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## Propaganda Narratives of the Polish Feminist Press on the Functioning of International Women's Movement (1946–1949)<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The Social and Civic Women's League operated in communist Poland in the years 1945–1949. Its first official publication, *Praca Kobiet*, appeared in 1946. Periodicals were published by the Warsaw Regional Board of the association. The national magazine *Nasza Praca*, an organ of the General Board, reached the readers just before the start of 1947. The published texts provided information concerning the activity of international women's movements and organizations such as the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared as part of the National Science Center project entitled "Liga Kobiet (League of Women)" which explores the organization's activity and functioning at regional and local level in the Polish People's Republic (1945–1989), 2017/25/B/HS3/02015.

values of such publications greatly varied. This was significantly influenced by the language journalists used to communicate ('newspeak'), and the propaganda (non-substantive) choice of recorded and omitted facts. Their analysis, however, helped to reveal the mechanisms of the functioning (interaction) of leftist women's movements on the international arena in the second half of the 1940s.

**Keywords:** the second half of the 1940s, history of women's movement, international leftist women's organizations, national leftist women's organizations, history of the press, Polish leftist women's press

## **PROPAGANDOWA NARRACJA POLSKIEJ PRASY FEMINISTYCZNEJ NA TEMAT FUNKCJONOWANIA MIĘDZYNARODOWEGO RUCHU KOBIECEGO (1946–1949)**

### **Streszczenie**

Społeczno-Obywatelska Liga Kobiet działała w komunistycznej Polsce w latach 1945–1949. Pierwsze oficjalne czasopismo „Praca Kobiet” ukazało się w 1946 r. Periodyk wydawany był przez Zarząd Wojewódzki w Warszawie. Krajowe czasopismo „Nasza Praca”, będące organem Zarządu Głównego, trafiło do czytelniczek tuż przed początkiem 1947 r. Publikowane w nim teksty informowały o działalności międzynarodowych ruchów i organizacji kobiecych, takich jak Międzynarodowa Federacja Demokratyczna Kobiet (WIDF). Wartości poznawcze tych publikacji były bardzo zróżnicowane. Znaczący wpływ miał na to język, jakim posługiwali się dziennikarze oraz propagandowy (nie merytoryczny) dobór odnotowywanych i pomijanych faktów. Ich analiza pomogła ujawnić mechanizmy funkcjonowania (interakcji) lewicowych ruchów kobiecych na arenie międzynarodowej w drugiej połowie lat 40. XX w.

**Słowa kluczowe:** druga połowa lat 40. XX w., historia ruchu kobiecego, międzynarodowe lewicowe organizacje kobiece, krajowe lewicowe organizacje kobiece, historia prasy, polska lewicowa prasa kobieca

### **Introduction**

The Main Board of the Social and Civic Women's League (MB SCWL), founded in July 1945, after only a year and a half of preparation, began to publish its own official journal entitled *Nasza Praca*

(Our Work) starting from February 1947 to the end of 1989<sup>2</sup>. Its first issue was prepared for publication at the turn of 1946/1947, when the election campaign for the Parliament (Sejm) reached its climax. The magazine could not be published before 19 January (it appeared after the elections held in February), and therefore its pages were not directly used for the pre-election political campaign.

Until the debut of the journal, the leadership of the League used its own socio-cultural magazines and supplements to the party press to communicate with the member ranks as well as their counterparts, offered by the Publishing and Educational Cooperative "Czytelnik" (Reader). Even in the difficult realities of post-war Poland, it was rare that the headquarters of an organization with nationwide structures was deprived for so long of an official press organ. What is worse, the situation was similar at regional level, where for many months none of the Provincial Boards (PB) of SCWL published any organizational magazines<sup>3</sup>.

A breakthrough in this respect was initiated in March 1946, when the Warsaw PB SCWL published the first issue of the newsletter *Praca Kobiet* (Women's Work)<sup>4</sup>. It was dominated by reports, work plans and other information illustrating the activities of the association's field circles in the Warsaw voivodeship and in the capital itself. However, the more general issues concerning the League's activities on a national basis and cooperation with its sister organizations in other European countries were not overlooked.

From March to December 1946, ten issues of *Praca Kobiet* were published<sup>5</sup>. For the editorial team, as well as the SCWL leadership who supervised them, involvement in this publishing project became a kind of testing ground in the preparation for the launch of a nationwide periodical of an organizational nature, approved by the League's Main Board.

<sup>2</sup> "Nasza Praca" from 1949 became the body of the Main Board of the League of Women, and finally since 1981 the League of Polish Women – more detail: Małgorzata Dajnowicz, "Działalność Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet w świetle «Naszej Pracy» (1947–1949)", in: Małgorzata Dajnowicz, Adam Miodowski (eds.), *Polityka i politycy w prasie XX i XXI wieku*, (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Humanica, 2016), 296.

<sup>3</sup> Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945–1995*, (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej), 1998, 70–82.

<sup>4</sup> From the fifth issue "Praca Kobiet" was already published monthly.

<sup>5</sup> Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca*, 92.

Starting from its first issue in February 1947, until May 1949, *Nasza Praca* was the official publication of SCWL, providing information about the entire activity of the association. With the beginning of the process of its organizational transformations, from the June issue the publication began to appear as a monthly magazine of the League of Women (Liga Kobiet)<sup>6</sup>.

#### Material and methods

The research presented here in the area of press history and press studies complements the existing body of knowledge about official press publications in the second half of the 1940s by Polish feminist organizations. In particular, the study introduces the knowledge gained from the research about the organizational structures of the international women's movement and their mutual relations.

The main purpose of this paper was to determine the state of knowledge of SCWL activists about its sister women's organizations in Europe and abroad. What was the relation between SCWL and these associations? What was the activity of Polish feminists on the international arena? What image of the activities of international women's organizations was presented by the press publications of the SCWL?

The source basis of the study are primarily two SCWL periodicals, i.e. *Praca Kobiet* (ten issues from the 1946 yearbook) and *Nasza Praca* (several dozen issues from the years 1947–1949). In addition, documentation from the archival team of the Wrocław Women's League was obtained from the local State Archives, as well as from legal sources in the form of the published legislation from the 1950s, and two collections of digitised documentation on the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

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<sup>6</sup> The path of organizational and ideological transformations on which the SCWL set out in November 1948 during the National Congress, led it finally in September 1949 not only to the change of the name, but also to its complete subordination to the ruling party authorities. The structure created after the reorganization of the Women's League was under the supervision of the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the of the Polish United Workers' Party and its counterparts at the level of Provincial and District Committees – for more detail: Adam Miodowski, "Rozwój dolnośląskich i zachodniopomorskich struktur Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet w świetle publikacji «Naszej Pracy» z lat 1947–1949", in: Małgorzata Dajnowicz, Adam Miodowski (eds.), *Polityka i politycy w prasie XX i XXI wieku. Polityka w prasie kobiecej*, (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2019), 182–183.

In addition to the classic method of analysis and criticism of press content, the topic was developed using a methodology of monographic research useful in the study of institutions (WIDF, SCWL and associations from other countries).

The result of the undertaken research should be the introduction into the scientific domain of documented source knowledge about the cognitive value of the press communication available in the official SCWL publications, and the assessment of its usefulness for research on the international women's movement, whilst also establishing the basic facts of the history of the development of women's movements in Europe and beyond, and finally, the recognition of the forms of co-operation of women's associations, and also the place of the SCWL in the structures of the WIDF and in similar international bodies.

The topic is extensive and will require continuation of studies. In further research, it will be necessary to make wider use (in a chronological sense) of the periodical *Nasza Praca* and to refer to the SCWL and Central Committee (also Provincial Committees) of the Polish United Workers' Party documentation.

## **Research findings**

### ***Praca Kobiet on the ability of international women's movements***

Analysis of the content of the journal allows to conclude that from the very first issue, the editors revealed the ambition to bring readers closer to information about the socio-political activity of their colleagues not only from neighbouring communes and provinces, but also citizens of other countries. At the same time, they tried to show that the post-war hardships of everyday life were equally felt by all the inhabitants of Europe. A good illustration of this was the information about the humanitarian drama of Bulgarian women. The reception of this message and all others at that time was somewhat hindered by the 'newspeak' that journalists began to use, but for readers the most important thing was the content and not the form of information. Hence, how did the editorial office describe the situation in Bulgaria? "From the struggle of the Bulgarian people against their own fascism and the Nazi invader, people's democracy emerged victorious. Despite the relatively limited destruction of the

war, Bulgaria, an agricultural country, is still struggling with great economic difficulties, especially in the area of provisioning: lack of fats, meat, fish, milk, sugar (the latter could not be distinguished on rationing cards for three months – it was completely missing). Only the daily ration of bread has recently been increased from 350 g to 500g.” The readers learned nothing about the impact of the collectivisation of agriculture<sup>7</sup> on this humanitarian catastrophe<sup>8</sup>.

In its place, they were informed about the original forms of engaging Bulgarian women by local feminists in the fight against hunger. On the initiative of the 300,000 members of the Democratic Committee of Bulgarian Women<sup>9</sup>, “harvest aid committees” were established in the cities. The women who joined, went into the countryside, but by no means to work on the harvest. Some activists “took sewing machines with them. While [those without machines] watched over the village children so that their mothers could work in the fields, the others sewed clothes and underwear for the peasant women and their families.” What impact these forms of help had on the growth of the harvest and overcoming hunger is not known, because the author of the report did not mention it; instead, she gave information about another original initiative of the Democratic Committee of Bulgarian Women, which in her opinion was worth following up by SCWL activists. This was about the so-called “fight against the scourge of bureaucracy”, which the leaders of the committee initiated in Sofia and several other major cities. “The members intervene in any identified case of heartless bureaucracy through the Trade Unions operating in these institutions. And in Poland there is a fruitful field for work in this area.”<sup>10</sup>

*Praca Kobiet* published information not only about the situation of women in the countries of the so-called people’s democracy<sup>11</sup>,

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Gruev, *Preorani slogove. Kolektivizaciâ i Social promâna in Bŭlgarskiâ Northwest 40-te – 50-te year after XX age*, (Sofiâ: Ciela, 2009). (In Bulgarian: Груев Михаил, *Преорани слогове : колективизация и социална промяна в Българския северозапад, 40-те – 50-те години на XX век*, София: Ciela, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> In the tenth issue of the monthly, there was only information about the progress of collectivisation in Bulgaria, but without linking this process to the deepening supply difficulties. In the cited publication, the reader was informed that already “in 1944, cooperatives covered all areas of economic life in Bulgaria ... . Forty-five thousand farms have united in workers’ cooperatives.” See: “Spółdzielczość w Bułgarii”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 10, 1946, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Комитет на демократичните жени в България.

<sup>10</sup> „W Bułgarii”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> The term was originally used in the context of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) to refer to the “Red Republic” regime. According to international opinion, Spanish communists did

but also in Western countries. For example, a natural complement to the Bulgarian issues was the information about food rationing in France, where the people were additionally troubled by high prices and speculation. Although no one said it directly, the juxtaposition of both these pieces of information showed that although it was bad in Bulgaria, it was no better in France. The readers could therefore have come to the conclusion that the common opinions about 'Western prosperity' do not have to be true at all.

Life in France is hard. Prices on the black market are high. Sugar, for example, costs 350 francs ... For a worker, the monthly ration of sugar from the allocation is only half a kilogram. The reason for the high prices in France is the collaboration of entrepreneurs ... who draw huge profits from the misery of the worker. ... Workers in France do not receive the same care at all as in Poland. They do not have organized holidays, they do not have discounted travel for holidays<sup>12</sup>. The situation is so difficult that the worker cannot sometimes earn enough money to buy rations, the price of which is much higher than in Poland. It is not surprising that the mortality rate of children reaches 75%. The situation of women is much

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not exercise power directly. Controlling the police, the army and the economy, established the system run by some socialists and liberals, referred to as "new type democracy" or alternatively "people's democracy". Established on the Iberian Peninsula, the "Red Republic" was thus the Spanish People's Republic. It was a kind of model that the Soviets used after the Second World War to initiate the process of establishing "people's democracy" states in Central Europe (e.g. the Hungarian People's Republic, the Polish People's Republic). See: Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, Grigory Sevostianov (eds.), *Spain Betrayed: the Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Yale University Press, 2001), Document 1. See also: Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *O krok od sowieckiej Hiszpanii?*, Salon24, <https://bit.ly/331YhQr> [access online: 25.11.2023].

<sup>12</sup> In practice, many of these privileges were attainable only to the elect few. SCWL activists often offered employees holidays "under a pear tree" (i.e. in the countryside), while they found something better for themselves. In 1948, "thanks to the efforts of the Administrative and Economic Department at the Main Board of the Social and Civic League of Women in Warsaw, two holiday homes were opened in the so-called Recovered Territories: one in Sarbinowo by the sea, in the West Pomeranian voivodeship, and the second in Głuszycza in Lower Silesia. The houses can be used by employees of the Social and Civic League of Women and their families. Employees are entitled to a two-week stay on holiday with a reduced fee ... and free return travel." See: A.P., "Domy wypoczynkowe Ligi Kobiet", *Nasza Praca*, no. 7, 1948, 25. This eloquent exclusivism of the holiday offer for the functionaries of the League, against the background of the proposals for the masses, was paradoxically intended to constitute a kind of incentive for women not only to join the SCWL, but above all to be active in it. Was that the case? It turns out that no, on the contrary, because this "asset distinction" contributed to considerable loss of image. Few, because they saw the daily social involvement of SCWL leaders as their proverbial "third job", but everyone else saw in this distinction their unequal treatment. In practice, ordinary employees could only be sent to such holiday resorts as their staff, not as holidaymakers.

more difficult than in Poland. The principle of equal pay for equal work, which our Government of National Unity has carried out, is not applied<sup>13</sup>.

The data on the level of child mortality in France in the years 1945–1946 were particularly shocking. The communist propaganda machine in the People's Republic of Poland used them with delight, flaunting them to the public not just on the pages of *Praca Kobiet*. For a stronger effect, this information was compared with statistics on mortality among Polish children, which in the same period oscillated at the level of 25% and was characterised by a downward trend<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, in contrast to the 'fallen West', propaganda tried to show not only its own advantages, but also to publicise the "exemplary achievements of the Land of Soviets." The narrative of the death of most of the French children born (and abused) was contrasted with the information about the "extensive health care system" of the Eastern neighbour of Poland, operating not only in the cities, but also in the countryside.

The Constitution of the Soviet Union provides the entire population of the country with medical assistance at the expense of the state. ... The population of rural settlements is served by a doctor-manager of a rural health centre. As a rule, these health centres have clinics, besides, almost half of them also have hospitals for 15–25 and more beds. In most cases, there are pharmacies at rural hospitals. Patients who need the help of specialist doctors are referred by local doctors to district cities, to hospitals with special wards, to polyclinics where specialist doctors are trained, to medical conferences. In this way, the rural population has access to all medical assistance and advice provided in the district or perimeter city. ... The medical staff of the centre provides systematic advice to children, regularly conducts medical examinations of young people learning, and takes care of children's homes, nurseries and gardens. ... Crèches play a great role in the fight against child mortality, and they also enable the mother to take part in the economic and social life of the country<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> "Akademia na cześć Polek z Francji", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 9–10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 10.

<sup>15</sup> "Opieka nad dzieckiem ludności wiejskiej w Związku Radzieckim", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 10–11.

From the quoted description emerged an idyllic picture of the functioning of health care in the Soviet Union. According to the propaganda, its level – even in the rural areas – was much higher in 1946 than in France. The only thing that is puzzling is the lack of information about the level of mortality among Soviet children. It must be assumed that if there was anything to boast about in this regard, it would have been done. Since this information was kept silent, there was probably nothing to show, or maybe there were even reasons to be ashamed. Providing such information that does not match the propaganda message could naturally disavow this whole idyllic narrative.

For many readers, the information describing the situation in the West rather than in the East of the Old Continent seemed to sound much more plausible. The monthly publication wrote, for example, about the voting rights of Belgian women. From the information provided, it was possible to learn that women in Belgium have been exercising active and passive voting rights for the local government for 25 years. An interesting fact was that the electoral law for the parliament guaranteed them passive voting rights (in 1946, three deputies and five senators held seats), but still did not provide women with active voting rights. However, Parliament has been working on a corresponding amendment<sup>16</sup>.

Interesting information was published about the proceedings of the Third Congress of Women in Zurich on 20–24 August 1946, during which Swiss women summarised their organizational activity during the war years and formulated a programme of action for the first post-war years<sup>17</sup>. They considered one of their main demands granting them full electoral rights. The first of a series of referendums on this issue took place in the canton of Basel; the result was negative. The editors of *Praca Kobiet* commented on it in the following way.

The nations surrounding Switzerland have long since adopted such a law, could Switzerland remain such a ‘natural reserve among the European nations?’, as Kurt Erlich, Zurich’s opponent of women’s voting, calls it. Unfortunately, many Swiss people still have the ancient conviction that women do not have enough reason and must be ruled by the ‘rational’ masters of the world.

<sup>16</sup> “Jak głosują kobiety w Belgii?”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 4.

<sup>17</sup> F. Łuniewska, “Kongres kobiety w Szwajcarii”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 4.

Unfortunately, this belief is also held by some women who transplant it later into young people<sup>18</sup>. Despite the negative result of the vote ... The Swiss, thinking in a European and human way, are convinced that the momentary victory of the old-fashioned views is an inevitable harbinger of their total defeat. This is eloquently stated in the juxtaposition of the figures of the current and previous votes<sup>19</sup>. Over the course of a quarter of a century, three referendums were held in the canton of Basel. In 1920, 35% of male voters voted in favour of granting women the right to vote, in 1927 only 29%, and in 1946 38%. The result in the last referendum was important because it was recorded with the highest turnout of all<sup>20</sup>.

The protests of British women at the end of June 1946 were relatively widely reported, demanding that the House of Commons make such changes in legal regulations to equalise the wages of working women with those of men. However, the concept of equal wages was blocked by entrepreneurs who lobbied parliamentarians against changes in legislation. They did this despite the mass exodus of poorly paid women from factories. From the cited publication one also learns that the government directed the mounted police against the women demonstrating in front of Parliament<sup>21</sup>.

This kind of information was intended to shape the readers' belief that regardless of the place where women led their lives, everywhere they had to struggle if not with hunger (like Bulgarian women), then with wage exploitation (like British women)<sup>22</sup>. The difference between the two was that in Eastern Europe the authorities were supposedly open to dialogue and the implementation of

<sup>18</sup> In this context, the monthly cited the interesting results of a survey conducted among readers of one of the Swiss women's magazines. Out of 2919 questionnaires, 1239 were sent back, i.e. only 44%. The key question was: Are you in favour of gradually introducing women's voting rights, starting with voting rights in municipalities? There were 407 affirmative, 665 negative, 167 abstaining. This result was commented on by the authors of the survey in such a way that among Swiss women, "the majority of women spoke out against women's rights, as if they wanted to say, 'I don't need to worry about the future of my daughter. The father is worried about it'." See: F. Łuniewska, "Kobiety szwajcarskie w walce o prawo głosu", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, 6–7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Aszk, "Kobiety w Anglii", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 8, 1946, 8–9.

<sup>22</sup> For example, manufacturers in the machine industry, agreeing to wage concessions to their employees, raised their weekly pay to the level of 4 shillings 4 pence, which was almost half the rate compared to the expected 7 shillings of 6 pence. See: ibidem, 8.

women's demands, and in the West they seemed to be deaf to them and ordered women to be beaten with police batons.

It is significant that *Praca Kobiet* reporting about the disparities in wages of men and women in Great Britain did not address this problem in its pages in relation to Polish realities, where this problem was even more noticeable. In this case, it was not about the money itself, but also about cultural and mentality issues. A member of the District Board of the Women's League in Kłodzko (called Gacowa) speaking on this subject recalled her own case and colleagues from the Kłodzko structures of the association, stating that "where there is a well-paid job, the district authorities do not see women"<sup>23</sup>. For example, as long as there was a low salary in the office, I was offered a job there, but when it turned out that the salary would be higher, a man was hired."<sup>24</sup>. Even such specific employers as the Presidiums of the District National Councils<sup>25</sup> recorded violations of labour law in relation to female workers. This type of practice was mentioned by, among others, a local activist of the League in Świdnica (called Szaflarska), holding the position of an accountant in the local Presidium. She identified the Secretary and President of this institution as responsible for this state of affairs. Both were known to ignore all comments and requests addressed to them in this regard by co-workers and associates<sup>26</sup>.

An interesting aspect of the wage differential was pointed out by the editors of the magazine when writing about the National Women's Conference organized in the autumn of 1946 by Belgian communists. During the meeting, the problem of wage differential between younger and older workers performing the same work was also raised. One of the delegates from Brussels (called Miniart), when "illustrating the life of a textile worker declared that girls up to the age of twenty receive only 4.8 francs per hour for their work

<sup>23</sup> This problem was given a lot of space in the publications approved by the Main Board of the Women's League. See, for example, an interesting analysis A. Neyowa, "Vocational training of women", *Nasza Praca*, no. 2, 1947, 12–16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> The Presidiums of the District National Councils were the executive and governing bodies of the District National Councils. The Bureau was composed of a President, a Deputy, a Secretary and members. They operated on the basis of the Act of 20 March 1950 on local organs of uniform state power (Dz. U. RP Nr 14, poz. 130), Ustawa z dnia 25 stycznia 1958 r. o Radach Narodowych (Dz. U. PRL Nr 5, poz. 16).

<sup>26</sup> Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, *Liga Kobiet – Zarząd Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu*, Sign. 8, card 5.

in textile factories, although they do the same job as older workers, whose work is much better paid.”<sup>27</sup>. Significantly, the situation was similar, for example, in factories in Łódź, but the readers of *Praca Kobiet* were not informed about it. What was a stigmatised pathology in the West – here in Poland became the norm, if not acceptable, then certainly tolerated (and silenced).

Completely different problems were mentioned regarding the situation of Greek women involved on the communist side in the civil war in 1946–1949<sup>28</sup>. An extensive article about them was published in December 1946, from which one could learn that:

When the light of freedom shone on other nations in Greece, the drama of the occupation of 1940–1944 is renewed. ... neo-fascist terror is flourishing under the protectorate of England. Persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, sent away in large numbers were women torn away from their families and children. From April to the present day, according to insufficient data, 840 women have been imprisoned, exiled, missing without a trace, while by the above period statistics show the number of detainees – 429 women. These figures testify to the increase in terror in recent months – 111 women were killed by terrorist gangs and sentenced to death ... trade unions have been abolished. Police arrested women’s union committees on the pretext that they were holding illegal meetings. ... Women took part en masse in demonstrations, meetings were organized by democratic parties. Women are also preparing for the upcoming local elections, although here women have the right to vote only from the age of 30, and only those who can read and write, which, with the high intensity of illiteracy in Greece, greatly limits women’s rights<sup>29</sup>.

Significantly, from the cited publication, the readers could not learn that there was an actual civil war in Greece, and the described repressions affected its active participants not only from

<sup>27</sup> “Konferencja kobiet w Belgii”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 9, 1946, 11.

<sup>28</sup> In October 1946, the Communist Party of Greece announced the formation of a guerrilla organization, the DSE (Gr. Dimokratikos Stratos Ellados), i.e. the Democratic Army of Greece. These forces, supported by Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania (indirectly the Soviet Union as well) came out against the right-wing monarchist government supported by the British and Americans. Both sides resorted to repression against women, for more about this conflict see: Foivos N. Grigoriadis, *Druga Wojna Partyzancka (Historia wojny domowej 1945–49)*, vol. 2, Athens: Kamarinopoulos, s.a. (in Greek: Γρηγοριάδης Φοίβος, *Το δεύτερο Αντάρτικο (Ιστορία του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου 1945–49, τόμος Β)*, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καμαρινόπουλος, s.a.).

<sup>29</sup> “Sytuacja w Grecji”, *Praca Kobiet* no. 10, 1946, 13.

the communist side. Many women with monarchist sympathies suffered persecution and died at the hands of the communists in the territories occupied by the Democratic Army of Greece<sup>30</sup>.

In addition to information relating to the situation of progressive women in individual countries, the monthly published publications described the activities of international organizational structures associating associations such as SCWL. Readers could learn, for example, who led the WIDF established in December 1945,<sup>31</sup> who were the chairwoman's co-workers, what programme tasks they carried out together. In the tenth issue of the journal, it was reported that

The organization is headed by an Executive Committee chaired by Eugenia Cotton, a scientist, a representative of France, who does not belong to any party<sup>32</sup>. ... Mrs. Cotton belongs to the elite of the progressive intelligentsia ... . The late Pierre Curie and Marie Curie Skłodowska belonged to the same group. The presidium of the Executive Committee also includes Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, called La Pasionaria, who is a leading figure in the Republican Spanish movement. ... A member of the presidium is also Nina Popova, who represents the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women. The Federation has a Council which shall elect an Executive Committee and a Secretariat of the Federation. The Secretariat is headed by Mrs. Vaillant-Couturier. ... The Secretariat operates permanently with its seat in Paris. ... The Secretariat comprises the following committees: (1) the Committee on The Economic, Political and Social Rights of Women; (2) the Child Custody Commission; (3) Commission on Colonial Problems and the Situation of "National

<sup>30</sup> In the current dominant left-wing narrative about the Greek Civil War, one can look in vain to look for information about the tens of thousands of civilian victims of fighters from the Democratic Army of Greece. Those interested in learning the facts on this subject have to reach for older publications, such as: Theofylakos Papakonstantinou in *The Anatomy of revolution: a theoretical and historical analysis of the dynamics of communism. Three ,rounds' of KKE*, see: Theofylakos Papakonstantinou, *Anatomía tīs epanastáseos: theoritiki kai istorikianálisis tīs dyn kommounismoý: oi treis „gýroi” tou KKE*, (Athina: s.n., 1952), 257–264.

<sup>31</sup> This structure was established on 1 December 1945 at the International Congress of Women in Paris.

<sup>32</sup> This information was not true. E. Cotton after 1933, under the influence of anti-fascist refugees from Germany, she joined the French Communist Party. In 1944 she founded and chaired L'Union des Femmes Françaises. After the end of hostilities, in 1945, she contributed to the creation of the WIDF, which she chaired until her death in 1967. She was also Vice-President of the World Council for Peace. Both organizations were considered in the West as so-called agents of influence, linked to Moscow. For her activities, she was awarded the International Stalin Peace Prize in 1950. She was a member of the board of the Franco-Soviet Friendship Society.

Minorities of Colour”. The members of the federation are the national organizations of the countries that have declared their accession to the WTO. These organizations are called sections<sup>33</sup>. ... The Federation in Europe is based primarily on France and the Soviet Union<sup>34</sup>.

In the personal dimension, the authorities of the WIDF were indeed dominated by French women, but in the decision-making sense, the decisive voice belonged to the representatives of Soviet women<sup>35</sup>, and in fact to the officers from Lubyanka who tasked them<sup>36</sup>.

The momentum with which the WIDF operated meant that in a short time women's organizations were created not only in most European countries, but also elsewhere. *Praca Kobiet* described the historical and political background of the activation of women in these areas and reported on the process of creating these organizations and the difficulties associated with it. A good illustration of this was the information about the persecution of progressive women's organizations in Egypt.

In July this year, the League of Egyptian Students and Women with Higher Education, which is part of the WIDF, was dissolved. The League of Workers was also dissolved. ... In view of the above, the Secretariat of the WIDF has sent a protest to the Egyptian Government demanding the release of those arrested ... and the

<sup>33</sup> In 1946, left-wing women's organizations from France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, Greece, Spain (in exile), Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union belonged to the WIDF, and from non-European countries: USA, China, Mongolia, Madagascar, as well as India and North Korea, Algeria, and Africa – see: “Organizacja pracy i władz Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet”, *Praca Kobiet* no. 10, 1946, 4. In total, the organization had over twenty million members (43 nationalities), among whom dominated Chinese women (20 million). See: Dolores Ibarruri, “O działalności międzynarodowych organizacji kobiecych”, *Praca Kobiet* no. 10, 1946, 5, 27.

<sup>34</sup> “Organizacja pracy i władz Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 10, 1946, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Stanisława Dłuska, “Posiedzenie Rady Naczelnej Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 2, 1947, 6.

<sup>36</sup> This was understood by the American intelligence services, which created a kind of dossier on the WIDF and the national structures co-creating it. See: “Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). A compilation of available basic reference data. Affiliates and parallel organizations, strength, officers, addresses, publications. Based on data available as of 1 October 1956”, <https://bit.ly/2SHOBbJ> [access online: 25.11.2023]. See more: Five College Archives and Manuscript Collections, “Women's International Democratic Federation records, 1945–1979”, 4 boxes (2 linear ft.). Collection number: MS 594, <https://bit.ly/2WVX6z7> [access online: 25.11.2023].

Executive Committee has sent letters to these organizations expressing its deep indignation at the actions of the Egyptian Government and stressing its total solidarity with the members of democratic women's organizations in Egypt. The Executive Committee considers it necessary to send a commission of the WIDF to Egypt to investigate the situation of women and to assist in the work of democratic women's organizations."<sup>37</sup>

The internal chaos that engulfed Egypt practically until the mid-1950s favoured the left-wing radicalisation of certain circles of society. Its progress was limited not so much by the repressive government of King Farouk I, but by the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Under these circumstances, any actions of the WSDFK on Egyptian soil and attempts to support communist women's organizations were doomed to failure.

The most exotic country written about in the magazine in the context of equality and the functioning of women's organizations was Cuba, which under President Ramón Grau San Martín<sup>38</sup> enjoyed relative political stability and economic development.

Our sisters are doing well there, because the constitution of Cuba provides equal pay for equal work, as well as far-reaching relief for a pregnant woman. She cannot be removed from work three months before giving birth, and during pregnancy she was not allowed to do heavier work. Six weeks before and after giving birth, she is dismissed from work and receives her previous salary. At the age of 20, every Cuban woman receives the same civil rights as a man. A woman sits in parliament and one of the senators is a minister<sup>39</sup>.

Surprisingly, the description had an unequivocally positive overtone, although it was about Cuba from before the Fidel Castro era and was still free from the ideological contexts typical for the later period, i.e. after El Comandante took power.

In the information published about the situation of women in other countries and the activities of their associations (national and international), apart from the threads referred to above, the

<sup>37</sup> "W Egipcie", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 10, 1946, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Ramón Grau San Martín, the biggest political rival of Fulgencio Batista, after whom he became president in 1944. In 1947, a year before the end of his term, he managed to significantly reduce his communist influence in the country.

<sup>39</sup> F. Łuniewska, "A co się dzieje na dalekiej Kubie", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 7, 1946, 4.

first articles appeared referring to moral and ethical issues related to abortion, then referred to as artificial miscarriage. Initially, this issue was discussed in isolation from Polish realities, showing only the dilemmas faced by Western societies. At the June 1946 Congress of the Democratic Union of Women of Finland, a resolution was passed on this matter, which stated that

Democratic Women do not consider the issue of miscarriages to be programmatic. However, given the plight and timeliness of this issue for the broad masses, one cannot remain on the sidelines in considering it and discussing the relevant legislation. Artificial miscarriage should not be a means of regulating the number of births, for it is an act against the supreme creation of nature, human existence. It should be noted that artificial miscarriage is a compulsory means of protecting a woman and a child when society cannot secure their existence. On the basis of the above, the Congress considers that when discussing the law on artificial miscarriages, it is necessary to take into account that the permission to perform artificial miscarriages (unless they are caused by the state of health of the pregnant woman) results from the inability of society to protect the mother and child, i.e. it is a temporary phenomenon, and artificial miscarriages should be prohibited when there is an improvement in the general material condition of women<sup>40</sup>.

The above quote illustrates the path that humanity (feminists in particular) has travelled over the last 73 years not only in terms of moral and ethical issues, but also the very form of the narrative about abortion and the so-called 'social justifications for it'. Nowadays, such a declaration would be considered an expression of 'right-wing regression', and in 1946 it was signed by Finnish feminists associated in the Democratic Union of Women, and the Polish union published its content in its official press body.

In contrast to most reports on the activity of women's movements abroad, which were left without comment, in this case the editors decided not only to express their own opinion, but also published in the same issue, in the immediate vicinity of the report from Finland, a reprint of the publication from the September issue of the monthly "In the Health Service" by a clinical doctor (with the degree of doctor) signed with the initials C.J.G, under the

<sup>40</sup> "Zjazd Demokratycznego Związku Kobiet w Finlandii", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 9, 1946, 11–12.

significant title *The fight against abortion*. Quoted below, if one realises the fact that it appeared in a magazine licensed by the public authorities, published by the progressive SCWL, and that this took place in 1946, allows seeing its uniqueness, both in the linguistic and in the substantive layers.

In the last fifty years, the use of abortion carried out by doctors has increased gradually, but it peaked during the Nazi occupation. After the Warsaw Uprising, in the face of the destruction of the city, the province became the leader in this aspect; in Częstochowa, for example, this practice was carried out in hospitals without any medical indications. Łódź, Kraków were not better either. Currently, also in Warsaw, abortion is on the rise, and no one has the courage to start a fight against it. Whereas ten years ago the rulings of other doctors were required, today no one asks about it, it is enough that the patient wants to. It is necessary to realise that there is almost no artificial miscarriage that would not harm a woman's health immediately or after some time. Married persons should be made aware of this. Most of the female ailments arose from the so-called 'scrapers' [abortions] performed even by eminent specialists. ... The practical approach to the fight against abortion would consist in a series of the following activities. The Ministry of Health can help the most in this matter by issuing a decree that due to depopulation all indications for abortion are to be suspended for a period of, e.g. ten years, and issue an order that no clinic or hospital should make this procedure effective under pain of closing this clinic. Midwives, back-street abortionists and other unauthorised persons performing artificial miscarriages should be subject to special ad hoc courts, consisting of lawyers and expert doctors. Societies for the care of poor mothers and their children should also be established. These societies would aim to admit pregnant women to appropriate maternity shelters who do not have the conditions to give birth at home and take care of their newborns<sup>41</sup>.

The editor of *Praca Kobiet*, who signed the article and was quoted in it, concluded by saying that "the above issue, which is indeed very important for women, in our opinion cannot be solved as simply as Dr C.J.G. predicts."<sup>42</sup> Has this encouragement to speak met with a response from the magazine subscribers? We

<sup>41</sup> F. Łuniewska, "Walka z przerywaniem ciąży", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 9, 1946, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

don't know. A few weeks later, i.e. in December 1946, the last tenth issue of the magazine was published. The supervision over its preparation was taken over from the Warsaw Provincial Board of the association by MB SCWL<sup>43</sup> itself. Officially, taking over the supervision of the editorial office of *Praca Kobiet* was to be a step preceding the launch of a new nationwide magazine *Nasza Praca* with the participation of the old editorial team. However, the new organ was published only in February 1947, prepared by the editors in a rearranged personnel structure.

### ***Nasza Praca* on the ability of international women's movements**

A prominent place in the articles appearing in *Nasza Praca*, as it was the case in *Praca Kobiet*, was taken from the very first issues by the subject of the persecution of progressive women in countries west of the Iron Curtain. In the first days of May 1947, Dolores Ibárruri Gómez (La Pasionaria) was in Poland, whose profile was widely presented to readers in the May–June edition<sup>44</sup>, and the course of the visit was reported in “Kobieta Dzisiejsza” (Today's Woman) in the article entitled *Dolores Ibárruri our guest*<sup>45</sup>. She was accompanied on her journey by another Spanish radical, Irena Falcon Rodriguez<sup>46</sup>. The editors of the official organ of the MB SCWL, in addition to publishing the ‘hagiographic’ biography of La Pasionaria, published her call to Polish women, in which she appealed “to adopt patronage of prisons holding Spanish women as political prisoners.” According to the information provided by the

<sup>43</sup> “Od redakcji”, *Praca Kobiet*, no. 10, 1946, 2.

<sup>44</sup> “Dolores Ibárruri”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 3–4, 1947, 2–6.

<sup>45</sup> “Dolores Ibárruri naszym gościem”, *Kobieta Dzisiejsza*, no. 8, 1947, 2–3. It is worth noting on this occasion the practice of mutual complementarity of both titles published by SCWL activists in communication with the member ranks of the SCWL. This was the case with the reporting on the visit of La Pasionaria, and also, for example, publishing official wishes addressed to Polish women on the occasion of Women's Day, Mother's Day, etc., see: “Pozdrowienia z Ameryki”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 6, 1947, 19, where this type of correspondence appeared, and in “List Stowarzyszenia «Polonia» z okazji Święta Matki nadesłany z New Bedford”, *Kobieta Dzisiejsza*, no. 10, 1947, 11, where the full text of this correspondence was published.

<sup>46</sup> Spanish journalist, feminist and communist activist, for many years an assistant to D. Ibárruri Gómez. After the Francoist victory in the Spanish Civil War, she was in exile in Moscow and Beijing, and returned to Spain after the restoration of democracy in 1977.

periodical, such patronage on the part of the League structures in Warsaw, Łódź, Katowice and Bydgoszcz, covered prisons in Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona and Malaga, respectively. During the visit, the SCWL activists from the first three cities collected and donated a total of PLN 175,000 to the hosted Spanish women to help the revolutionaries imprisoned by the Francoists<sup>47</sup>.

The relatively good result of the collection of money for Spanish prisoners obtained in such a short time became an incentive for MB SCWL to continue the action. It was possible to involve not only the following Provincial Boards<sup>48</sup>, but also many of those at district level<sup>49</sup>. The amounts obtained during regularly organized fundraisers were sometimes impressive<sup>50</sup>.

A specific ritual included the practice of publishing, in subsequent issues of the periodical, greetings and thanks from the leaders of the women's movement from other countries which hosted these personages. This was also the case with La Pasionaria, when the July issue of the magazine reported information about a telegram sent by her to the members of MB SCWL. From the quotes, readers learned that "Spanish women gathered at the congress in Paris, send Polish women their greetings and thanks for helping Spanish political prisoners."<sup>51</sup> A part of the described procedure was also the customary reading of such telegrams at public rallies and conferences before their publication. In this case, the participants of the SCWL Cooperative Conference held in Warsaw on 20–21 May were the first to be introduced to the words of

<sup>47</sup> "Dolores Ibarruri", 6.

<sup>48</sup> Next to PB SCWL in Warsaw, Łódź, Katowice and Bydgoszcz those in Rzeszów, Wrocław, Olsztyn and Poznań also joined the collection, while the PB in Białystok, Gdańsk, Kielce, Kraków, Lublin and Szczecin remained passive – see: "Na więźniarki hiszpańskie", *Nasza Praca*, no. 10, 1947, 30.

<sup>49</sup> The amounts obtained by the District Boards for Spanish prisoners ranged from several hundred to several thousand zlotys. They were comparable to those obtained during the fundraisers for protesting French women, see: "Na walczące kobiety francuskie", *Nasza Praca*, no. 4, 1948, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Record amounts were raised by PB SCWL in Warsaw and Łódź, PLN 182,034 and PLN 168,750, respectively. A complete fiasco was the collection organized by the PB in Rzeszów, which obtained only PLN 1,200, and slightly higher amounts were collected by the PB in Poznań (PLN 8,003) and Olsztyn (PLN 12,600). In other collections organized by the PB, amounts in the range from PLN 50,000 to PLN 90,000 were raised, see: "Na więźniarki hiszpańskie", 30. In total, this amounted in 1947 to approximately PLN 827,695, see: "Kobiety polskie pomagają walczącym o wolność", *Nasza Praca*, no. 2–3, 1948, 27.

<sup>51</sup> A. D., "Rezolucja w sprawie Hiszpanii", *Nasza Praca*, no. 5, 1947, 27.

D. Ibárruri Gómez<sup>52</sup>. The final stages of the described ceremony were associated with the adoption by a given body of a resolution thanking for the received telegram and assuring solidarity with its authors. The text of such a resolution was communicated to those interested by telegraph, and the wider female public opinion in Poland got to know it from the pages of *Nasza Praca*. This mechanism of 'greetings, thanks and resolutions' typical of controlled feminism<sup>53</sup> was the norm among all left-wing women's movements associated with the WIDF on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Informing about the effects of fundraisers for Spanish prisoners and publishing cordial correspondence between La Pasionaria and the President of the MB SCWL, Irena Sztachelska justified the constant presence of Spanish topics in *Nasza Praca* in the second half of 1947. Few readers understood that on this occasion an excuse was found to wage a campaign against the Francoist government. The propaganda message created a simple antinomy, where good, persecuted prisoners were contrasted with evil persecuting Francoists, and not a word about the co-responsibility of some Spanish communists for the thousands of victims of the "Red Terror",<sup>54</sup> and nothing about the legal and moral justification for the post-war courts sentencing them to prison. Is a conviction for war crimes, persecution? By the standards of the women's organizations gathered in the WIDF, the answer was in the affirmative. In this context, one more issue is puzzling as to whether the league activists were equally concerned (at least unofficially) about female political prisoners serving sentences in communist prisons? Even if so, there were no sources confirming this type of action, not even individual ones.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>53</sup> Controlled feminism in the realities of the People's Polish developed fully after December 1948, i.e. after the Unification Congress of the PPR and PPS. In Poland, the women's movement was controlled from above by comrades from the Women's Departments of party committees of individual levels – this was similar in the countries of the so-called people's democracy. The models were drawn from the Soviet Union. In the Western European-North American reality, a simple adaptation of this models to control feminist organizations sympathetic to the Soviet Country was not possible. Similarly, although for other reasons, this was also the case in most countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. For some of the feminist movements there, the steering role was played by the Moscow-linked WIDF, and where there were strong communist parties (France, Italy), by the corresponding cells of their Central Committees.

<sup>54</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain; The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 81.

Without asking unnecessary (difficult) questions, MB SCWL followed the guidelines of the communist authorities. One of them led in the summer of 1948 in to the preparation of a mass rally, with thousands of league activists assembled in Wrocław in connection with the proceedings of the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace held in this city on 25–28 August, attended by, among others, the head of the WIDF, E. Cotton. Therefore, it was a great opportunity not only to show the dynamics of the development of SCWL, but also to develop a good image and a stronger position in the international structures of the women's movement. On the eve of the end of the congress, "in the huge, tightly packed Centennial Hall [then People's Hall] at the Exhibition of the Recovered Territories, an impressive rally of 15,000 delegates of the Women's League from all over Poland took place, with the participation of Mrs. Cotton and outstanding representatives of science, art and culture – participants of the Congress of Intellectuals. ... The Women's League Rally, of which many of you were participants, made an impressive impression not only in the country."<sup>55</sup> Contrary to the expectations of the SCWL leaders, this did not pay off in the future with promotion of Polish women within the Paris headquarters of the WIDF, where key positions were customarily filled by French and Soviet activists<sup>56</sup>. The representatives of SCWL in the leading bodies of the WIDF at the beginning of the 1950s were Edwarda Orłowska and Eugenia Pragierowa. The former was a member of the Supreme Council of the WIDF in the period 1947–1953. The latter chaired the Information and Propaganda Committee of the WIDF, at the same time being the head of the Polish section of this body. Apart from E. Pragierowa, it was also made up by Wanda Górńska (Vice-President), Zuzanna Sobierajska (Secretary), Maria Jaszczukowa, Żanna Kormanowa, Janina Bogucka-Ordyńcowa, Stefania Stankiewiczowa and Wyczkowska<sup>57</sup>.

The activists had a similar position in the International League of Cooperatives, in which on the Executive Committee sat only one Polish woman, Zofia Dembińska. She also represented SCWL on the Executive Committee of the International Cooperative

<sup>55</sup> "Czego nas nauczył zlot kobiet we Wrocławiu", *Nasza Praca* no. 10–11, 1948, 23–24.

<sup>56</sup> "Organizacja pracy i władz Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet", *Praca Kobiet*, no. 10, 1946, 4.

<sup>57</sup> "Polska Sekcja Komisji Informacji i Propagandy ŚDFK", *Nasza Praca*, no. 1, 1948, 31–32.

Union<sup>58</sup>. An additional opportunity to introduce Polish women to the leading bodies of international organizations was created by the accession of MB SCWL to participate in the World Congress of Peace Defenders<sup>59</sup>, at which it was planned to establish the World Peace Council<sup>60</sup>.

In addition to visits from foreign guests such as E. Cotton and La Pasionaria, another pretext for addressing women's issues in a broader international context was the difficult socio-economic situation and the persecution of women activists. The second of these circumstances was revealed in the case of maintaining interest in Greek issues as initiated by *Praca Kobiet*. In the July issue of *Nasza Praca* there was an article under the telling title *Persecution in Greece*, where readers learned that

there is terror in Greece. Military tribunals sentence members of the EAM<sup>61</sup> to death. The Greek people are crying out for help. ... In Thessaloniki, two women were shot: Sofia Vomvonkaki and Coula Elefteriadi. The latter, a heroine of the resistance movement, was interned during the occupation, and the monarchist-fascist authorities have already carried out death sentences on four, while the fifth was sentenced to death by an ad hoc court in Thessaloniki. The list of victims is long. Four women were murdered in the southern Peloponnese. Two of them were pregnant. In the area of Laconia, two nuns were thrown down from the top of a rock. Three women were murdered in the vicinity of Patras. In the village of Centrico, Maria Joanides, a mother of four, died, tortured by gendarmes. In the town of Katveini in Macedonia, among the murdered women was a 14-year-old girl who was burned alive."<sup>62</sup>. Despite the ongoing civil war, various factions of the Greek wom-

<sup>58</sup> "Konferencja Międzynarodowej Ligi Kooperatystek", *Nasza Praca*, no. 10–11, 1948, 41.

<sup>59</sup> "Akces Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet do Komitetu Światowego Kongresu Zwolenników Pokoju", *Nasza Praca*, no. 3–4, 1949, 15–16.

<sup>60</sup> The World Peace Council (WPC) was finally established in 1950 in Warsaw, during the Second World Congress of Peace Defenders. It was supposed to be an organ of the international peace movement. This movement was officially initiated in Wrocław in August 1948 during the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace. The WPC was politically and financially dependent on Moscow, which annually contributed approximately USD 50 million to its activities. In 1950, the WPC initiated a political message known as the "Stockholm Appeal"; see: Christopher Andrew, Oleg Gordijewski, *KGB*, transl. Rafał Brzeski, Warszawa: Bellona, 1997, 442–443. (in English: Christopher Andrew, Oleg Gordievsky, *The KGB*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1990).

<sup>61</sup> The National Liberation Front, i.e. the left-republican political structure established in 1941 by the Communist Party of Greece and three other minor radical parties.

<sup>62</sup> J. T., "Prześladowania w Grecji", *Nasza Praca*, no. 5, 1947, 20.

en's movement decided to convene the Conference of Democratic Women's Organizations at the end of February 1949. MB SCWL delegated its representative in the person of Stanisława Zawadeczka. Her emotional account of the meeting has already appeared in the March–April issue of *Nasza Praca*.<sup>63</sup>

The above news about the persecution of Greek radicals must have shocked the readers, but its significance was weakened, contrary to the intentions of the propagandists from the SCWL, by the growing terror unleashed by the communists in Poland. Its victims were also women, including minors, such as Danuta Siedzikówna "Inka", a victim of judicial murder in August 1946. It was impossible to show in the existing conditions the contrast between good (supposedly) people's power in Poland and bad monarchist-military rule in Greece. There were too many examples of the hypocrisy in this propaganda thesis. Thanks to such articles, many readers realised that the secret police both here and there persecuted and killed their compatriots for ideological reasons.

This type of message was routinely (ritually) provided with information on the involvement of international and national structures of the women's movement in helping the persecuted, and manifesting solidarity with them, which was also the case here. From the final part of the cited article, one learned that

the WIDF, from the first moments of its existence, has shown a lot of interest in the fate of Greek women and children. It stood in the front ranks of their hottest defenders, intervening repeatedly on the platform of the United Nations and wherever necessary. The Federation also provided material assistance – Swiss women twice organized collections for this purpose, Argentinian women sent food, and French women – parcels with medicines. ... The Women's League, a member of the WIDF, is following the events in Greece with deep concern and concern. ... We must awaken the conscience of the world, form an opinion by participating in mass protests, and demonstrate against the violation of fundamental, democratic human rights – in the name of individual freedom and universal peace."<sup>64</sup> Greek issues in the context of persecution and help for the local structures of the women's movement were present on the pages of *Nasza Praca* also in the following years.

<sup>63</sup> "I-sza Konferencja Demokratycznej Organizacji Kobiecej Wolnej Grecji", *Nasza Praca*, no. 3–4, 1949, 31–32.

<sup>64</sup> J. T., "Prześladowania w Grecji", 21.

In the February–March 1948 issue, an article entitled *Women's Organizations Fighting for Greece* was published. The readers could learn about the dissolution by the government of 19 women's organizations, including the Panhellenic Women's Union. However, when reporting on these actions of the authorities in Athens, the editors did not mention that the banned associations had a pro-communist profile without exception or, at best, sympathized with the Greek communist partisans. Instead, the editors focused the readers' attention on the description of the aid activities of the Mother and Child Care Section of one of the disbanded organizations<sup>65</sup>.

The aspect of the charitable activity of women's movements gathered in the WIDF was very often exposed in the pages of *Nasza Praca*. This issue was also taken up in the context of the activities of the headquarters itself, whose lack of success in this field had to be somehow explained to the readers. According to the editors, the lack of financial resources was a limitation in the actions undertaken by the WIDF to provide material assistance to persecuted activists of women's movements. This meant nothing less than that Moscow and its 'satellites' were not able to provide for them to a sufficient extent. One of the ways to raise money was, therefore, the organization by the WSDFK of international raffles and public fundraisers. These forms of fundraising for the readers of *Nasza Praca* were reported by the Foreign Department of the MB SCWL published in July 1947 in Circular No. 20. It included an appeal for

all provincial, district and municipal boards to properly assess the seriousness of the situation and proceed to collect gifts in their areas, which will be sent to Paris. We kindly ask you to collect objects of a certain artistic value and having a regional character (e.g. ceramics, wood products, embroidery, lace, kilims, crystals, etc.). ... Items sent to the Foreign Department at the Main Board should be provided with a certificate of provenience (informing where they come from, and who donated them). In this way, the collected objects will become Polish propaganda abroad." The appeal was signed by the Secretary General of MB SCWL, Izolda Kowalska, and the Chairwoman of the Foreign Department of MB SCWL, Maria Jaszczukowa<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> "Organizacje kobiece w Grecji Walczącej", *Nasza Praca*, no. 2–3, 1948, 10–11.

<sup>66</sup> "Okólnik nr 20 o nadsyłaniu fantów na loterię międzynarodową", *Nasza Praca*, no. 5, 1947, 30–31.

In the coordination of the organization of the raffle for the needs of the WSDF, the activists SCWL were involved not just inside the country; the strongest branches of the association operating abroad also joined the action, mostly at embassies and consulates. Most often, the impulse to create them were meetings with members of the MB SCWL, who during their foreign visits stopped at Polish diplomatic missions or held official meetings with the leaders of local feminist organizations. On the occasion of one of such visit of Izolda Kowalska, the branch of SCWL was established in the Polish embassy in Stockholm. Its board included “Anna Ostrowska as the chairwoman, Jadwiga Cabanowa as the secretary, and Andrzejewska and Nadzinowa as members”.<sup>67</sup> The central office of the association boasted about the fact of the existence of their foreign representations expressed in the pages of *Nasza Praca*, whose journalists sometimes had to publicise information not even about the creation of yet another branch, but about the establishment of its ‘initiative group’<sup>68</sup>.

This type of practice proved how much the Warsaw authorities of the association cared about such successes and the possibility of their propaganda use. An additional opportunity for this was created by the inclusion in December 1947 of the SCWL branches operating at diplomatic missions to distribute Christmas packages sent from the country to Polish children awaiting repatriation, most of whom in Germany. At the end of the year, on the initiative of MB SCWL and with the participation of the Polish Red Cross, the Workers’ Society of Friends of Children (WSFC)<sup>69</sup> and the Polish Teachers’ Union, a charity collection was carried out. “Monetary donations, food parcels, books, and individual packages from children were received. ... At the Women’s League Training Centre at 30–32 Lubelska Street in Warsaw, cars and trucks were arriving,

<sup>67</sup> “Koła Ligi Kobieta zagranicą”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 7–9, 1947, 37.

<sup>68</sup> This was the case, for example, of the initiative of Bronisława Przybosiowa, who made an attempt to establish the SCWL branch at the embassy in Bern, see: “Koła Ligi Kobieta zagranicą”, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Socialist childcare organization operating in the period 1926–1949. The head of the WSFC in the years 1919–1939 was Tomasz Arciszewski. The Main Board included, among other SCWL activists, Dorota Kluszyńska. In 1949, the WSFC was merged with the Peasant Society of Friends of Children and thus the Society of Friends of Children was established, more detail in: Maria Kuzańska-Obrączkowska, *Koncepcje wychowawcze Robotniczego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Dzieci, 1919–1939: analiza założeń i funkcjonowania placówek*, (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1966).

unloading boxes with gifts.”<sup>70</sup> The collected goods went to Polish children staying in Berlin and in other centres in Westphalia. On behalf of the SCWL, the distribution of gifts to Polish children was to be carried out by activists seconded from the country and Polish diplomats in the Soviet and British occupation zones.

An analysis of press releases about the foreign trips of SCWL leaders allows to conclude that these trips were relatively frequent and involved not only contacts with the Paris headquarters of the WIDF, but also the use of invitations for the association’s delegations to the conventions and conferences organized by women’s organizations associated in this federation. As far as the countries of the Eastern Bloc are concerned, apart from the official contacts of the members of the MB SCWL with their counterparts in the ‘fraternal’ countries, the custom of working visits of groups of mid-level activists, and even from the base branches to their foreign counterparts, has also developed. The most prestigious direction of the ‘peregrination’ of league activists was officially the Soviet Union, and in fact also Western countries. The trips to these two opposing ends of the continent were described in detail in the SCWL periodicals. The September–November issue of *Nasza Praca* reported on the departure of a delegation consisting of Wanda Wawrzyńska and Irena Rudnicka, at the invitation of the Union of Italian Women,<sup>71</sup> to the Second National Women’s Congress in Milan scheduled for 19–23 October 1947. Emphasising the importance of this event, the readers were informed that during the meeting, recommendations regarding the equality of Italian women were to be developed in order to submit them to the forum of the Italian Constituent Assembly<sup>72</sup>.

In the milieu of SCWL leaders, contacts with sister women’s organizations in the countries of the so-called people’s democracy were given a slightly lower rank, nevertheless, each time invitations from the other side were used to participate not just in the most important events, since the latter were obligatory. The SCWL delegation headed by Maria Jaszczukowa participated, for example, in the proceedings of the Unification Congress of Hungarian

<sup>70</sup> “Organizujemy «Gwiazdkę» dla dzieci polskich w Niemczech i kraju”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 10, 1947, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Unione Donne Italiane.

<sup>72</sup> “Kongres kobiet włoskich”, *Nasza Praca*, no. 7–9, 1947, 38.

Women. The initiator of the merger of several women's organizations was the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women associated with the Communist Party<sup>73</sup>. At the congress, "a number of smaller organizations were incorporated into its structures, ranging from socialists, forming a department at their party, through small private proprietors, to the association of women at the Reformed Church."<sup>74</sup> A routine report from the meeting was published in *Nasza Praca*, and its most colourful part concerned foreign delegations visiting the congress. "Women from Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, and Trieste were represented. The most cordial reception was given to all representatives of the fighting Greece, who came to Budapest straight from the battlefield in their uniforms. They overcame many difficulties by breaking out with weapons in their hands."<sup>75</sup> What is astonishing in this account is the special attention given to the Greek women at the expense of Soviet comrades, which went against the accepted unwritten rule. What is even stranger, is that the Soviet Union was not mentioned among the listed countries from which came the delegates to the Budapest congress. Most likely, however, Soviet women were there, and their presence simply slipped the attention of the author of the report (and the censor), just as the date of the congressional deliberations, about which there is not a word in the three-page text.

The relatively wide spectrum of activity of SCWL members on the international level, apart from participation in foreign congresses and congresses, was evidenced by official protest letters published in *Nasza Praca* regarding the persecution of women and their associations in other countries, declarations of support for the initiatives of the WIDF and its associated organizations, as well as congratulatory letters addressed to women who have been entrusted with honourable positions. An example of the latter was

<sup>73</sup> Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége.

<sup>74</sup> Maria Jaszczukowa, "Kongres kobiet węgierskich", *Nasza Praca*, no. 5–6, 1948, 19. The Hungarian communists were very keen on the widest possible unification platform for image reasons, because in December 1948 the Second World Women's Congress organized by the WIDF was to take place in Budapest. A multi-page account of its course was published in the January–February issue of the MB SCWL magazine from 1949, see: "Sprawozdanie z obrad kongresu Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet w Budapeszcie w 1948 r.", *Nasza Praca*, no. 1–2, 1949, 5–15.

<sup>75</sup> Maria Jaszczukowa, *Kongres kobiet węgierskich*, 21–22.

the sending of a congratulatory letter addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Ana Pauker, the first woman in the world to take up the post of head of diplomacy at the end of 1947. The letter signed by the Chairwoman of MB SCWL, I. Sztachelska, and Secretary General, I. Kowalska read: "The Main Board of the League of Women, on behalf of Polish women, would like to congratulate you most warmly on the occasion of your assumption of such a high and honourable office. Polish women are moved and proud that a woman, a long-time fighter for freedom and democracy, the Chairwoman of the Anti-Fascist Committee of Romanian Women, a member of the highest authorities of the WIDF, has been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania."<sup>76</sup>

The nomination of A. Pauker and the publication in *Nasza Praca* of the congratulatory letter of the League authorities, became an opportunity to take up the subject of the conditions for the functioning of the Romanian women's movement. The only article on this subject appeared in the May–June issue in 1948. It is significant that in the extensive four-page text does not even mention the Romanian women's movement<sup>77</sup>. The real curiosity was the fact that the readers of the MB SCWL official publication could get to know the name of the organization operating there, i.e. the Democratic Union of Romanian Women,<sup>78</sup> only after more than a year, and this from the content of the message that the leaders of the League activists sent on the occasion of the anniversary of "the liberation of Romania by the heroic Red Army."<sup>79</sup>

Following the example of *Praca Kobiet*, *Nasza Praca* wrote not just about the difficult conditions for the development of the Bulgarian women's movement, but also about the achievements of the Democratic Committee of Bulgarian Women. Over the years, the organization's activity gained a certain dynamism. Thanks to the support of the Communist Party, as many as 36 women obtained parliamentary mandates, which made a big impression on the 26 women deputies in the Polish Legislative Chamber (Sejm)<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> "Z Wydziału Zagranicznego", *Nasza Praca*, no. 10, 1947, 32.

<sup>77</sup> "About the Romanian woman", *Nasza Praca*, no. 5–6, 1948, 22–26.

<sup>78</sup> Uniunea Femeilor Democrate din România.

<sup>79</sup> "Związek Demokratycznych Kobiet Rumunii", *Nasza Praca*, no. 10, 1949, 51.

<sup>80</sup> "Ludowy Związek Kobiet Bułgarskich", *Nasza Praca*, no. 10, 1949, 38–40.

In connection with the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, *Nasza Praca* published in the last two issues of that year, extensive articles describing the course of the process of internal reorganization and international initiatives of the Chinese women's movement<sup>81</sup>. In the latter case, it was the Asian Women's Conference announced for December, where contrary to the name, delegations of African women's organizations were also to attend the meeting. Finally, at the invitation of the created in March 1949 The All-China Democratic Women's Federation,<sup>82</sup> brought to Beijing activists from India, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Burma, Siam, Malaya, Indonesia, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Nigeria and Madagascar<sup>83</sup>. After the conference, the involvement of Asian and African women's organizations in the production of emancipatory slogans based on Marxism-Leninism was intensified, and after 1958 slogans of emancipation were also more frequent, with the proclamation of the "Three Red Banners" campaign<sup>84</sup> in Maoism.

## Conclusion

In the years 1946–1949, the official press organs of the SCWL which took up the issue of the functioning of foreign structures of the women's movement in their articles, were not able to provide their readers with comprehensive information about its sister organizations. This was mainly due to the lack of access to even basic information and most often the laconic nature of that available. As a result, between 1946 and 1949, not a single news item about the Czechoslovakian women's movement was published in *Praca Kobiet* and *Nasza Praca*. When, on the occasion of the appointment of A. Pauker as the world's first female head of diplomacy, such a serious issue of the journal was devoted

<sup>81</sup> The All-China Democratic Women's Federation was the only women's organization in Asia to respond to WIDF's call during its May 1948 session in Rome to convene an Asian Women's Congress. The governments of other Asian countries did not agree to the organization of the congress, see: "Konferencja Kobiet Azjatyckich", *Nasza Praca*, no. 12, 1949, 36.

<sup>82</sup> All-China Democratic Women's Federation (全中国民主妇女联合会).

<sup>83</sup> "Konferencja Kobiet Azjatyckich", 54.

<sup>84</sup> The common name of the three great mass campaigns initiated by Mao Zedong in 1957–1958. It was about a new general line of the party, the so-called Great Leap Forward and the creation of people's communes.

to Romanian women, the four-page article not only lacked space for information about the process of reorganization of the local women's movement, but did not even provide the current name of the organization of Romanian women. In terms of volume and frequency, most was written in both periodicals about women of the Soviet Union associated in the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women<sup>85</sup> – most, but not very accurate and also condescending. When assessing both publications, one should also recall another 'incriminating' shortcoming, which was their propaganda character, therefore, before any scientific use, one should be highly critical of the content published in them.

The above facts determine the assessment of the cognitive value of *Praca Kobiet* and *Nasza Praca* in the study of the history of the international women's movement. In fact, it is very limited, yet despite this weakness, in the Polish reality there is no better alternative source for those researching this issue. Therefore, one is faced with the dilemma of whether to obtain from the Polish women's press simply rudimentary knowledge about foreign feminist organizations, or not, and thus refrain from establishing even these basic facts?

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<sup>85</sup> Антифашистский комитет советских женщин.

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