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State Archive in Piotrków Trybunalski

The organization and the operations of the War Alert Women's League

Abstract: The author focuses on the rapid development of civil activity during the war, in particular on the work of women's organisations such as War Alert Women's League and Polish Women's League for Wartime Emergency Services. Various forms of activity by women's groups are studied, as well as their support for the military personnel.

One of the dynamic changes in political and social life for which the outbreak of World War I became a catalyst was civil activity; it had never before been so wide-ranging. Many organizations and associations were started at that time, and many of these were women's organizations. One of the most interesting examples was the War Alert Women's League (*Liga Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego* – LKPW) operating in Piotrków and the surrounding area. The origins of this organization can be traced back to November 1912, when the events connected to the First Balkan War led to the creation of the Temporary Commission of Confederated Independence Parties (*Komisja Tymczasowych Skonfederowanych Stronnictw Niepodległościowych*), which tried to invigorate political life and to activate the Polish communities operating in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia. In an appeal published at that time, the Commission prophesied the imminent outbreak of war and urged the people of Poland to start organizations that would prepare society for the armed struggle against Russia¹. Under the influence of all that was happening during that period and the information coming from England and France of many social organizations with female members, a group of known educational activists and publicists with strong patriotic views began the work aimed at starting most probably the first female social organization of this kind in the area of Poland. In Warsaw, April 1913, Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka, a Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) activist, together with Jadwiga Marcinowska, Teresa Ciszkieviczowa and Helena Ceysingerówna, who belonged to the National League (*Liga Narodowa*), and Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, Helena

1 Dufurat, Joanna: *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej. Od Ligi Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego do Ochotniczej Legii Kobiet (1908–1918/1919)*. Toruń 2001, p. 31

Sujkowska and Leokadia Śliwińska² established the War Alert Women's League, which operated as a secret organization in its initial phase. All activists already had some experience in political activity: in 1905 they had co-organized a strike of Polish youth in the Kingdom and before the revolution, they had worked together in secret educational organizations, including the Crown and Lithuania Circle (*Koło Kobiet Korony i Litwy*) and the National Education Association (*Towarzystwo Oświaty Narodowej*)³. The first board members of the LKPW in Warsaw were Joanna Nieniewska and Helena Ceysingerówna, while Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka became the president. Moszczeńska-Rzepecka was a praised social and educational activist, who from 1891 ran a guest house for girls, which in fact was a secret homestay with a curriculum of a female secondary school. She collaborated actively with the magazines "Przegląd Tygodniowy", "Głos" and "Prawda" and she worked for the Working Women's Circle (*Koło Pracy Kobiet*) and the Secret Crown and the Lithuania Circle (*Tajne Koło Kobiet Korony i Litwy*). Moszczeńska-Rzepecka was equally active after she moved to Poznań, where she worked with the "Warta" Education Association (*Towarzystwo Oświatowe "Warta"*) and the Women's Reading Room (*Czytelnia dla Kobiet*)⁴.

The first women's circles, which were created a few months after the circle in Warsaw started its work, began operations in other cities including Kielce, Lublin and Ząbkowice. In its initial phase, the organization was dispersed and worked in intermittent contact with communities connected to the Riflemen's Association (*Związek Strzelecki*). In that time, the LKPW concentrated its operations on propaganda and educational activities⁵. The founders, already with some experience in working for the Riflemen's Association, which was forming behind the cordon, wanted to focus their mission on "being a moral support and providing material aid in the armed struggle against Russia for Polish independence"⁶. At the same time,

2 Dufnat, Joanna: *Powstanie Ligi Kobiet w okresie I wojny światowej*. Access 14.04.2015, http://ligakobietpolskich.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Powstanie-Ligi-Kobiet-i-dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9B%C4%87-w-okresie-I-wojny-%C5%9Bwiatowej_dr_Dufnat.pdf

3 Pająk, Jerzy Zbigniew: "Liga Kobiet Polskich Pogotowia Wojennego wobec sporów w obozie aktywistycznym (sierpień 1915–sierpień 1916)". *Kieleckie Studia Historyczne* (15), 1999, p. 79. Dufnat, Joanna, 2001, p. 78.

4 Petrozolin-Skowrońska, Barbara: "Portret publicystki i działaczki. Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka". *Mówią Wieki* (6), 1980, p. 26.

5 Piasta, Aleksy: *Piotrków Trybunalski w latach pierwszej wojny światowej*. Piotrków Trybunalski 2007, p. 212–213.

6 Śliwińska, Leokadia: *Z dziejów Ligi Kobiet Polskich Pogotowia Wojennego 1913–1918* (manuscript). Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, Liga Kobiet Polskich, 32, sheet 20.

as an organization working for the anti-Russian irredentist movement in Galicia, it pledged itself to surrender to the legitimate authorities with the beginning of warfare and the creation of a military movement in the Kingdom. Before that, however, it was intended to be dependent on the military movement initiated in Galicia⁷. The founders of the LKPW generally disapproved of military service for women because they believed their work in the society to be much more useful. They wanted women to take over the duties of men who had to do their military service. This also proved to be a powerful means of propaganda because it allowed the LKPW members to highlight that the military effort of the men was supported beyond the front line by a concerted work effort aimed at freeing the homeland oppressed by the invaders. At the same time, the LKPW members provided material support for the military movement from Galicia and after the outbreak of war, took care of wounded Polish soldiers and their families. An equally important aspect of LKPW operations was the wide-ranging distribution of propaganda throughout Polish society promoting an armed struggle for independence and sovereignty. Soon after the advent of the LKPW, Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka went to Cracow to assess the needs of the riflemen squads and to contact the leaders of the military movement in Galicia. However, it seems that her main goal was to contact Józef Piłsudski and gain his acceptance of these kinds of operations by the LKPW. Such acceptance was given and the LKPW was able to continue work on the promotion of national awareness and patriotism among those Polish people who so far had pro-Russian views.

Since all LKPW work had to be done secretly, the board had to be very selective when choosing new members. Hence, the organization was highly elitist and consisted of very few members. A year after the LKPW was founded, its only branch, in Warsaw, had only 17 members: Helena Ceysingerówna, Teresa Ciszkiewiczowa, Maria Dąbrowska, Maria Godlewska, Helena Grotowska, Zofia Kozłowska, Jadwiga Marcinkowska, Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka, Halina Niemiewska, Joanna Niemierczycka, Maria Pawlikowska, Maria Przyjemka, Julia Rottermundówna, Helena Sujkowska, Leokadia Śliwińska, Ludwika Zawadzka and Jadwiga Zielińska⁸. Before the outbreak of the war, from April 1913 to August 1914, the organization was working mainly among the intelligentsia in Warsaw. The task was not easy because at that time, a strong political attitude similar to the views of Roman Dmowski prevailed in the Kingdom of Poland. Despite this, the agitational campaigns for the riflemen movement in Galicia were very successful. The LKPW members organized many debates and discussion circles where the possibility of regaining

7 Pająk, Jerzy Zbigniew: *op. cit.*, p. 79.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

independence was widely analysed. As a result, the LKPW began to publish its own propaganda materials: “Wici”, “Głos Wolny”, “W Przede dniu”, “Sprawa Polska”. These magazines were distributed and promoted in various places and social communities. Because of the illegal character of LKPW operations, it also had to have a network of secret premises where members of riflemen’s organizations could be hidden and where illegal publications and guns could be stored. All members were very careful while working; however, there were cases of women being suspected of belonging to the LKPW and then being arrested and interrogated during investigations. At that time, the LKPW was one of the most important organizations in the anti-Russian irredentist movement and for this reason it was closely monitored by the law enforcement agencies.

The outbreak of war made the LKPW members even more active, and since the inhabitants of the Russian Partition were reluctant to actively co-operate with the Austrian authorities, the members of the LKPW focused on intensifying their campaigns aimed at promoting such collaboration. Since it was difficult to travel during the first phase of the war when the front line was moving, communication between the organizational units in Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland was interrupted. An attempt to slink through the cordon resulted in the arrest and detention of Helena Ceysingerówna near Kalisz. As a result there was an urgent need to introduce changes to the LKPW board. From August 1914 to August 1915, LKPW activities were directed by Jadwiga Marcinowska (until January 1915), and Helena Grotowska, Joanna Niemiewska and Leokadia Śliwińska (from January 1915)⁹. The new board quickly began the work focused on organisation. Then the subdivision was made and the following new units were created to operate in the following areas: agitation, local activities, economy, clothes, accommodation, finances and aid for the families of legionaries. The LKPW also began to closely collaborate with the Polish Military Organisation, POW (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, POW*). As a result, some of the LKPW members were delegated to work in a sanitary unit and a military mail unit. The LKPW was also deeply committed to providing equipment for the I Warsaw Battalion of the POW (*I. Warszawski Batalion POW*) in August 1915.

After a wide-ranging agitational campaign, the LKPW also increased the number of its members to one hundred. In consequence, the elitist character of the LKPW, which previously was demanded by the political situation of that time and the fact that all work was done in secret, was abandoned. In order to distinguish themselves from other women’s organisations which focused solely on education

9 Ibid.

and culture, LKPW members always highlighted the words used in the name of the League: War Alert¹⁰. Taking the recruitment headquarters as an example, the LKPW board decided to enroll women who represented different political groups and different social classes. The only condition of their positive verification was a declaration that they supported the armed struggle against Russia to regain independence. Additionally the candidates were asked to provide a declaration that they would not succumb to the influences and pressure of other political groups or factions. At this time, the members of the LKPW began to promote its ideas in the field. It was thanks to the activists from a provincial unit that a close relationship was made with women's communities in Vilnius, Lublin, Radom and even in Saint Petersburg. What is more, apart from the regular secret operations, the LKPW began to organize very popular sanitation courses.

One of the main goals of the LKPW after the outbreak of war was to provide moral support and material aid to the legionaries and Polish soldiers serving in the Austrian army but based in the Kingdom. The League wanted to create a place that would resemble a "family home for a Polish soldier", with a kitchen, a larder, food and clothes storehouse, and a clinic in which they could be treated and rehabilitated. The staff working in these "houses" was to be composed of female compatriots with the hope that this would influence the patriotic attitudes of the Polish army, which had to create itself from scratch. This goal, which was initially of humanitarian importance, gained political and national importance over time, especially when the idea of military collaboration with Austria against Russia became predominant in those circles¹¹. Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka wrote

The woman is not serving in the army so to prove her support, she needs to show it through the work she is doing – the work for the army [...]. The fact that the soldier will be well dressed, fed and all the service will be provided to him, may impact his will and fate, however, what has a greater significance is the awareness that the country remembers about him, that he is not homeless and insignificant, that thousands of watchful eyes throwing him kind and caring glances follow his actions, take pride in his bravery, share his sorrows and wish him to triumph¹².

The LKPW was a freedom-fighting organization, a fact that was clearly visible in its character, operations and goals, of which the most important was the revival of the homeland. However, it must not be forgotten that it was also promoting ideas

10 Moszczeńska, Iza: "Liga Kobiet". *Wiadomości Polskie* (22), 1915, p. 3.

11 State Archive in Piotrków Trybunalski (Archiwum Państwowe w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim subsequently referred to as APPT), *Liga Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego*, 3, sheet 31.

12 Moszczeńska, Iza: "Liga Kobiet jako Pogotowie Wojenne". *Na Posterunku*. Leaflet on 11 June 1916, p. 4.

connected to the global emancipation movement that was growing in strength. In these wartime circumstances, the LKPW began its more active political work, first participating in the Union of Freedom Fighting Organisations (*Zjednoczenie Organizacji Niepodległościowych*) in Warsaw, and later in the Union of Freedom Fighting Factions (*Unia Stronnictw Niepodległościowych*) following its dissolution in November 1914¹³.

No complete version of the first charter of the LKPW has been preserved: only one copy was made because of the conspiratorial nature of the organisation. It included an announcement that in case of the outbreak of the war, the organisation would surrender itself to the fighting armed force and would be at its service¹⁴. In the following acts (statutes) passed during the meetings, the LKPW mentioned the following tasks as being the most important:

1. Taking care of the Polish Army: raising money for the fight for independence; providing Polish Legions or Polish Army with necessary items including underwear, clothes, food and sanitary aid, as well as caring for the soldiers by opening taverns, shelters, among many others and raising the fighters' spirits by strengthening their faith in the victory and solidarity of the nation in their armed struggle;
2. Taking care of the legionaries' families and all the freedom fighters;
3. Promoting the idea of independence and moral support for the armed struggles by means of publishing and distributing patriotic magazines and publications, organizing talks and proceedings awakening patriotic feelings and appreciation for the heroes of the freedom fights, raising society's awareness of the crucial nature of the fighting; educating people in the spirit of fighting for freedom; working on cultural revival, economic growth and sanitary support for people as part of promotion of the idea of independence;
4. Organizing military mail for the Polish legionaries and all freedom fighters¹⁵.

The charter also emphasized the organizational independence of this women's organisation, which could co-operate with any political organisation with the same views, without allowing any of them to take control¹⁶. The LKPW could create its own circles, not only in the country but also abroad, provided that they were created in the cities with a Polish diaspora. The main institution of LKPW was the General Assembly (*Zjazd Ogólny*), which could pass or change organizational

13 Pająk, Jerzy Zbigniew: op. cit., p. 81.

14 Moszczeńska, Iza, 1915, p. 6.

15 *Ustawa Ligi Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego*. Lublin 1916, p. 3.

16 Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, Naczelny Komitet Narodowy, 114, sheets 10–11.

resolutions and could decide on closing the organization or joining it with another one with the consent of two-thirds of its members. The General Assembly chose the Main Board (*Zarząd Naczelny*), the Auditing Committee (*Komisję Rewizyjną*) and the headquarters of the Main Board. It additionally had to deal with the proposals of the main Board and the Auditing Committee. Assembly meetings were open to all members, deputies and advisors. To facilitate communication between the circles and district branches, they organized Partial Assemblies; however, these did not have legislative power¹⁷. The highest executive power of LKPW was the Main Board, which represented the League outside and supported the growth of the District Branches and Circles. It had five members who represented all District Branches¹⁸. All newly-created circles had to inform the Regional Committee (*Komitet Okręgowy*) about their activation, and this information was later passed to the Main Board. The circles could choose their own Board consisting of three members, and had full autonomy in the decision-making process and their actions, as long as they obeyed their own regulations¹⁹. The circles were divided into units, which could divide the tasks among their members and choose their Boards²⁰. When in the summer of 1915 the Kingdom was occupied by the army of the Central Powers and divided into two occupation zones, the territorial structure of the LKPW already consisted of 12 district branches²¹. The zone occupied by Germany included the Warsaw (sub-branches: Włocławek and Płock), Łódź, Kalisz, Siedlce and Łuków branches, whereas the Austrian zone included Lublin (sub-branches: Lublin and Zwierzyniec), Kielce, Częstochowa, Radom, Olkusz, Zagłębie and Piotrków.

The importance of LKPW in propaganda grew when, in August 1915, the German army entered Warsaw, resulting in conflict between the supporters of Józef Piłsudski and the politicians who argued for close collaboration with the Central Powers authorities. Piłsudski, who at that time was a commander of the I Brigade of the Polish Legion, believed that until Germany and Austria made a clear statement on Polish independence, making further political concessions and enrolling more recruits would endanger the nation. These views, however, were not shared by the politicians from the Supreme National Committee (*Naczelny Komitet Narodowy NKN*) from Cracow. Both sides were trying to win support from the LKPW to gain access to its influence and finances. It was especially

17 APPT, LKPW, 6, sheet 11.

18 *Ustawa...*, p. 7.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

20 APPT, LKPW, 3, sheet. 5.

21 Dufurat, Joanna, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

important for the emerging leftist political organisations, e.g. the Supreme Committee of the United Independence Factions (*Komitet Naczelny Zjednoczonych Stronnictw Niepodległościowych*), or later the Central National Committee (*Centralny Komitet Narodowy CKN*). The LKPW also had a very well formed structure and useful premises, which made it easier to recruit supporters from varying political factions, especially from small communities.

In this conflict, the LKPW officially took the side of Piłsudski and supported his decision to stop recruiting new legionaries and at the same time, engage in current politics. This attitude was visible also in the collaboration between the LKPW and the Military Department (*Departament Wojskowy NKN*) in Piotrków. For this reason serious conflicts were created within the LKPW. A group focused on the politics of the Military Department was represented by Iza Moszczeńska-Rzepecka and Helena Ceysingerówna. As the heads of the LKPW, both decided in September 1915 to subordinate the organisation to the Military Department. This was strongly opposed by Leokadia Śliwińska and Joanna Niemiewska, who stated the position of LKPW during a plenary meeting of the members. Now the focus was on providing support to all brigades of the legions, whereas the decision to agitate and recruit to the Legions, or not, could be taken by the members themselves. A new institution was created – The Council of the Polish Women's League for Wartime Emergency Services (*Rada Ligi Kobiet Polskich Pogotowia Wojennego*). Despite the efforts to maintain coherence in November 1915, the part of the organization located in Warsaw was split into two circles: Circle A supporting close collaboration with the Military Department, and Circle B opposing such collaboration.

Another consequence of the various activities of the LKPW was that in the middle of 1916, it also began to co-operate with the Galicia and Silesia Women's League (*Liga Kobiet Galicji i Śląska*) created in 1915 in the Austrian Partition. When the partnership started, both the organisations had more than 16 thousand members and became the first large organized union of women in Poland²². The relationship between the two Leagues was very good from the beginning and this could be related to the fact that most members were somehow connected with Galicia and, therefore, the rifleman independence movement.

From 28 to 29 January 1916, a ground-breaking meeting (*zjazd radomski*) of LKPW members was held with delegates representing the League in Warsaw and Piotrków, as well as the Kielce and Lublin voivodeships. An announcement was made that a new coherent organisation will be created for the whole Kingdom, the

22 Dufurat, Joanna, Internet, p. 5.

Supreme Board of the Polish Women's League for Wartime Emergency Services was chosen and three branches were created, in Kielce, in Lublin and in Piotrków²³; this revived the previous argument from 1915. The beginning of internecine conflict between LKPW factions led to a split during the third gathering in Piotrków which took place from 24 to 26 August 1916. This meeting introduced feelings of reluctance to a so-far coherent community, especially in its larger branches (Warsaw, Łódź, Piotrków and Lublin). The third gathering showed growing tendencies to introduce changes that would change the LKPW into a political organisation, especially when considering the matter of the relationship of the League to the Central National Committee, which was clearly visible during the next meeting in Warsaw²⁴. During the fourth Gathering of the LKPW from 25 to 28 June 1917, the main goal was to heal and improve operations and redraw the organizational structure. New units were created at that time:

1. A unit focused on taking care of soldiers and their families: its task was to coordinate and regulate the works connected to moral support and material aid for the soldiers and other victims of the fight for independence;
2. A unit focusing on organization and agitation: its task was to supervise the growth of the circles, regulate their organizational and administrative issues, facilitate communication between the circles, run a school for instructors and coordinate the agitational campaigns of the circles;
3. A unit focused on social work: its task was to create social circles and supervise their activities and growth;
4. A unit focused on the press: its task was to collect the materials connected to the activities of the LKPW and publish them in the press, as well as to shape the attitude of the media towards LKPW;
5. A unit focused on equal rights: it was to run LKPW campaigns to fight for women's political rights and to remain connected to other women's organisations;
6. A unit focused on taking care of soldiers' families, children from the legionaries' families and the victims of war: these LKPW operations were coordinated in co-operation with the Galicia and Silesia Women's League aid unit;
7. A unit focused on the social and national economy: it started trading cooperatives, loan societies, and supported nationalisation of industry and commerce²⁵.

23 Pająk, Jerzy Zbigniew: *op. cit.*, p. 87.

24 Piasta, Aleksy: *op. cit.*, p. 214.

25 APPT, LKPW, 6, sheet 8.

At this point, a suite of acts was passed presenting the LKPW standpoint on the most important political issues of the country, including the union of Polish lands and creation of a unified country, opposition to the occupying authorities, which sabotaged the fulfilment of the act issued on 5 November, and organizing elections for the Legislative Sejm. It was agreed that the LKPW should be autonomous when dealing with the current Polish political situation and the role of the Central National Committee diminished. After the oath crisis in 1917, the League's Main Board took decisions to reorganize the circles by starting new working units. The final period of the war saw a growing number of voices calling for the LKPW to be closed because of the situation. Eventually, the two women's organisations united in late Autumn 1918 during a meeting of the League's Supreme Board. From 1 to 2 November 1918, the League of Polish Women (*Liga Kobiet Polskich*) was founded as an organisation which would take an active part in the public life of a reviving country²⁶.

The War Alert Women's League had a strong impact on the functioning of the city of Piotrków during the Great War. In the beginning of the 20th Century, after a period of stagnation between 1904–1905, Piotrków began to grow again. In 1913, its population reached 40 thousand people. The glazier and textile companies expanded in the city and other new companies connected to the timber and construction industry were created²⁷. What undoubtedly influenced the growth of Piotrków was its advantageous location in the most industrial part of the governorate, which was an administrative centre of that time. The largest economic growth of the city was in 1914. Because of the city's importance, military forces were garrisoned in Piotrków and in the Piotrków governorate: one staff and two regiments – the 14th Cavalry Division in Częstochowa and Będzin and the II Infantry Brigade consisting of the 7th Infantry regiment in Częstochowa and the 8th Połock infantry regiment in Piotrków²⁸. The units comprising the Southern Squad of the Russian army, except the border units, were expected to form four units of 100 men of foot and four units of 100 men of horse in case of the outbreak of war. They were operating on the left bank of the Vistula river and their main task was to protect the western frontiers of the Empire. On 26 July 1914, General

26 Piasta, Aleksy, op. cit., p. 216.

27 Gąsior, Marcin: "Działania wojenne na obszarze byłej guberni piotrkowskiej w pierwszych miesiącach wojny 1914 roku". In: Zawilski, Piotr (ed): *Drogi do niepodległości. Materiały z sesji naukowej*. Tomaszów Mazowiecki 1998, p. 5. Kukulski, Jerzy: "Dążenia narodowe i społeczne w Piotrkowskiem na początku XX wieku". *Zbliżenia* (1), 1992, pp. 17–18.

28 Gąsior, Marcin: op. cit., p. 6.

Orawnowski, the commander of the Southern Squad and 14th Cavalry Division was informed that the enemy was preparing to declare war and four days after he began to organize the army. Although the preparations had begun, Russia's strategic goals did not include protecting the western and southern lands of the Kingdom of Poland at all costs. However, the plan included a possibility of evacuation of all offices and institutions from this area to the Russian hinterland in the event of the outbreak of war. The first plans concerning the evacuation of administration from these areas were made in 1909²⁹. This was doubtlessly caused by a previous event: the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary in 1908. Because Russia did not want to recognize this act, Germany entered the conflict and put strong pressure on Russia. This political crisis showed how potential sides of the conflict would stand up against each other in case of a military intervention.

In regard to the worsening international situation, the Russian administrative offices began to prepare for the evacuation from the areas threatened by the military operations³⁰. Not only the national administrative offices were to be evacuated but also all the workers, with their families, archival materials from the registration offices and the archives of the Governorate Government and District Boards. The scheme for the evacuation of each governorate was the same. First, the families were to be taken to a safe place, followed by the officials supervising the evacuation of state property. Remarkably, even though the offices and institutions were suspended at that time and did not conduct any work, the officials were still receiving their salaries and were treated as officials on duty. The evacuation of institutions and workers from the governorates threatened by war was going smoothly. After conducting the first evacuations and gaining experience therefrom, the Russian Interior Ministry verified the regulations governing the evacuations. On 2 September, 1914, they were first accepted by the Council of

29 Budziński, Janusz Roman: *Polityka zagraniczna Rosji 1907–1914. Aparat decyzyjny, koncepcja, rezultaty*. Toruń 2000, p. 71.

30 Cf. Latawiec, Krzysztof: "Ewakuacja organów administracji ogólnej wyższego i niższego szczebla guberni lubelskiej w sierpniu 1914 roku". *Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny* (2), 2002, pp. 43–46. Latawiec, Krzysztof: "Ewakuacja cywilnej administracji ogólnej szczebla powiatowego z guberni lubelskiej latem 1915 roku". *Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny* (1), 2004, pp. 159–160. Malinowska, Dorota: "Ewakuacja urzędów Królestwa Polskiego w latach 1914–1915 do Rosji, ich losy i rewindykacja akt do Polski po 1921 roku". In: Łosowski, Janusz (ed.): *Pamiętnik III Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Studentów Archiwistyki w Lublinie*. Lublin 2000, pp. 189–196. Górak, Artur: *Kancelaria Gubernatora i Rząd Gubernialny Lubelski (1867–1914)*. Lublin/Radzyń Podlaski 2006, pp. 144–163. Kopiczyńska, Alina: *Akta władz administracji gubernialnej Królestwa Polskiego w latach 1867–1915*. Warszawa 2004, pp. 107–109.

Ministers and after this approval they were presented to the Tsar³¹. The plan was to evacuate all the offices and institutions in a particular order, which would allow the evacuees to immediately start the work interrupted by the military operations upon their arrival³².

The citizens of Piotrków learned about the conflict between Austria and Serbia, which later turned into a world war, from the 30th issue of “*Kroniki Piotrkowskiej*” on 29 July 1914³³. Mobilization of the army went very well and finished on 1 August 1914. The first clashes took place at night from 1 to 2 August near Herby and Koziegłów. In fact, the Russian army had abandoned the Piotrków governorate on 3 August, because on that day, the Russians had evacuated from Częstochowa and the 8th Połock regiment garrisoned in Piotrków was transported by train to the right bank of the Vistula river. Civil authorities of the governorate’s administrative offices started to prepare for the evacuation on 1 August on the grounds of an edict issued by the Governor of Piotrkow, Michał Edward Jaczewski³⁴. However, it was not until 11 August 1914 that they evacuated. In spite of all the previous plans and preparations, the situation on the front surprised the Russian administration. Evacuation was performed hastily and chaotically. As a result, only the documents considered to be the most important and most crucial for continuing the activities were taken. The offices and their archives, which had been evacuated so quickly, were moved to different parts of Russia: Kazan, Moscow, Saratov, Smolensk and Ryazan³⁵. The fate of the archival materials from the offices in Piotrków illustrates the course of events. Some documents were evacuated together with the workers and their belongings to Smolensk and Saratov. The rest had been prepared for the evacuation in the beginning of August 1914 and remained unsupervised.

31 Cf. *Przepisy czasowe o wywożeniu na koszt skarbu, wskutek okoliczności wojny majątku państwowego, instytucji rządowych, urzędników i ich rodzin. Akty prawodawcze wydane w związku z wojną 1914/1915 roku*. Warszawa 1915, pp. 259–285.

32 Matuszak, Tomasz: “Archiwalia piotrkowskie w czasie I wojny światowej”. *Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne* (7/8), 2005/2006, pp. 7–8. Matuszak, Tomasz: *Archiwum Państwowe w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim 1919–1951*. Piotrków Trybunalski/Radzyń Podlaski 2009, pp. 53–54.

33 Wachowska, Barbara: “Życie społeczno-polityczne i kulturalne w latach pierwszej wojny światowej”. In: Baranowski, Bohdan (ed.): *Dzieje Piotrkowa Trybunalskiego*. Łódź 1989, p. 360. Pielużek, Anna, *Piotrków i powiat piotrkowski w świetle “Kroniki Piotrkowskiej” 1910–1914*. Piotrków Trybunalski 2005, pp. 60–61. *Kronika Piotrkowska* (30), of 29 July 1914, p. 1.

34 Kukulski, Jerzy: *Piotrkowskie u progu niepodległości*. In: *Ziemia Piotrkowska u progu niepodległości*. Piotrków Trybunalski 1988, pp. 25–26.

35 Kopiczyńska, Alina: op. cit., pp. 107–108.

Fortunately, because they were packed into packages, wrapped with a packing paper and then stored in cases and placed in the carts, they were not destroyed³⁶. Later they proved to be very interesting for the occupying Austrian authorities, especially the military police.

On 12 August 1914, the German army entered Radomsk and on the next day the subdivisions of the 4th Landwehr Division occupied Piotrków. Lieutenant von Stollberg from the provisional cavalry regiment (*Ersatz-Kavallie-Regiment*) became City Governor. He immediately issued an announcement that the city was occupied, declared a state of emergency and announced that contribution will be imposed on the city. German occupation was relatively short, though: only until 27 August 1914, because the counter-offensive of the Russian troops forced the German army to withdraw from the northern districts of the Piotrkow governorate. The Russian army held the retrieved territories for a month.

At the end of September 1914, the military situation on the front changed again. On 3 October, the German and Austrian army began an offensive after which the troops of Gen. Fromm entered Piotrków. This time, Major Keller was placed in charge of the city and made an announcement in which he described the military situation and laid down the regulations governing the lives of civilians under occupation³⁷. However, the Central Powers' offensive came to a standstill on the 15 October and the Russian army began its counter-offensive. The last train evacuating the German troops left the city on 30 October 1914. On 9 November, the Russian army entered Piotrków again and though it was prepared to defend the city, it did not manage to hold it. As a result, on 17 December 1914, the Austrian army entered Piotrków and occupied it until November 1918³⁸.

In 1915, the whole Kingdom of Poland was occupied by the army of the Central Powers and had been divided into two occupation zones: German and Austrian. As a consequence, Piotrkow was governed by the Austrian military administration³⁹. A General Lublin Governorate had been created for the territories occupied by the Austrian army, with an authority structure that was similar to the one present earlier in the German occupation zone⁴⁰. The administrative division into

36 "Dokumenty niewoli". *Dziennik Narodowy* (1), 1915, p. 4.

37 Gąsior, Marcin: op. cit., pp. 9–11.

38 Kukulski, Jerzy: *Sto lat Rosji w Królestwie Polskim (1815–1915). Wybrane problemy*. Piotrków Trybunalski 2005, pp. 322–324.

39 To read more about different aspects of the situation of Piotrków during the First World War cf. Bibliography: Piasta, Aleksy.

40 To read more about the actions of Austrian Authorities with the emphasis on their registry and production of the files cf. Bibliography: Gaul, Jerzy.

governorates was no longer used and the offices of local administration were now only communal offices⁴¹. In February 1915, on the basis of a district functioning before the war, the Piotrków oblaszt was created and governed by the Reserve Command: the K.u.K. Kreiskommando in Piotrków⁴². The first Reserve Commander was major von Pappe, and from 16 May 1915 to 1 January 1917 it was Lieutenant-Colonel Juliusz Schneider. During his tenure, his deputy Major Witt, with a strong anti-Polish mindset, collaborated very closely with the chief of the military gendarmerie: Robert von Weinrichter⁴³. At the beginning of 1917, the position of commander was taken by Colonel/ General Tadeusz Wiktor. Until May 1915 there was a Citizens' Committee operating in the city and throughout the time of the occupation, also the magistrate and municipality. From the first days of the occupation, the new authorities applied an economic depredation policy. Everything with any value or significance for the army had been confiscated, and the industry and agriculture were subordinated to demand-driven production for the army. The social situation was dramatic: unemployment had risen and there was an increase in infectious diseases. Rationing of goods and services began. This situation gave rise to supportive social organisations like the LKPW.

Since the outbreak of war, Piotrków was a bastion of patriotism. Together with the legionaries came the representatives of Polish National Organization (*Polska Organizacja Narodowa*). In the summer of 1915 when the situation on the front had stabilized and a new administrative framework had been established, the occupied Piotrków became the headquarters of the NKN Military Department. Its main task was to recruit for the Polish Legions. Colonel Władysław Sikorski was its head. This command included: the Central Registration Office (*Centralny Urząd Ewidencyjny*), the Central Enlistment Office (*Centralne Biuro Poborowe*), Press Office (*Biuro Prasowe*), the Publishing Administration (*Administracja Wydawnictw*), the State Printing Office (*Drukarnia Państwowa*) and the Central Recruitment Office (*Centralne Biuro Werbunkowe*) among many others. What is more, the Polish Legion Headquarters (till November 1916), reserve centers, non-commissioned officers schools and hospitals were also located in the city. All of them in some ways were co-operating with the Piotrków LKPW Circle, established in 1914 by Maria Piłsudska, nee Koplewska: the first wife of Józef

41 Cf. Lewandowski, Jan: *Królestwo Polskie pod okupacją austriacką 1914–1918*. Warszawa 1980.

42 Piasta, Aleksy: "Polityka austriackiej administracji wojskowej na terenie powiatu piotrkowskiego w latach 1915–1918". *Archiwum i Badania nad Dziejami Regionu* (1), 1995, p. 109.

43 Wachowska, Barbara: op. cit., p. 361.

Piłsudski and a social and socialist activist⁴⁴. Initially the circle had 34 members but this number increased to 65 very quickly. The circle initially operated secretly, and so its members were listed under pseudonyms and sworn to secrecy. The internal rules of the Piotrków LKPW Circle were laid down by its Board, and in accordance with these rules, the members had to pay fees, which were used to finance the operations of three subdivisions: fiscal, sewing and laundry⁴⁵. Initially, when the front was moving through the city, the activities were limited to sewing clothes. The circle was first activated in the beginning of January 1915 when the Russians left the city. Later, the circle was re-organized and the new chairwomen was Helena Trzczińska: a pedagogical activist and a member of the National Education Association (*Towarzystwa Oświaty Narodowej* TON). Wanda Grabowska, also a TON activist and a participant in the strike of Polish youth in 1905, became a vice-chairwoman. Other members of the Board were J. Zaleska, Maria Chelińska and Kazimiera Domańska, later replaced by Zofia Rowecka. From that moment, the scale of the activities of the Piotrków LKPW Circle started growing. There was also an increasing number of members. In 1916 there were 159 registered active members in the 17 units of the circle. In the time of the Austrian occupation, the number of active members of active units varied between 10 and 14⁴⁶.

When completing the tasks of the LKPW, the Piotrków Circle and its units were focusing on helping the Polish soldiers by means of creating a friendly atmosphere in a local community, providing material support, financed by money paid by the members and money earned during organized prize draws, and promoting the idea of independence. The circle's members also sent packages to the front to help the soldiers while focusing on their regular work: running a profitable tea-house and a tavern, a hospital, a laundry room, a reading room, providing medical support, taking care of expelled soldiers, taking care of the families of the legionaries, agitating (agitation and distribution unit), promoting education and culture; collecting money during organized events and fundraising⁴⁷.

Piotrków was also the city where the LKPW had its two aforementioned gatherings. The first, attended also by the delegates from Galicia and Silesia Women's League (May 8–9, 1915), included approximately 50 delegates from 26 LKPW circles. During these deliberations, the attendees listened to 21 reports: four from Galicia and one from Silesia. The Piotrków Circle was eager to act, help and co-operate with other entities including political formations or cultural and

44 APPT, LKPW, 4, sheet 1.

45 APPT, LKPW, 2, sheet 1.

46 APPT, Archiwum Wandy Grabowskiej, 23, sheet 1.

47 APPT, LKPW, 4, sheet 1.

educational associations. From 1915 to 1916, the circle closely collaborated with the NKN Military Department. The LKPW circle celebrated patriotic holidays and events, and in exchange, their profitable ventures and celebrations received artistic and technical support. The Military Department donated to the Piotrków premises of the LKPW in where the circle could run a tea-house, and provided rationed sugar and tea for two months and kerosene and charcoal for six months. The unit taking care of the soldiers, on the other hand, was given by City Command (*Komenda Placu*) a venue for a soldiers' tavern and a tea-house as well as tea, sugar and wood⁴⁸. It was a fair exchange that provided for the most urgent operational needs of the circle. After the aforementioned division which had occurred in the LKPW, help was vastly limited. Only the muster station continued its collaboration with the circle⁴⁹.

The Piotrków LKPW was part of the National Committee (*Komitet Narodowy KN*), which was constantly in touch with the CKN. The Piotrków Circle collaborated on preparing national celebrations and events, and political speeches. The circle's delegates in KN were Wanda Grabowska and Maria Rudnicka. When the educational and cultural institution Polish Homeland Society for Education (*Polska Macierz Szkolna*) resumed operations, the LKPW began to collect declarations for its members⁵⁰. When the "*Głos Piotrkowski*" returned to circulation, the circle found 30 regular subscribers and delegated Bronisława Strużyńska to the editorial board. The premises, which belonged to the Piotrków LKPW circle, were also used by the students' choir, workers and charity organizations. Additionally, the representatives of the circle co-operated with the primary school teachers in order to prepare the strike and boycott teaching the German language in schools⁵¹. In 1917, the League continued to work with KN and was part of the Communication Commission of the Independence Factions (*Komisja Porozumiewawcza Stronnictw Niepodległościowych*). Its representatives were also active in the Auxiliary Military Committee (*Pomocniczy Komitet Wojskowy*) and in the Department of Social Care (*Departament Opieki*). On 3 May 1917, during a session of the City Council attended by representatives of the LKPW circle, the new local authorities were given a national emblem funded with the money raised by collecting fees⁵².

The members of the Piotrków LKPW Circle often took part in selling occasional pads to collect money for the State Treasury. They were also active in

48 *Ibid.*, 2, sheet 26.

49 *Ibid.*, sheet 32.

50 Over 100 of them had been collected, *ibid.* sheet 31.

51 *Ibid.*, sheet 32.

52 *Ibid.*, sheet 33.

prisons. They were caring for POWs and legionaries held in prison and they delivered warm meals to the prison five times a week. Co-operation with those institutions continued in 1918. Together with the Communication Commission of the Independence Factions, the League took part in preparing celebrations on 19 March connected to the "Chełm land", and prepared an Easter table for the prisoners together with the prison authorities. All activities were financed with the money made in the tea house, where convalescents and soldiers on leave would meet over a cup of tea, or a glass of milk, or a snack; these would be paid for by money earned in the laundry room where clothes and uniforms were washed⁵³. The welfare unit was helping the families of the legionaries not only by providing material aid, both financial and rendered, but also by helping to find jobs and put children in the nurseries and early kindergartens⁵⁴. It was responsible for 55 families in 1915, a number which rose to 101 families in 1916⁵⁵. Children were given warm clothes, and winter shoes, special theater shows, dance soirees and prize lotteries were organized for them⁵⁶. The unit taking care of the soldiers provided beds for wounded soldiers, pyjamas and bedclothes. All units worked efficiently and passionately, amply demonstrating the devotion of the members of the Piotrków LKPW circle and the immense needs of a society devastated by war and the depredation policy of the city's occupiers.

All things considered, throughout the years of the Great War, a difficult time for politics, society and economy, the Polish Women's League for Wartime Emergency Services was a very important organization for Polish society. Without the help of women united in the circles and units of LKPW, many families would have suffered from famine and poverty, and the legionaries with loneliness, especially the wounded ones who were left behind the frontline as convalescents deprived of aid. The patriotic and educational aspects of the LKPW operations must not be forgotten since they were crucial in molding the attitudes of the future society of the revived II Republic. The awaited freedom came in 1918. However, it did not put an end to the activities of the Piotrków LKPW circle⁵⁷. Just like the structures of the Polish Women's League, their activities continued until 1936.

53 Ibid., p. 106.

54 APPT, C. i K. Komenda Powiatowa w Piotrkowie, 90.

55 APPT, LKPW, 2, sheet 73.

56 APPT, CKKP, 109.

57 Hubka, Maciej: "Źródła do wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1919–1921 w zasobie Archiwum Państwowego w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim i Oddziale w Tomaszowie Mazowieckim". In: Matuszak, Tomasz (ed): *W cieniu czerwonej zarazy. W 90. rocznicę Bitwy Warszawskiej 1920 roku*. Piotrków Trybunalski – Opoczno 2012, pp. 76–77.

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