

Guardians of the Memory
Пазители на паметта

ROMAN DMOWSKI (1864 – 1939)

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Abstract. Roman Dmowski (1864 – 1939) was an outstanding political leader, and an evocative and efficient publicist; he authored works that had great influence on his generation's way of thinking. He was one of those with greatest merits for Poland regaining her independence, but he lost the rivalry for power with Józef Piłsudski. However, when it comes to influencing people's minds, the result of this competition is much more balanced.

Keywords: Roman Dmowski; National Democracy; National League; nationalism; political thought; First World War; Poland regaining independence

The political leader and statesman, Roman Dmowski, was one of the most prominent Polish politicians of the first half of the XX century. Today, he is perceived as an ideologist and journalist rather than an effective politician. This is not entirely justified and even in the studies of researchers unfriendly to Dmowski this view is being questioned nowadays. Dmowski was managing effectively a huge political camp for years. Moreover, during the crucial years of the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference (1919) he happened to play the role of a diplomat and a statesman. At the same time, in the age of democratisation of politics, he attributed great importance to the written word; he has also left substantial literary works.

The perception of Dmowski was strongly influenced by his failure in the rivalry with Piłsudski for power in Poland after the country regained independence in 1918. It happens usually that the winners enjoy the privilege of imposing their own narrative of the past, of the reasons and merits. In this respect, however, Piłsudski's success was not complete - his great rival had (some people claim that he still has) a profound influence on the way of thinking of his compatriots. There is much exaggeration in this opinion, but also a bit of truth. Dmowski was able to astutely identify both the challenges of his times and the aspirations of his generation. His career as a political writer and leader was intertwined with the processes of a growing national consciousness, which took place spontaneously, with great power and great, decisive consequences for political transformations in Central Europe after

the Great War. Perceiving these processes as the decisive element of the present time, he based all of his political calculations and plans on these¹⁾.

Dmowski's career was part of the processes of democratisation of politics; hence some elements of his biography seem important. He came from outside the traditional elites. And although some of his biographers point to noble roots of the family, living in the suburbs of Warsaw since late 18th/early 19th century, its principal problem lay not in the contemplating of the family tree intricacies, but in a desperate struggle with misery. Dmowski's sisters died early of tuberculosis, which reaped its abundant grim harvest in many poor families at the time. According to material factors of the social status the Dmowskis were part of the proletariat, while according to their aspirations, expectations and a tendency to economise they counted among the middle class. Seeing the education of their children as a kind of a lifetime investment, they tried to provide education to the three sons at the cost of great sacrifices. This proved successful only in relation to the youngest, Roman, born on 9 August 1864. The possibilities expired after the death of his father. The material stabilisation, achieved with great difficulty, collapsed, and Roman Dmowski, who wanted to continue his education, had to earn money by giving private lessons.

As opposed to personalities from among the elite, he achieved his position only thanks to his own efforts. He could not use any connections of his family or milieu, nor any financial help. Dmowski's biographers point it out that he was able to learn at home the features that influenced his later life. First of all the diligence, the persistence, the habit of planning actions in terms of long-term rather than ad hoc benefits, and perhaps also a specific kind of ruthlessness, which, formed in a milieu that struggled with poverty, could be applied in political life, especially where there was the need to choose between mutually exclusive reasons. Combined with his outstanding abilities, these were important assets, but they would not have been enough to provide Dmowski with an opportunity to play a significant part in political life had social separations retained their former power (Kawalec, 1999: 5). The world was changing, however, as were the rules of the political life. The pre-condition for success was to be active within a mass political movement based on a plebeian electorate. Although Dmowski was not a rally politician, he had an outstanding ability to identify broader social needs and moods.

Other elements of his biography can be considered typical of the specific realities of the part of Poland occupied by Russia in late 19th century. This applies in particular to the relationship between the reality of the police-controlled system and the attempts of energetic young people to engage in public activity, which had to take the form of conspiracy²⁾. In another reality, Dmowski would have combined the career of a university researcher with political activity, just as Piłsudski, who studied medicine, could probably have combined his medical practice with socialist party activity. In both these cases the arrest, the trial, and then the sentence of de-

portation into Russia for several years, although rather mild from the 20th century perspective, were quite enough to knock them out of the ‘normal’ life paths.

However, the most important of all the elements that influenced Dmowski’s mentality and views, and consequently his whole life, was the encounter with the Russification system. His high school education came at the time of dire Russification of education. Years later, Dmowski recalled the nights he had spent on essays in Russian, where every word had to be assessed so as not to be expelled from the school, but at the same time to maintain one’s self-respect...³⁾ He wrote in a booklet devoted to the Russian school system originally published in Paris: “What does not bend, will be broken by the school, because its power and domination over the educated ones is unlimited.”⁴⁾ The school was a product of the police-controlled state. Combining educational functions with surveillance of the youth, it reflected clearly both the features of the Tsar state’s political system and the anti-Polish course that it pursued throughout the Russian-occupied part of Poland. Despite his outstanding abilities, Dmowski repeated three years at school. His biographer, Roman Wapiński, indicates that in his case the improvement of education results was associated with the beginnings of the national activity. These were connected with participation in self-education activities, needless to say conducted in conspiracy. Pupils’ conspiracy groups provided a way of escaping the oppressive atmosphere of the school. By creating an opportunity to fill gaps in the history, literature and geography of Poland, these stabilised their national attitudes, counteracting the Russification (Wapiński, 1989: 20 – 21). For many, such as Dmowski, but also Piłsudski, these provided a kind of foretaste of the world of politics. Dmowski continued conspiracy activities after commencing his university studies, by taking part in creating the then-formed structures, needless to say secret ones: the ‘Zet’ that grouped students and the Liga Polska (Polish League), an organisation active in all three parts of the occupied Poland (Russian, German and Austrian) aimed at regaining the state’s independence, proclaimed in 1887. Cooperation with a talented group of journalists who published the ‘*Głos*’, a journal that contested the system as far as it was possible under the censorship, was also important for his further fate. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Dmowski was never fascinated by Marxism.

As a curiosity it is worth noting that in his studies Dmowski undertook a subject distant from the political sphere: biology. The course of his studies, crowned with a doctorate after five years, documented his above-average abilities. However, any prospects of a scientific career were shattered by the effects of Dmowski’s political activity. In the reality of a police state the latter exposed him to repression. The police was efficient: when threatened with arrest, Dmowski evaded it temporarily by going to Paris for scientific purposes, but on the return trip he was arrested at the border and sent to a prison in the Warsaw Citadel. Following five months of detention, he was released pending trial and the verdict. During this time, he worked on the reorganisation of the underground conspiracy structures of the Polish League in

the Russian-occupied Poland. In April 1893 the establishment of a new organisation, the Liga Narodowa (National League), was proclaimed.

The verdict announced in November excluded him from this activity for the next one and a half years. He was sentenced to be deported to Jelgava (called Mitava at the time) in Latvia (a Russian province at the time), but in the early 1895 he fled from there to Lwów (called Lemberg at the time, now Lviv in Ukraine) in the Austrian-occupied part of Poland. There he started publishing the ‘*Przegląd Wszechpolski*’ (‘All-Polish Review’), a magazine which, within ten years, became the core of a strong political movement, supported by conspiracy structures, with a dedicated staff of activists and a network of periodicals addressed to various readers. The energy, sacrifice and skills of the people involved in the movement, combined with the efficiency and growing strength of organisational structures that flexibly combined legal and illegal forms of action, were certainly the keys to the success of the circle. The ‘all-Polish’ perspective presented in the National League’s publications, expressed in the recognition of the nation as the highest criterion, was a more controversial aspect. However, it, too, defined the power of the movement. At the time of foreign oppression and the rivalry of the occupying powers conducted in an ostentatious manner, with an open use of rhetoric that justified the supremacy of the powerful and their ‘right’ to oppress the weak⁵⁾, the nationalism provided an effective tool of policy planning as well as a cognitive instrument to help understand what was happening around, regardless of any doubts or numerous critical voices against it.

In effect, the National League proved to be an organisation capable of rapid development. While acting in conspiracy, relatively small, it was able to exert an effective influence on other social structures and associations, formally independent, but effectively controlled by League members who held various positions in their leading bodies. Assessing the capabilities of conspiracy groups is not easy, but contemporaries had no doubts that these were growing fast. Wilhelm Feldman, a socialist columnist unfriendly to the League, wrote of 8,000 copies of ‘*Polak*’ (‘A Pole’) smuggled to the countryside and 20,000 people associated with the nationalist conspiracy (Feldman, 1933: 252). Erazm Piltz, a conservative politician, when writing in 1903 his book about the ‘extreme parties’ (with the intention to expose them), mentioned 11 press titles published by the League, distributed in each of the three parts of occupied Poland, and additionally in Berlin, Paris and Chicago⁶⁾. In 1897, the movement adopted a characteristic dual structure, which it retained until 1918⁷⁾. The National League, which operated in conspiracy, formed its secret leadership, while the national-democratic parties formed in each of the three parts of occupied Poland were overt.

Among the leaders of the movement, it was Dmowski who proved the strongest personality. His principal assets, apart from his talents, were his energy, his growing knowledge of the world and his ability to act, especially where it was necessary to reconcile a relentless pursuit of the ultimate goal with flexibility in the choice

of the means. At the same time, not burdened with a family, Dmowski was able to completely focus on his activities in the organisation. By editing the ‘All-Polish Review’ in consecutive years he kept control over the ideological evolution of the League milieu. It is hard not to mention here the fact that, besides Zygmunt Balicki (Balicki, 1903), he authored one of the most important ideological manifestos of the time: “*Mysli nowoczesnego Polaka*” (“Thoughts of a Modern Pole”, 1903) (Dmowski, 1903). Their ideology message was similar, while their influence within the elite can be speculated upon: Balicki, one of the founders of Polish sociology, predominated over Dmowski in terms of his scientific position, but his work, due to its complicated style and difficult language, is nothing more than a historical document today. On the other hand, reading Dmowski’s booklet still leaves a strong impression, probably thanks to the quality of the language, surprisingly modern, almost without archaisms. However, it is not impossible that to at least some of today’s readers of Dmowski’s booklet, the problems of Poles from the beginning of the 20th century may seem to link with the challenges of the times of globalisation. Its message, in a nutshell, boils down to the opinion that the world is an arena of rivalry and struggle between nations. The rules of the game are that the stronger ones win, while nothing can save the weaker ones, especially if they lack the tool of their own state. If they fail to produce on time the energy they need to survive, they will perish, and no international tribunal will defend them...

The success of the National League was determined by the connection of the ideas propagated within it with the spontaneous process of national revival. The League’s publications, by combating compromise attitudes, prepared the ground for a subsequent political revival, by opposing the downfall of spirit characteristic of the atmosphere that followed the defeat of the anti-Russian uprising of 1863 – 1864, which resulted in pessimism and passivity. ‘The Pole’, smuggled illegally into the Russian-occupied territory, played a role that cannot be overestimated in raising the Polish national consciousness among the peasants. It is less clear to what extent a similar phenomenon occurred in relation to the elite, where the League’s actions encountered an energetic counteraction of other political circles. Conflicts were inevitable due to the rapid expansion of the movement, which affected the influence of other milieus, and also because there was an evident connection between its expansion and mounting tension on national grounds. Conservatives also warned about the threat of repression by the occupying powers, the consequences of which would fall on the entire Polish population. For a while the leadership of the League tried not to expand the internal front, thus no attacks were made against the socialist faction oriented towards Poland’s independence⁸⁾ or the peasant movement in Austrian-occupied Poland treated as an allied party, but this changed when the mutual competition increased and the surge of strength increased the League’s self-confidence.

The defeat of Russia in the war with Japan (1904), and later the outbreak of the revolution in 1905 were the threshold. For the leadership of the League the crisis

of the Tsar state meant an opportunity to intensify the activity in the key part of Poland, occupied by Russia, as well as to shift the focal point of activity towards practical politics rather than attempts to shape public opinion as it had been before. The views on how to exploit this opportunity have divided the previously tight milieu, preparing the ground for later splits, but it was evident that between 1905 and 1907 it enjoyed a spectacular advance. The *Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe* (Democratic-National Party) established in 1897, emerging from the underground conspiracy, grew into the strongest political movement in the country. Dmowski himself became a widely known politician. By winning a seat in the Russian Parliament (*Duma*), he took the post of the chairman of the Polish Circle there. A year later (1908), he published the book “Germany, Russia and the Polish question” in several languages, thanks to which he became known more widely also in Western Europe.

His assessment of the situation, as well as the policy resulting from it, still continues to raise emotions. Dmowski assumed that Europe was facing a war, and pointed at Germany as the prime mover of the growing conflict. In concluding, he announced that in the situation the Poles should support Russia. The choice made by Dmowski was a controversial step, even though it followed strictly from the international situation, and in particular the system of alliances. Proclaiming the pro-Russian orientation contradicted the tradition of the milieu he led, as well as the expectations of a large part of public opinion. With hindsight, it is clear that he saw Russia not as an ally, but as an obstacle, which can only be overcome by passing around it. He played a game. He did not change his attitude to Russia, characterized by aversion and contempt, but this was only documented in his private ascents. His public declarations were quite the opposite⁹. However, if the suggestion of pro-Russian views of Dmowski can be waved aside, the same cannot be said about all other allegations, including ethical ones. It is a fundamental question how far can a politician deceive his partners in the game he plays, and thus inevitably also his own people. Fears that the impact of the conciliatory declaratory statements may be demoralising in a wider perception, were also raised within the League itself.

These were, however, the inevitable costs of a policy, the goals of which had to stay hidden. They had to, because none of the states could accept the programme of solving the Polish issue in the shape that Dmowski imagined. When asked after the war about the reasons for the restraint in using the slogan of independence, he explained, not without spitefulness, that, being a mature man, he knew that “in politics you do what leads you to your goal and you avoid what moves you away from your goal”¹⁰. The necessity of temporarily hiding his political goals was obvious for Dmowski, but not for his opponents. If today we are often inclined to agree with the latter, it is largely due to the fact that we are not quite able to grasp the extent of the impasse in which the Polish issue was during late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The effects of prolonged foreign occupation were expressed in the inhibition of assimilation into the Polish culture. In view of the intensification of national antagonisms in the area of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the concept of being Polish was reduced to its ethnic determinants. Deepening divisions were even marked within the Polish community, expressed in growing antagonisms between Polish regions. In the international situation of the time there was no chance to change this state of affairs. The three strong powers who had divided the former Poland among themselves at the end of the 18th century, represented a potential that was sufficient not only to suppress a Polish irredentism, but also, acting in the coalition, to prevent effective intervention from outside. Only a conflict between them could change the situation. The increasingly clear division of the world into two blocks, with both German states on one side, and Russia allied with France and Great Britain on the other side, potentially created the prospect of bringing the Polish issue out of the impasse, although there was still the threat that in the face of a Polish irredentism the occupying powers would reconcile once again, as they did in the 19th century.

Dmowski's policy tried to overcome these limitations. Already in the first years of the 20th century, he raised the need to pursue a "cunning" policy, the goals of which would remain hidden. He took into account the risk not only of a counter-action of the occupying powers, but also of a repetition of a situation where, as in 1863, the protest action in Poland would break out spontaneously, at a time when the international situation would not promise success. These fears strongly affected the League's actions during the 1905 revolution.

The most important element of Dmowski's concept, however, was the idea of conducting actions in stages (Wapiński, 1989: 124 – 131). Theoretically, two options were possible: the first would be to expand influence in one of the regions, which could become separated and play the role of the "Polish Piedmont", subsequently attracting other occupied regions; in the second variant, the sequence would be reversed: Polish lands would be reunited within one of the occupying states before they became independent. The second option had a precondition: the outbreak of a war between the occupying powers. This was its obvious drawback, but not with the growing tension in international politics between 1907 and 1914. There was another drawback: the need to take steps that would be difficult to accept by the patriotic Polish opinion. In the existing system of international forces only Russia, allied with the Western powers and acting against the German-Austrian coalition, could reunite Polish territories. However, this country was seen as the most barbarous of the occupying powers. Proclaiming the pro-Russian orientation entailed a deepening of conflicts in the Polish camp; in the background, other conflicts continued to grow. Trying to deal with them, Dmowski took steps he had previously shied away from. Among these, the 1912 proclamation of a boycott of Jewish trade was of particular importance¹¹⁾. The existing state of research does not

allow answering the important question: whether the proclaimed boycott affected property relations in this area of economic activity¹²⁾, but it certainly meant the opening of a new battle front, which had far-reaching, unpredictable consequences.

In his memoirs written years later, Dmowski treated the pro-Russian orientation as the only rational choice, but in fact he did hesitate. The decision took a long time to mature. It is difficult to overestimate both the influence of the League's activists coming from the Prussian-occupied region, who, unlike Dmowski, lacked any prejudices against Russia but who could see the effectiveness of Germanising actions of the united Germany. The difficulties that he had personally encountered during his attempts to take a stronger position in the Austrian-occupied region before 1905 also had an effect. However, the expectations related to the forthcoming war were decisive, associated with the hopes that in the case of Russia, participation in a war may result in another internal crisis, as had been the case with the earlier Russian-Japanese conflict. Starting from 1907, these calculations affected decisively all Dmowski's actions. Fearing the influence of the German lobby in Russia and not wanting it to once again scare the Russian public with the vision of a Polish irredentism, he multiplied loyalist-sounding declarations, referring to the Slavic solidarity and assuring that when facing a threat from the west Russia could count on the loyalty of her Polish subjects. There is no doubt that he did it insincerely: he would write during the war, after the tsar system fell, in a letter to Ignacy Paderewski: "I fraternised with animals"¹³⁾.

In August 1914 Dmowski turned fifty. He was then a leading Polish politician, also recognisable abroad, but considered controversial and attacked fiercely. The outbreak of a great war was a pre-condition for his plans to come true; in this sense he was a revolutionary politician to no lesser extent than those socialists whose entire political calculations were built on the expectation of a universal revolution. And let us add that Dmowski was not counting on a brief war, but on a long-term, devastating conflict that would thoroughly remodel the international scene. It must be said that in this matter his expectations have come true. What has not come true were both his hopes for national concessions from the Russian authorities (in this, however, Dmowski was sceptical) and, following the defeats of the Russian army, his hopes that Russia would occupy the entire area covered by the Polish question. Drawing his conclusions from the deeper and deeper weakening of the tsar's state in the Allied camp, at the end of 1915 he went to the West. Russia's position, threatening to withdraw from the war if Polish postulates were taken into account, meant that initially he could not achieve much among her allies, either, but time worked in his favour. The turning point was the announcement in November 1916 by Germany and Austro-Hungary that they would establish a subordinate Polish state, then (March 1917) the fall of the tsar, and subsequently the Bolshevik revolution (November). Dmowski took careful advantage of the emerging possibilities. When the prospect of using the Polish cause by Germany appeared, he appealed to

the Allies for a declaration that would balance the German offer, while threatening them with the prospect of an army of a million Polish volunteers on the German side. The Russian resistance weakened as that state's decomposition progressed, and following the Bolshevik coup and Russia's withdrawal from the war she lost her right to vote. That was a more beneficial situation than Dmowski had predicted before the war or during the first years of the global conflict. With Russia falling out of the game and both German states weakening, exhausting their resources in a devastating war, resulted in previously unthinkable circumstances for Poland. This made it possible to reveal the goals of the game Dmowski played.

He did so in the documents handed over to the British government in March 1917, related to the western and eastern borders of the postulated Poland. As regards the western border, Dmowski's position was the same as that contained in the memorandum submitted to the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sazonov back in 1914. He postulated that the Poznań region, the so-called West Prussia (subsequently the Pomeranian Province of Poland), the Upper Silesia and a part of the Lower Silesia (Syców and Namysłów counties) should be taken over from Germany. In March 1917 this position was supplemented with suggestions referring to the eastern border of the future Poland¹⁴. Dmowski suggested that it should follow, more or less, the line of the second partition (1793). Even though for many Poles that was not enough (only a third of the Polish territory originally taken away by Russia would remain on the Polish side), the proposed line covered all areas with dense Polish population, and it ran more to the east than the eventual interwar border. In the south, all of Galicia and half of Cieszyn Silesia were to be incorporated into Poland. In his explanation Dmowski emphasized the bankruptcy of Russian policy in Central and Eastern Europe and the need to fill the political void emerging there, which potentially opened the way for German influence. In his opinion, this role could only be fulfilled by a powerful Polish state, capable of opposing the Reich, provided that it was granted an area that would enable it to build economic independence. It should be as big as possible without exposing the state to a national irredentism, and in addition it should have access to the Baltic sea and to Silesian coal deposits.

All these arguments were repeated and expanded in a large memorial presented to the British a few months later, in the summer of 1917¹⁵). This is a very interesting document, not only as an expression of the aspirations of the group of politicians grouped around Dmowski, but also as a kind of expert opinion, forecasting with amazing accuracy the future course of events in Central and Eastern Europe. Dmowski correctly predicted that the place of former monarchies would be taken over by sovereign nation states, with Poland as one of the stronger elements of the new territorial order. Some of his assessments of the situation were too optimistic. Russia's weakening would last shorter than he expected, and in view of the breakdown of the cooperation of Allied states after the war it would prove impossible to keep Germany in check. It was also a mistake to expect that Britain would be a

strategic ally of the rebuilt Poland. Although it would be difficult to prove that these errors projected negatively on the effectiveness of the game that Dmowski played during the war, their consequences in the long run can be shown. At this point it is difficult to abstract from the imperfections of the Versailles order, including the inability of the countries located between Russia (or the USSR in the interwar period) and Germany to come to agreement and defend their threatened sovereignty with solidarity. One may also wonder, considering the fate of the interwar Poland, whether the functions of a regional power realised by her (and included in Dmowski's vision) did not overwhelm her (Kawalec, 2000: 27).

During the war Dmowski gained the rank of a nationwide politician; he was more than just the chairman of the *Komitet Narodowy Polski* (Polish National Committee), an official Polish representation recognized by the Western Allies. At the time, he personified all actions for the recreation of Poland, whose independence would obtain a real sanction in the form of a territory that would correspond to the national aspirations of that generation, a state functioning in an international relations system, in which the decisive vote belonged to Western states rather than any of the great neighbours of Poland. Fiercely attacked, subjected to emotions, he nevertheless belonged to the group of personalities, not so numerous in Poland, who not only could see the differences between nationwide and particular goals, but also who were able to give the former priority in practical activities (Wapiński, 1989: 244). It was also marked by the will of compromise with Piłsudski, shown during the war and in the first dozen or so months of Poland's independence, which saved the emerging state from effects of a struggle for power. Another of his merits was his involvement in establishing such conditions for a truce with Germany, which would oblige the latter to maintain troops in Eastern Europe, which in consequence saved the Polish lands from an invasion of the Red Army. Taking this into account, and remembering about Dmowski's commitment to the struggle for the borders of Poland, and about the project of the Polish state he had created earlier, which largely coincided with the actual subsequent interwar Poland, he may be considered one of her creators, even if he was absent from the country during the first dozen or so months when the state was being rebuilt. Obtaining the inter-allied declaration in June 1918, signed by Britain, France and Italy, according to which the creation of Poland as a sovereign state, consisting of the three occupied regions and with an access to the sea, was one of the objectives of the war of the allied states, was Dmowski's spectacular success. At the end of the war, Dmowski's position began to weaken. Inter-party struggle in Poland contributed significantly to this. Often perceived as a politician of a single camp, when organising the Polish representation in the West, he managed to attract only some conservatives apart from his own party. Although the absence of politicians representing the liberal and leftist circles had its roots in the fact that these groups opted for Germany and Austria, still it created problems. The Allies wanted to deal with a Polish representation that deserved

complete trust and at the same time completely representative. The example of the Czechs shows that it was possible to create such a representation. Unfortunately, in Poland the temperature of political disputes proved too high and as a result, the agreement took place only after the end of hostilities, during late 1918/early 1919. The fact that Dmowski did not decide to attempt taking power by claiming his merits as a consistently pro-allied politician, was a right decision from the point of view of the vital interests of the Polish state then being formed, but for him it meant political degradation. When, after coming to an agreement with the authorities in Poland, the Polish National Committee was expanded to incorporate politicians arriving from Poland, and transformed into the Polish delegation to the upcoming peace congress, Dmowski had to satisfy himself with the role of the second delegate, Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski being the first one.

When assessing the effectiveness of Dmowski's actions as a diplomat, historians are in argument¹⁶⁾. It was easier for him to find a common language with diplomats of the "old school", and on the British ground with conservatives, especially if they were Catholics, but he had difficulties in reaching influential liberal politicians, as well as those of the left. He was a troublesome partner for allied politicians, as he defended his arguments relentlessly, sometimes in a manner perceived as arrogant. However, it is impossible to determine whether his problems were due to personality traits, or rather the fact that his programme (considered in Poland to be the minimum (Nowak, 2001: 207 – 219)) went too far from their viewpoint. When signing the text of the Treaty of Versailles he believed that he achieved 90 percent of his goal; the signature itself was for him a reward for the hardships he had suffered.

As a consequence of Dmowski's absence in Poland at the time when structures of the state were formed, additionally prolonged by his illness¹⁷⁾, he lost any chances in the race to power. When he arrived in Warsaw in May 1920, it turned out that he had ceased to be one of the central figures, not only in the political life of Poland, but even in his own party. The compromise with Piłsudski, about which Dmowski had thought in Paris, did not come to fruition because of resistance in his party, and the Marshal himself, exhilarated at the time with military successes, was not interested in it. It is possible that what decided were also differences of opinion around Piłsudski's Ukrainian policy, which Dmowski had fundamental doubts about (Kawalec, 2014: 82 – 93).

Seeing no suitable possibility of action for himself, Dmowski reluctantly engaged in current skirmishes in the Sejm. The attempt to withdraw from the political life was connected with a decision to leave the Polish capital: he eventually settled in Chłudowo near Poznań. However, in the case of leading politicians, the notion of political absence is relative. At the end of October 1923, Dmowski took over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the coalition government under the presidency of Wincenty Witos, and after the government fell (1924) he started writing his account of his activities during the war¹⁸⁾.

Piłsudski's coup d'état in May 1926 ultimately denied Dmowski any role in the authorities of the reborn Poland. Until his death (2 January 1939) he represented one of the most important and influential factions of public opinion, and his skills of grouping people around him were shown by the fate of the organisational structure that he established in December 1926 under the name of the *Obóz Wielkiej Polski* (Camp of Great Poland). Against the wish of its creator, the Camp was dominated by extremist youth and did not become the centre of consolidation of the centre-right opposition. In organisational terms, however, it was a success: within a few years, the Camp outpaced other political trends, expanding to the size of a mass organisation, exceeding 200,000 registered members. While acting within a large, internally diversified milieu of the National Democracy of the period, it was certainly (judging from today's perspective) the most controversial element of ND's characteristic internal pluralism. Historians hold it against Dmowski that he supported fascist youth who saw him as an authority until a certain point. The reality of the authoritarian dictatorship, combined with the growing pressure of the ruling camp, gave him little choice. Parliamentary politicians were the only personal alternative, but in the dictatorship reality they were, in fact, helpless. Other political movements have also undergone a similar evolution, expressed in the adaptation of organisational structures to non-parliamentary activities (various forms of uniforms, badges, militias), although generally they did so later than the National Democracy.

The controversy raised by Dmowski's politics has been indicated. A significant part of these is still alive today, drawing strength from resentments. In the post-Yalta realities there was nostalgia for the interwar Polish state; some of the old propaganda clichés have also regained vitality: in particular, the criticism of Dmowski's pro-Russian orientation. Objections, sometimes of a fundamental nature, also involve assessments of his position towards Jews, incompatible with contemporary sensitivity. From what can be read in Dmowski's enunciations and what is known about his system of values, it can be considered certain that his attitude towards the Jewish question, although influencing his political concepts, did not determine their final shape, nor the decisive focal points. The issues related to the assessment of the international position of Poland, and in particular the attitude towards both her great neighbours, were decisive. This is why, at the end of the 1930s, the National Democracy did not revise the view that the German policy poses the greatest threat against Poland and that the Hitler's state's persecution of its Jewish citizens changes nothing here. Remembering the Holocaust committed by the Nazi Germany, it is difficult not to say here that Dmowski not only did not live to see it (he died in early January 1939) but, formed mentally in the liberal atmosphere of the 19th century, he could not imagine the genocide (Wapiński, 1989: 365 – 366), let alone accept it. At the same time, it is difficult to deny that his actions, as well as those of the milieu around him, had their effects in the form of intensifying tensions on perhaps the largest of the ethnic "edges" of the reborn Poland, where the division line ran through every Polish city.

Questions about Dmowski are to a large extent questions about nationalism, assessed very critically today. It is difficult, however, not to take the broader background into account here. Compared to similar trends, Polish nationalism showed a number of characteristic features. One of these was the resistance that met the actions of Polish extremist circles, fascinated by the Italian fascism. As an ideology, the views developed by Dmowski and his collaborators were not a coalesced, coherent para-scientific system, but rather a conglomeration of ideas referring to concepts associated with institutions that symbolise tradition and social order. In Poland, the ideas of independence formed the mainstream of the tradition. In nationalist circles they were often perceived as a burden but in practice, along with other factors of cultural nature, they contributed to the toning down of extreme trends.

Dmowski's case is more complicated also because he cannot be seen only from the viewpoint of nationalism. He spoke nine languages, he eagerly travelled abroad and felt good there. In his case, the accession to being Polish did not result from a lack of knowledge of the world or a fear of "the alien", but it was the resultant of a sense of duty and a free choice. In this context it is difficult to overestimate the influence of the liberal atmosphere of positivism and his long-term fascination with the Anglo-Saxon world. For example, Dmowski considered, and that was a permanent view, that a state cannot be based solely on coercion. On the contrary, political institutions should ensure stability of state structures in such a way as to preserve the sense of freedom of its citizens. He attributed great significance to the latter, seeing it not only as a source of social energy and initiative, but also a special feature of the Western civilisation, of which he saw Poland as part of. For a long time he thought that the optimum political system should be based on a rivalry between two parties: a liberal and a conservative-national ones. As this ideal did not fit the reality of Poland, where there were plenty of parties, it was potentially a source of frustration and growing criticism of the institution of liberal democracy. But these frustrations were stronger only after the war; earlier not only the enunciations on political issues, but also the documents depicting the territorial vision of the future Poland were based on the assumption that the state would be based on the western political patterns, with a parliament elected by general vote that would form the centre of legislature. As a result, the scale of territorial aspirations was reduced.

Until the end of his life, Dmowski remained convinced that the state should be "cheap", without extensive offices and with a small scope of interference in social life, which was in principle against the practice of totalitarian regimes. At the same time, however, he was increasingly critical of the actually functioning systems of liberal democracy. Apart from Polish experiences, including the collapse of the system of democratic governments in result of the armed coup in May 1926, there was a strong conviction that the Western civilisation faced external and internal threats and the survival of the freedom institutions would be impossible without dealing with those.

It is not often that, as in the case of Dmowski, the characteristics of a political leader are combined with the talent of an analyst-intellectual. He was a man with a busy mind and broad interests, also outside the sphere of politics. He was interested in sociology, psychology, ancient cultures, he tried his hand at literature. Above all, however, he was an insightful observer of modern times. His journalism was of uneven value, with the most outstanding texts published before 1918. In the case of his later work the assessment is complicated: observations and analyses proving his gift of observation and insight alternate with oversimplifications. The reference to a dichotomous image of the world, torn apart by the struggle between good and evil, is striking, with the vision of Freemasonry and Jews in the latter. Although Dmowski's insights are not entirely deprived of value, a modern reader will become irritated while reading many passages, and will simply fail to understand others.

It has already been indicated that even in the last, clearly declining period of his activity, Dmowski avoided many errors the effects of which, measured by the scale of confusion in minds, would have been the worst. As regards his vision of Poland's relations with her neighbours, not only Germany and Russia, but also Czechoslovakia (he urgently, but unfortunately unsuccessfully, encouraged an approach with the latter), his assessments should be considered correct. He did not fall to the fascination with racism that was fashionable in the interwar period. The nation, a key category for his description of social phenomena, was for him not a community of origin, but a product of history and culture.

I do not want to decide, to what extent these kinds of pluses can affect the balance of his post-WWI activity, generally very controversial, but I think that it is worth striving to apply rational factors of assessment and equal criteria for various persons. After 1926 Poland became an authoritarian dictatorship, but it was not Dmowski who falsified elections or persecuted the opposition, and his writings did not mean much in destroying the authority of the parliament or other institutions of the democratic state. Besides, he was very fortunate in that he did not live to see the cataclysm of another World War. A war that destroyed the state, to the establishment of which he had contributed to such a large extent.

NOTES

1. See: *Zagadnienia śródowo- i wschodnioeuropejskie* (przez R. Dmowskiego), London, July 1917, [in:] R. Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, Warsaw 1926, pp. 450 – 501.
2. See: Wapiński, Roman Dmowski, Lublin 1989, p. 51; Andrzej Garlicki, Józef Piłsudski 1867 – 1935, Warsaw 1990, pp. 17, 27, 32 – 33.

3. Notes by Ignacy Chrzanowski to the biography of R. Dmowski. From the Niklewicz family collection, provided to me by Prof. Marek Czapliński, p. 15 – 22.
4. R. Skrzycki [R. Dmowski], *Ze studiów nad szkołą rosyjską w Polsce*, Lwów 1900, p. 32.
5. See the characteristic opinion of Wilhelm Feldman (W. Feldman, *Dzieje polskiej myśli politycznej 1864-1914*, 2nd ed., Warsaw 1933, p. 277).
6. *Nasze stronnictwa skrajne*, przez Scriptora, Cracow 1903, pp. XV – XVI.
7. Formally speaking, until 1928, when the League was dissolved, but after 1918 the League's influence on open political life has weakened.
8. I.e. Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party), and in particular its leader, Józef Piłsudski, about whom Dmowski wrote a warm article.
9. In anticipation of further argument it can be pointed out here that this was the case only for a certain period. Dmowski's loyalty to Russia did not survive the latter's first internal troubles: the outbreak of the February revolution was an opportunity for him to present a program of territorial re-possession in the east. These went further than the Russian opinion, even the liberal one, could accept, as they were a part of the programme of rebuilding Poland as a local quasi-power, this being in clear contradiction to the imperial goals of Russian policy.
10. Dmowski, *Polityka polska...*, p. 83.
11. See: W. Feldman, op.cit., p. 368 – 370. In the opinion of Alvin Fountain, Dmowski's American biographer, the key to Dmowski's anti-Semitism was in the number of the Jewish population, and also in the conviction that the percentage of Jews in Poland was growing. When asked at a meeting in Edinburgh in 1916 about the reasons for his reluctance against the people who were the salt of the earth he apparently replied that salt was a good spice only when reasonably dosed; nobody would eat an oversalted soup (Alvin Marcus Fountain II, *Roman Dmowski: Party, tactics, ideology 1895 – 1907*, New York 1980, p. 109 – 110)...
12. This is also confirmed by the latest monograph of the problem, by Grzegorz Krzywoec, where the relevant problem was ignored (G. Krzywiec, *Polska bez Żydów, Studia z dziejów idei, wyobrażeń i praktyk antysemickich na ziemiach polskich początku XX wieku (1905 – 1914)*, Warsaw 2017).
13. Mariusz Kułakowski (Józef Zieliński), *Roman Dmowski w świetle listów i wspomnień*, vol. II, London 1972, p.82.
14. *Memoriał o terytorium państwa polskiego*, [in:] R. Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa...*, p. 445 – 447.
15. *Zagadnienia środkowo- i wschodnioeuropejskie...*
16. Scepticism is shown, among others, by the author of the most comprehensive monograph devoted to the Polish question at the Paris Peace Conference, Kay Lundgreen-Nielsen (*The Polish Problem of the Peace Conference. A study of the policies of the Great Powers and the Poles, 1918 – 1919*, Odense 1979).

17. In the autumn of 1919, Dmowski contracted the ‘Spanish flu’, which took a severe course. He was lucky to survive the illness, but complications, and then convalescence, excluded him from any activity until May 1920.
18. Supplemented with annexes in the form of documents translated into Polish, it was published as a book the following year.

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