



Illustration: Natalia Kulka

# Stalinism and Revolution in Universities

## Democratization of Higher Education from Above, 1947–1956<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The first postwar decade in Poland saw a rebuilding of the whole country, including the school system and higher education. Higher education institutions were to mold a new intelligentsia, coming from a wider social background. Initial grassroots efforts to change the elite character of universities were eclipsed from 1947 by a reform introduced from above. On the one hand, the reform curtailed the autonomy of universities and increased censorship and political control; on the other hand, however, its aim was to make university education available on an unprecedented scale to people from the working and peasant classes. This article offers a survey of tools through which this “democratization” of access to higher education was implemented, such as a new admissions process, the induction year and preparatory courses. It also shows how these tools changed the students’ social backgrounds, albeit without permanently altering the general picture of higher education in Poland.

**Keywords:** Stalinism; modernization; reform of higher education; universities

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Today, the postwar calls for widespread availability of education and the democratization of universities are often seen as yet another element of state-socialism propa-

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ganda and a tool of subjugating or seducing successive generations. The neototalitarian turn which can be observed in Polish historiography from the 1990s onwards has presented the whole postwar decade in the history of Polish society as a “second occupation,” a dark time of subjugation, oppression and terror. Even if we fully agree with such an approach, elements of the aggravating political situation do not reveal much about social changes. They do not explain social processes or the particular experience of various social groups, such as the intelligentsia, traditionally conservative and critical of the left, or, conversely, people whose economic status improved as a result of migration from the country to the city. Considering the social and economic situation in Europe, as well as Polish postwar shortages and the need for specialists in the new state (offices, education, the press) and the rapidly developing industry (engineers, administration, skilled workers), calls for a reform of higher education appeared a necessity. Socialism and its calls for social justice were also crucial for the construction of the postwar system. An envisaged element of this system was widely available education, including opening up elite higher education to all social classes. This process was referred to as democratization of universities, which meant ensuring an equal representation of all social classes both at the admissions stage and among university graduates.

The first solutions meant to facilitate admission to universities were put in place immediately after the war, both by lecturers and educators and by politicians and journalists. They included preferential treatment for certain groups during the admissions process as well as year zero, preparatory courses and regulated admissions quotas, and were designed particularly with a view to compensating for the war losses and accelerating the process of making up for the lost time. It was not long, however, before calls for the opening up of universities became more radical and took on a clearly class-oriented character. This also pertained to the discourse on the intelligentsia. Class background became the main criterion of social division, rather than religion, ethnicity, language or gender. While these other divisions did not disappear in the dynamically developing postwar reality of a country within new borders, with its new divisions, mass migrations and deep traumas – this change was not without significance for the modernization project and for the vision of new society. The division based on social background was superimposed, so to speak, over other social divisions.

On the one hand, the shortage of cadres was so acute that industrial plants attempted to train the specialists they needed on their own (Słabek, 2001, p. 314). On the other hand, it was crucial to build political support for the new system by creating genuine opportunities for upward social mobility through education. The objective of the promotion campaign in the press which accompanied the implemented reforms was to transform the horizon of expectations of the young generation of workers and peasants, and to awaken educational aspirations among the masses. Both research policy and university reforms were designed to build institutions that would allow for social advancement. Solutions such as preparatory courses or the zero year, special

schools affiliated with the Communist Party, and places on certain university courses allocated by the ministry were intended to accelerate this process. Before the war, working-class students accounted for 7%, while peasant students made up 10% of the student population. In communist Poland, the ratio of white-collar children among students in higher education diminished three times, and the negative selection of young people from the working classes declined three to six times (Białecki, 1982; Pohoski, 1984; Zawistowska, 2012, p. 72). A new intelligentsia was being built, but despite wide-ranging institutional reforms and the campaign in the press, social change proved slow to come.

## **Reform**

The “gentle revolution” of the relatively open postwar period increasingly turned into efforts to build state socialism the Polish way. In spring 1947, the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) presented a plan for a more comprehensive reform of the educational system (cf. Krasiewicz, 1976; Tymowski, 1980; Chodakowska, 1981; Hübner, 1987, 1992; Connelly, 2000; Zysiak, 2016). The decree “On the Organisation of the School System and Higher Education,” issued on October 28, 1948, replaced the law from 1933, briefly restored after the war. The decree severely curtailed the autonomy of universities, allowing an active involvement of the central state authorities in the employment and promotion policy, the awarding of habilitation degrees and the appointment of rectors. The Rectors’ Meeting held in the same year outlined the objectives to be pursued by the academic staff. All of these were signs of a hardening political line towards universities. Subsequent events, including the electoral victory of the Democratic Bloc and the introduction of the so-called “Small Constitution” (“Ustawa Konstytucyjna o ustroju i zakresie działania najwyższych organów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 19 lutego 1947,” 1947) were harbingers of further change.

One of its most important elements was democratizing the composition of the student body in terms of social background. Already in 1947, members from outside academia were introduced into enrollment commissions, and Marxism was included in university curricula. At the same time, censorship (and self-censorship) intensified. Election of university authorities was abolished; rectors were appointed by the minister, who also approved nominations for other posts. Rectors were no longer the first among equals but were to become, in today’s parlance, managers responsible for fulfilling centrally imposed plans. The reform also changed the organizational structure of universities, introducing a hierarchical system (concerning reports in particular). Vocational schools were separated from universities, and medical faculties were detached from the latter as separate medical schools. Split structures were supposed to be supervised

more easily: after the reform, the number of higher education institutions grew to 83, including eight universities. The ministry also announced a plan to divide the latter into three groups, each with its own admissions limits determined every year by the ministry, and a limited range of study courses. Highly specialized courses could only be run by the University of Warsaw.

Degree courses were divided into two levels: a practical three-year cycle and a two-year extended program, leading to a master's degree. Students were to learn practical skills, useful in their future professional work, and to make contacts with potential employers through work placements in factories or public institutions. Unlike in the prewar model of university education, attendance at lectures and classes was obligatory: the student was to spend as many hours at university as the worker in a factory. The long hours and carefully recorded, obligatory attendance were intended to level out class differences. The prewar university did not require attendance at courses, which in any case were individually chosen by students: in order to obtain a degree, it was necessary to pass the examinations and defend a master's thesis. Furthermore, bureaucratization and statistical reporting were introduced at all levels of higher education, which meant that universities had to comply with the norms imposed by the ministry<sup>2</sup> and accept a prescribed number of students, according to a quota based on social background. One of the historians of higher education has called the time after 1947 "the period of quantity" (Tymowski, 1980, p. 488).

One of the most important aims of the reform was to prevent the social reproduction of the old intelligentsia and to break the elite character of higher education. Young academic staff in particular were targeted in order to prevent the transmission of the prewar academic habitus and to mold a new generation of academic teachers. The same objective was to be served by the abolition of habilitations, the centralization of the awarding of academic titles, and the introduction of time limitations for obtaining successive academic degrees (Connelly & Grüttner, 2005, p. 194). The pedagogical aspect of the reform was particularly emphasized. A new intelligentsia was to emerge as a result of planning efforts; the common grounding of science, education and formation, all based on dialectical materialism; the divisions and changes in the structure of universities; as well as team work and competition.

Even before the establishment of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, hereafter PZPR), the so-called "cells of six" (*szóstki*) were created, including three members of the Polish Workers' Party and three of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS). Their task was to draw up lists of professors and lecturers in order to assess their academic performance and political

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2 Such norms included, for example, efficiency, measured by the ratio of graduates to students commencing their studies, required to be at least 80%, which meant an increase by over a half (Herczyński, 2008, p. 118). The dropout and selection rates were among the parameters measured, as were "student hours" (*studento-godziny*) – reported to the ministry on enormous spreadsheets – and "examinations per student" (*studento-egzaminy*) ("Zatrudnienie absolwentów," 1946/1949/1950–1967).

outlook. In 1948 alone, 1,093 decisions were taken concerning the academic staff and structure of universities (Herczyński, 2008, p. 96): some professors took early retirement, while individual academics were transferred from university to university in order to weaken prewar professional dependencies.

The First Congress of Polish Science (1951), organized under the slogan of fighting bourgeois scholarship (mainly in the humanities, especially sociology), outlined the framework of the academic policy of the new state-socialist system (Hübner, 1983). It was the final act, the crowning achievement of the reform effort. Thanks to its enormous budget and extensive promotion campaign, the Congress turned into a symbolic event, a rite of passage into the new world. The event was accompanied by further institutional changes, such as a greater centralizing of higher education and subordinating it to the needs of industry. Central institutions were also established, such as the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk, PAN) or the Polish Scientific Publishers (Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, PWN) as well as research institutes for industry.

Further decisions concerned the detachment of agriculture, economics and medical faculties from universities and turning them into separate educational establishments. A new university structure imposed after 1951 also attempted to restrict the humanities to a single faculty. As a result of reduced admissions in the humanities, the number of students in technical subjects rapidly increased. In 1952, the Central Qualification Commission for Scientific Workers, appointed by the minister, took over the powers to confer academic titles (Habielski & Rafalska, 2010, p. 20). International contacts at the institutional level were limited and academic presses were nationalized, ensuring state control over the publishing market.

The aim of higher education was to prepare highly qualified employees as well as employees capable of scientific work on issues at hand; consequently, there was a particular emphasis on teaching and the creation of a working-class intelligentsia. In this configuration, higher education institutions were no longer supposed to engage in research; instead, their role was to train new cadres needed for the modernization of the country. Academic circles protested against restrictions of research freedom and of independence of higher education institutions. In response, supporters of the reform argued that it was in capitalism where academia could not enjoy freedom, as it was subordinated to profit, and academic faculty needed to fight for economic survival (Hübner, 2011; Zysiak, 2015). From the same perspective, it was argued that the reform was to bring true freedom through the planning and coordination of academics' efforts by the state, in place of earlier haphazard activities and academic individualism, considered detrimental to the development of knowledge. In this way, the time and effort of the highly qualified specialists, as the authors of the modernizing projects defined academics, were to be no longer wasted.

As the policy line toward academia hardened, a growing deterioration affected many projects introduced immediately after the war, and fueled by genuine engagement of

their proponents rather than imposed from above. Such was the case of preparatory courses, or of Clubs of Democratic Professoriate. Increasingly, empty declarations replaced real action. The idea of year zero mentioned above was a grassroots initiative of academics, intended to bridge the educational gaps caused by the war. The introductory year as such appealed to both left-wing academic circles and to the Polish Workers' Party, which saw the project as a tool of permanent democratization of access to higher education, but also as a means of its control. It is not surprising, then, that as the ideas of year zero, and later of preparatory courses, deviated from the original project and came to resemble the Polish version of Soviet *rabfaks*,<sup>3</sup> they were increasingly regarded with skepticism.

Soon afterwards, this initiative became subject to legal regulations, and in 1948 year zero was transformed into an introductory (preparatory) study. The prospective students were only required to have completed seven grades of primary school and to come from a peasant or working-class family. To encourage working people to undertake further education, new legal regulations ensured that participants received paid leave from their workplaces for the duration of the course. According to the regulations, such colleges could be attended by people between 18 and 27 years of age (immediately after the war, the upper limit was 36 years and it was successively lowered each year). Every recruitment to year zero or preparatory courses was preceded by a press campaign encouraging people to take up studies. It was stressed that such additional preparation was not a cause for shame, and prospective students were attracted by means of additional perks such as scholarships, places in student dormitories and access to study aids, laboratories, libraries and other facilities offered by higher education institutions. Significantly, during the admissions process to university courses proper, a separate quota was reserved for graduates of preparatory courses. From 1949 onwards, only two-year preparatory courses were offered, and the introductory college became part of them. Course participants could rely on a stable financial arrangement: a seat in the course came with the provision of a seven-year scholarship (covering the two-year preparatory course, and five years of two-level studies at a higher education institution) as well as a place in a student dormitory (Lewandowski, 1991, p. 69). Unsurprisingly then, many course participants came from worker and peasant backgrounds. Preparatory course participants were also the ones most engaged in the activities of the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP); they were described as staunch and persevering supporters of socialism: had it not been for their strong motivation, they would not have got so far. Soon, however, the number of candidates began to fall and year by year it was increasingly difficult to fill all the available places until finally the program was closed.

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3 From the Russian *рабфак*, an abbreviation of *рабочий факультет* (*rabochii fakul'tet*) – workers' faculty aiming to prepare people from the working classes to enroll at higher education institutions.

## Enrollment

The reform, aiming at the democratizing of education, meant the introduction of a more inclusive admissions process that would regulate the social composition of the student body. Since changes were first introduced to the admission process in the late 1940s, students applying for university admission were required to submit documents issued by their secondary school. These included, among other things, a “certificate of social background, aptitude and community work of secondary school graduate-candidate for the first year of studies.” Such certificates, which listed information about the occupations, employment and incomes of both parents compiled on the basis of local government documentation, were prepared by School Enrollment Commissions, with the obligatory participation of a representative of the Union of Polish Youth (Król, 2004, pp. 74–75). Apart from introducing the admissions system based on such certificates and on instructions for enrollment commissions, the ministry additionally reserved a pool of places, which amounted to even 20% at the most prestigious and attractive university courses. In 1952, when the new constitution was being introduced, a large number of young people from intelligentsia families were not accepted at universities in order to make the statistics look better (Król, 2004, pp. 78–79).

The press continuously encouraged its readers to enroll into universities and explained the ever more complicated application procedures. The prospective students’ choice of further education and of a particular course became a matter of utmost importance, an element crucial for the success of the modernization project itself. An informed and responsible choice of the course of study to pursue remained a subject of numerous press articles. In view of the lack of cadres caused by war losses and of the enormous effort necessary for rebuilding the country, every individual choice was considered significant. Each year during the enrollment time, newspapers appealed for informed and responsible decisions, taken not only with one’s own advantage in mind, but also for the benefit of the entire society. As the intricacies of the admissions process were explained to the worker readership in Łódź, the center of textile industry in Poland:

The large influx of students at higher education institutions, observed immediately after the war, does not decrease. Fortunately, there are enough places for everyone. What is worse is that young people are driven by strictly material motives – great numbers are eager to study at medical or law faculties, and do not appreciate the value of other, equally important subjects, such as the humanities or natural sciences (“Młodzież garnie się do nauki,” 1947 [Young People Eager to Study]).

After 1946, the activities of enrollment commissions, which were special committees run by student organizations (after 1948 by the ZMP), became more extensive. Their aim was not only to inform prospective students about admissions procedures, but also

to discuss with them their life goals and to offer advice on the choice of the study course. The press presented their activities in the following way:

The commissions, whose aims are to ensure appropriate selection of young people for particular schools and to point to each candidate a study subject most appropriate to their abilities, intellectual aptitude and health, try to counteract negative phenomena [the wrong choice of course – A.Z.] by explaining to young people the purpose of higher education in People's Poland. [...] There are, however, individuals who think in the old way, typical of bourgeois society. Against their abilities, they insist on choosing medicine or engineering, because completion of such studies would ensure "affluent and peaceful life." [...] Such individuals do not realize that in our people's state everyone can be certain they will obtain a job, and their duty is to choose such an area where their work will be most fruitful ("2000 podań na wyższe uczelnie," 1951 [2,000 Applications for Higher Education]).

There was thus no room for prewar "individual whims" or "wasting time and money from the state budget." This socialist meritocracy promoted by the press was not intended to send the greatest number of students to courses directly related to industry, but to create the opportunities to develop people's interests. This was supposed to ensure later devotion to work and, consequently, better efficiency and greater benefit for all.

Educational institutions were also supposed to cooperate with potential employers, who in their turn funded special scholarships: their recipients were then obliged to take up positions indicated by the workplace that had supported them during their studies. Interestingly, in Łódź the city council also offered scholarships to outstanding students, who were then required to work for one of the municipal institutions for exactly the same amount of time as they had received the scholarship for ("Posiedzenie Miejskiej Rady Narodowej," 1946). Admissions planning, implemented from 1949, was intended to ensure that there would be jobs for all students. A strictly determined number of candidates accepted at education, monitored later through annual reports, made it possible for the ministry to introduce a system whereby graduates were assigned jobs by administrative order.

A campaign in the press was launched to promote ministerial initiatives: the preparatory course, year zero and the admissions procedure (qualifying commissions, place allocation, the choice of students at the ministerial level). From 1948 onwards, the admissions system increasingly became a topic of articles. Its functioning was presented as "a most pressing matter," since the social origin of candidates would translate into the social composition of future cadres. As the editors of the *Kurier Popularny* [The Popular Courier] tried to explain to the readers in a possibly succinct way, the admissions procedure would involve three stages of selection:

For a start, candidates will go through the first sifting process in local commissions run by Trade Unions and Peasant Self-Help Associations. These commissions will direct [to higher education institutions] the most gifted and valuable individuals among working-class



and peasant youth from even the farthest and most peripheral places in our country. In this way it will be possible to uncover talents hidden in the remotest villages and sift out at the very beginning those who do not meet the standards for enrollment, due to either concern over the appropriate social composition of the student body or their personal qualities ("Równy start dla młodzieży," 1948 [An Equal Start for Young People]).

From the point of view of the existing legislation, this was an important change, especially that the system of assigning jobs by administrative order (*nakaz pracy*) was already in operation and, for example, most students completing education in teacher training secondary schools had to take up jobs in the countryside, often in very difficult conditions, in areas far away from their places of residence or study. Only a few, mainly those who had been awarded the title of "an outstanding student" (*przodownik w nauce*), were given permission to continue their studies at a higher education institution. The press persuasively explained the rationale behind such solutions as it explained the procedure stage by stage:

The second sifting procedure, focusing directly on the candidates' personal qualifications and selecting students on the basis of their social background and of the demand for particular professions, is performed by the Candidate Selection Commission. Its task is also to raise the academic level of students by appropriate selection of the best and most gifted individuals out of all candidates presented for its approval. This commission will play the role of the personnel office, so to speak, in the great project of forming future generations ("Równy start dla młodzieży," 1948).

These commissions administered entrance examination, and should not be confused with above-mentioned enrollment commissions, often praised in the press as sources of information for undecided candidates. These enrollment commissions were composed of representatives of local authorities, the Peasant Self-Help Association and the Union of Polish Youth, and were based in city districts and rural locations. As discussed before, they were responsible for gathering the necessary documents and providing guidance as to the choice of a study course.

The press kept warning that an insufficiently thought-out choice of a study course frequently led to failure at the entrance examination or severe difficulties during actual studies. To help prevent that, there was another stage in the selection procedures:

The third sifting process, based on purely academic grounds, will be performed by professors, directly responsible for the education of new scientists and specialists in all branches of knowledge ("Równy start dla młodzieży," 1948).

The press provided guidance and explained the complicated procedures, whose aim was to eradicate the negative mechanisms of selection deriving from the prewar period, thanks to concerted efforts of both students and the entire society. In order to bridge inequalities already at the admissions stage, preferential treatment was introduced, favoring certain candidates, which the press described as a necessary step on

the way to educational equality. A lot of coverage was devoted to such solutions. This stemmed not only from the past-oriented narrative related to redressing prewar wrongs and injustice but also from the future-oriented vision of a new order, of modernization and the restructuring of Polish economy, culture and the entire social fabric.

## The Generations of Upward Mobility

Actual effects of the reforms became visible several years later. The first postwar Three-Year Plan (*trzylatka*) (1947–1949) later came to be seen as the most comprehensive and well thought-out reconstruction plan in the whole Eastern bloc (Kowalik, 2006). However, the Six-Year Plan that followed – modelled on prewar Soviet production plans – proved much less successful. The pace of development, truly impressive in the first postwar years, slowed down, as did the process of democratization of higher education. The first spectacular reconstruction period brought some effects: an increase in the number of higher education institutions, growing numbers of students and graduates, and, if official statistics are to be believed, a rising proportion of students from peasant and working-class backgrounds. Nevertheless, the relatively egalitarian social representation in the student body, a crucial indicator from the point of view of the democratization process, proved temporary. It reached its peak in the second half of the 1940s, when as a result of the strictest educational policy (or in spite of it), the ratio of students from peasant and working-class backgrounds approached 50%. It was also the time when preparatory courses were in operation and the absolute numbers of students and academic staff increased (Table 1).

Table 1: Social composition of the student body in Poland, 1947–1950

Candidates enrolled in higher education institutions (state and private schools, first year of studies)			
Academic year	The number of accepted candidates	Percentage of students of working class background	Percentage of students of peasant background
1947/48	30,090	22.0%	19.7%
1948/49	31,180	27.5%	21.9%
1949/50	37,179	30.3%	25.2%

Prepared by the author on the basis of official statistics of the Ministry of Education compiled for the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' party; based on Lewandowski, 1991, p. 120.

Unlike students, most academic staff remained skeptical of the new developments (Connelly, 2000; Zysiak, 2016). In view of the relatively modest successes in building wide support for the changes both among the academics and the intelligentsia at large, new, separate channels of educational advancement were created. New institutions were established, controlled exclusively by the “progressive” intelligentsia, as an alternative to the traditional university faculty. The year 1948 saw the establishment of the Institute of Literary Research (Instytut Badań Literackich), the Marxist Association of Historians (Marksistowskie Zrzeszenie Historyków), and the State Institute of Art (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki); in 1950, the Training Institute for Academic Cadres (Instytut Kształcenia Kadr Naukowych) and the Central Party School of the PZPR (Centralna Szkoła Partyjna) were established. The two-year curriculum of the latter was intended to provide speedy training for party functionaries. The Central Party School was subsequently renamed the Higher School of Social Sciences (Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych, 1957–1984) (Hübner & Degen, 2006) and given the powers to award doctoral and habilitation degrees. At the lowest level, it offered courses for electoral activists, school inspectors, local party leaders, or even mechanics (Cichocki & Józwiak, 2006, p. 47). The Training Institute for Academic Cadres, in 1954 transformed into the Institute of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the PZPR (Instytut Nauk Społecznych przy KC PZPR), gathered the progressive intelligentsia and had a wider range of courses, not oriented solely on educating party functionaries. The institutions mentioned above provided parallel structures, alternative to traditional academia, and grouped an elite, small circle, carefully selected in terms of political views. Their elitism was even greater than in the case of traditionally-minded university circles, though it was motivated by different considerations and driven by different selection criteria. The main criterion of selection in party schools was less social background than loyalty towards the party.

Data from official reports, one of the few sources available today, cannot always be considered fully reliable. They were distorted at many levels: starting from individual declarations, deviating from the truth to a varying extent, to smaller or greater approximations of figures by university administration and local authorities, up to the activities of ministries and communist party agencies. In addition, such data differed even at the level of official reports: figures presented during parliamentary proceedings were different from those provided in internal party documents, and different still from those quoted in the press. Discrepancies between such sets of data are enormous, although admittedly they often arose from inconsistencies of definitions and criteria. Assigning people to different social classes or occupational groups appears to have caused the greatest problems; additionally, it proved difficult to classify people whose career advancement took place immediately after the war.

Despite these methodological problems, from 1948 onwards officials and party representatives, and consequently the press, seemed obsessed with the charm of figures

and the persuasive beauty of statistics. Especially in the first years of the reform, around 1950, various statistical figures were increasingly included in the reports. It was then that the effects of the implemented solutions should have become visible, and data were used as proof, necessary both for further mobilization and as evidence of the effectiveness of the system. Archival files are full of handwritten charts and tables, painstakingly compiled statistics and calculations.<sup>4</sup> A wide range of social characteristics came to be measured and reported. The social origin fetish and attempts to subordinate all admissions procedures to this one criterion were criticized by many academics, including the first rector of the University of Łódź, philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński.

Despite the differences in the collected data, the general message was clear: changes in the social composition of the student body were significant, but not fully satisfactory. Depending on the source of statistics, around half of students were still of intelligentsia origin, now optimistically called “intellectual workers” or “the working intelligentsia.” Their domination in the most popular university courses, where the negative mechanisms of selection remained most visible, was even greater.

## **Dropouts and Sieves**

In the first years of the reform, the mechanisms of selecting candidates for higher education institutions favored young people from the working classes. The percentage ratio of candidates from working-class or peasant backgrounds and the general number of accepted candidates show that proportionally more peasant and working-class applicants were admitted. This tendency was reversed after the political changes of October 1956 (Szczepański, 1963, p. 123). As a consequence of the reform, at the beginning of the 1950s, negative selection based on social origin diminished, only to become more pronounced after 1956. The social composition of the student body quickly returned to earlier, more elitist proportions. The democratization of higher education did not proceed without political pressure.

The effects were so disappointing that in the 1960s a decision was made to introduce an admissions scheme assigning preferential points according to social origin, a practice which had not been used even in the Stalinist era. The point system was not based solely on the students’ social background, but also awarded additional points to candidates with good results in secondary schools, or ones who demonstrated social engagement, were in full-time employment or studied in postsecondary schools (if they had not been successful in their first application); from 1975, finalists of national sec-

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4 Based on my own research in the Central Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) and University of Łódź Archives (Archiwum Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego), for example the collection of the Department of Science and Higher Education (Departament Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego), annual reports of University of Łódź sent to the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministerstwo Szkolnictwa Wyższego), etc.

ondary schools' science competitions gained open admission to higher education institutions (Kluczyński, 1986, p. 17). Changes concerned also the actual exam process; the introduction of written tests and summary writing ensured anonymity impossible to achieve in previous oral examinations. All these solutions were similar to the regulations adopted in 1948 in that their aim was to introduce standardization and simple criteria intended to prevent the social reproduction of the academic habitus as well as to ensure more effective management of ever increasing numbers of students. A complicated points system was put in place, yet – once again – its results proved minor and transitory. As soon as the points system was relaxed, the social composition of the student body returned to earlier proportions. Assigning preferential points for social origin at the undergraduate level turned out to be ineffective, since negative selection took place earlier: at the stage of choosing a secondary school (Stasińska, 1985; Zawistowska, 2012).

According to Jan Szczepański, in the 1970s, 40% of secondary school graduates started higher education (as compared to 4–5% before the war) (Szczepański, 1976, p. 77), but Jan Kluczyński puts this number at 30%. In both cases the data are overly optimistic, as they concern the period when the socialist education system worked on a truly mass scale, with a nationwide number of over 500 thousand students in higher education, a third of whom studied technical subjects; 6% pursued agricultural courses, 10% exact science and biological subjects, 13% medicine, 18% law and economics, and 22% humanities and social sciences (Kluczyński, 1986, p. 40). The overall reform outcomes, however, were not spectacular, considering that throughout the communist period the Gross Enrollment Index in higher education never exceeded 10%. The democratizing of education, i.e. change in the social composition of the student body, was successful mainly at the enrollment stage. With each successive year of study, the mechanisms of dropping out and selection affected the social makeup of the student population: 20 to 60% of students dropped out after the first year. Throughout the entire study cycle, the number of students of peasant origin was stable, but the ratio of students from intelligentsia families increased, which suggests that it was mainly students from the working-class background that dropped out (Słabek, 2001). Similarly, more women obtained higher education, but despite better examination results they ended up in worse-paid jobs; those who continued their academic careers usually came from the most privileged social groups (Woskowski, 1958, p. 170; Zysiak, 2016, pp. 252, 261). Religion and ethnic origin were not included in official statistics or in sociological studies of changes in higher education.

Tadeusz Krajewski calculates that among those completing secondary education in the years 1957–1960, i.e. those whose entire education took place after the war, 10–12.7% of graduates of primary schools were accepted at higher education institutions (Krajewski, 1969). According to Jan Woskowski, in turn, out of 700–800 thousand children born each year at the beginning of the 1950s, only 16 thousand (2 to 2.2%)

enrolled at higher education institutions. Yet admission constituted only the beginning of the way towards a master's degree: in the academic year 1951/1952, 77.8% out of the initial number of students obtained a degree, and their number decreased in subsequent years: in 1955/1956 it was 73.4%, and in 1958/1959 – 68.2% (Woskowski, 1958). Changes promoting inclusiveness in the social composition of the student body were particularly visible in more egalitarian courses: in technical ones, and later on, thanks to ministerial regulations, also among students of law and economics.

Research conducted in the 1970s also showed a marked difference between the social composition of primary school pupils and that of students in higher education; this difference became visible at the secondary education level. General secondary schools (*liceums*) attracted the best students; vocational schools were attended by pupils with weaker results, while some students did not continue their education beyond primary school (Białecki, 1982). In 1960, ca. two million out of 29.77 million of the general population of Poland held secondary school education, and in 1970–1988 the number of higher degree holders rose threefold (Karpiński, 2005, p. 160). Still, even in the 1980s secondary education was far from common.

Mechanisms of selection, especially at earlier levels of education, remained an equally important problem. According to Jan Szczepański, such selection consisted of “all kinds of social forces at work in social classes, the state, local circles, families and schools that either create barriers or, conversely, establish conducive circumstances which open the way toward higher education to individuals” (Krajewski, 1969, p. 37). Thus the key to increasing the number of students of peasant and working-class backgrounds lay at the earlier stages of education, especially in the choice of secondary school. However, attempts to increase the number of students of working-class and peasant origin in *liceums* resulted only in higher elimination and dropout rates.

Considering the ambitiousness of the plan to build a socialist university, the effects were far from satisfactory. Despite various efforts, including introduction of sophisticated policies and instruments of democratization, such as year zero, preparatory courses, extramural and evening courses, as well as university consultation points maintained in small towns, the communist modernization project progressed uneasily. Differences in educational aspirations (and a conviction of their unattainability), economic factors (costs incurred both by a student's parents and by the state), demographic factors (difficulties in adjusting the infrastructure and policies to demographic fluctuations), inequalities in access to culture and often unsuitable educational policies, all had impact on the mechanisms of selection.

Yet, despite the discussed weaknesses, shortcomings and political pressures, the so-called Stalinist period saw the introduction of the higher education reform which opened up the way to social mobility and advancement on an unprecedented scale, and reshaped the institutions of higher education. While the outcomes of the reform did not

fully meet its planned objectives, they nevertheless constituted a bold attempt to change the face of higher education and to build a new postwar Polish society.

Translated by Maria Fengler

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### Stalinizm i rewolucja na uczelniach – ogólna demokratyzacja dostępu do edukacji wyższej 1947–1956

**Abstrakt:** Pierwsza powojenna dekada to czas odbudowy całego kraju, w tym systemu edukacji, i reformy szkolnictwa wyższego. Uczelnie miały stać się miejscami budowy nowej inteligencji o egalitarnym pochodzeniu. Początkowo oddolne starania, by zmienić elitarny charakter uniwersytetów, od 1947 roku zostały zdominowane przez ogólną reformę edukacji. Z jednej strony oznaczała ona ograniczenie autonomii uczelni, zwiększenie cenzury i politycznej kontroli, z drugiej jednak miała na celu umożliwienie studiowania osobom z klasy robotniczej i chłopskiej na niespotykaną wcześniej skalę. Artykuł stanowi przegląd narzędzi „demokratyzacji” dostępu do szkolnictwa wyższego, takich jak nowy proces rekrutacji, rok wstępny i kursy przygotowawcze. Pokazuje także, jak zmieniły one społeczne pochodzenie studentów, a jednak nie zmieniły trwale oblicza szkolnictwa wyższego.

**Wyrażenia kluczowe:** stalinizm; modernizacja; reforma szkolnictwa wyższego; uniwersytety

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