

Civil education in the theory and practice of Women's Civil Work Association in the Second Polish Republic

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One of the main aims of Women's Civil Work Association (Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet) (1928–1939): the largest and the most influential women's organisation of the Sanation political camp in Poland in the interwar period, was the creation of a new model of a woman citizen and forming and educating women, in concordance with ideological and political ideas of the Sanation (the state-forming idea of J. Piłsudski), to be “a new type of citizens”, aware of their rights and duties, who take an interest in the affairs of the state and who take an active stance towards the strengthening of the new independent state. The Association tried to achieve this aim by organising various forms and methods of civil education, setting up and running various educational, supportive, an economic institutions, which made it possible for the Association to bring into effect its ideas, including the main goal, that is, the creation of a modern, active, and responsible woman citizen.

Key words: *citizen; civil education; forms and methods of civil education*

During the interwar period Women's Civil Work Association (Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet: ZPOK) was one of the largest and most influential women's organisations of the Sanation camp in Poland. At its height the organisation had 31,000 members¹. It was established on March 25, 1928 and it was active nonstop until the outbreak of World War II.

The association presented a clear political and ideological stance. Its political character was manifest in its attempts to increase the awareness

¹ Zofia Moraczewska states (cf. Almanach. Kalendarz Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet. Rok 1932. [Almanach. Calendar of Women's Civil Work Association. Year 1932]. Warszawa: 1932, p. 9) that in 1932 ZPOK had over 50,000 members. The figure appears grossly exaggerated. According to the most recent findings made by J. Dufurat the number of registered members was only slightly higher than 31,000.

and political independence of women in the Sanation movement. "The stance of ZPOK on political matters was consistent with the intellectual attitudes of the Sanation camp, which became manifest first and foremost in the adherence to the 'will and thought' of J. Piłsudski and incorporation of state ideology"², i.e., the main aim of ZPOK was to develop the ideas of J. Piłsudski that were fundamental to the contemporary Polish state. Making life political, a Sanation slogan, was particularly popular with the activists of the Association, because it was consistent with the image of the woman as a healer of public life. The image was being constructed since the beginning of the Second Polish Republic. Women were supposed to contribute to building a state based on "a truly democratic system that calls out to all the equal citizens to work creatively for the good of the state"³. In this appeal the activists saw a chance for women to become fully fledged citizens by fully participating in the public life that women theretofore had had no influence on⁴.

That is why the idea of civil education of women was the greatest goal of ZPOK. They aimed to create "a new type of Polish woman citizen", who is aware of her rights and civil duties, who is interested in the problems of the state, who is independent, feels responsible for the state and participates in the efforts "to increase the ethical, cultural, economic, and social standards"⁵. Zofia Moraczewska⁶ would claim that "to call oneself a true citizen one must learn to make his everyday work, regardless of where he performs it and with what tools, a creative link in a great entirety and one must learn to put the good of the people before his own needs"⁷.

The model of citizenship promoted by ZPOK was consistent with the state ideology propagated by the Sanation camp. This ideology emphasised the superiority of the state as an independent and objective

² Chojnowski, A. (1996): *Moralność i polityka. Kobięce lobby w Bezpartyjnym Bloku współpracy z Rządem* [Morality and politics. Women's lobby in the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government]. In *Kobięta i świat polityki w niepodległej Polsce 1918–1939* [Women and the World of Politics in the Independent Poland of 1918–1939]. Warszawa, p.166.

³ Moraczewska, Z. (1928): *Nasz program* [Our Programme]. *Praca Obywatelska*, Issue 1, p. 4.

⁴ Dufnat, J. (2013): *W służbie obozu marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego. Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet (1928–1939)* [In Service to the Camp of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. Women's Civil Work Association 1928–1939]. Kraków–Wrocław, p. 168.

⁵ Z Kongresu Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet [From the Congress of Women's Civil Work] (1938). *Kobięta w Pracy*, Issue 9; *Statut Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet* (1931) [Statute of Women's Civil Work Association]. Warszawa.

⁶ ZPOK founder and chairman until 1933.

⁷ Moraczewska, Z. (1932): *Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet* [Women's Civil Work Association]. Warszawa, p. 12.

entity, with its own awareness and laws. In this conception of the state it was an institution superior to society with its structures, social divisions, and social awareness⁸.

In relation to these assumptions the activists of the Association would frequently emphasise that the theretofore educational ideas were no longer meaningful in an independent state. One of the ZPOK leaders, a member of the Head Office (Zarząd Główny), Ludwika Wolska wrote: “the era of the independence before the Partitions failed to create a citizen in the positive and modern understanding of the term. (...) What is more, the negative attitude towards the occupation governments, a specific relation to the authorities, great effort put into maintaining national identity without any thoughts and feelings towards our own state, which was at the time nonexistent, left the masses – and not only the uneducated masses – with certain difficulties in shaping a positive attitude towards the state and an emotional and intellectual connection with the state organism”⁹.

At the same time the Association undertook to implement a new model of women’s civil education, consistent with the main aims of the state. Hanna Pohoska¹⁰ wrote that: “our idea must lie in the education of a citizen who is aware of his duties to the state, who is capable of fulfilling these duties, and who possesses an inner will/imperative to fulfil the duties”¹¹.

Pohoska developed the assumptions and the ideological basis for civil education as promoted by ZPOK. She would claim that “the family, the school and all the organisations in the Polish state that work for the good of the society and the state ought to be involved in civil education”¹², and that “our aim should be to achieve perfect harmony in enlightening citizens by these three means. There must be a perfect harmony in defining the goals as well as the selection of the methods in civil education”¹³. That is why all of these educational environments were

⁸ Paruch, W. (2005): *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego 1926–1939* [Political Thought of the Camp of Józef Piłsudski]. Lublin, p. 100.

⁹ Wolska, L. (1932): *Wychowanie państwowo-obywatelskie* [State and Civil Education]. Warszawa, p. 3.

¹⁰ A leader of ZPOK, its chairman from 1936 to 1938. In the years 1931–1933 she was head of the Civil Education Commission with the Ministry of Religions and Public Enlightenment that worked on the reform of school curricula.

¹¹ Pohoska, H. (1932): *Wychowanie obywatelskie* [Civil education], *In Almanach. Kalendarz Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet. Rok 1932*. [Almanach. Calendar of Women’s Civil Work Association. Year 1932]. Warszawa, p. 20.

¹² The same, p. 22.

¹³ The same, p. 22.

assigned proper aims, tasks, and methods of civil education. Greatest emphasis was put on the tasks and methods of civil education typical of social and political organisations.

According to Pohoska, civil education begins in the family environment, when a child “learns about the world around it, starts to speak and to address others as individuals. If the child is not taught to take others into consideration, if it is not taught to be responsible, our later civil and educational work shall be made extremely difficult”¹⁴. Pohoska states that the role of the family is essential and “it is not diminished even later, when the child is in its school years. What the youth hear at home, what opinions they hear on matters of the society and the state, is often stronger than the influence of the school, often in the negative sense. In few cases will the influence be positively good or bad, that is, the family hardly ever educates a child to be for or against the state. The family is typically indifferent to matters of the state and has no conscious influence on children in this context. One must bear in mind, however, that such indifference is, in fact, unconsciously against the state, and if it is connected with the interests of the family being considered superior to those of the state, and if the laws of the state are ignored, than an anti-state attitude may be shaped”¹⁵.

In civil education at school (with the institution understood as “a unit of social life”), according to Pohoska, there need to be different forms and rules. “The school must be aware of the fact that it is a social group and the interests of this group, that is, education of children and youth, ought not to be superior to those of the entirety: the state. The school is established to undertake a planned and pure educational effort. (...) The civil and educational work of schools needs to be closely connected with teaching and upbringing. Schools have a unique chance to fulfil the ideals of civil education. They benefit from the curricula, and by working on the curricula they instil perseverance, agility, and dedication to work. (...) At the same time, social feelings, the love for the fellow man, the ideas of humanitarianism and solidarity can develop. However, all of this ought to be connected with the good of the Polish state, that is, the supreme good”¹⁶. Simultaneously Pohoska emphasises that the educational task must be carried out at all levels of education. She wrote that “school is to be understood as the entirety of education of children and youth, from nurseries to universities. That is because only a coherent education in all

¹⁴ The same, p. 22.

¹⁵ The same, p. 23.

¹⁶ The same, p. 23.

these types of schools can create a coherent attitude of the citizens towards the state. There cannot be any differences. The educational ideal needs to be the same starting with the first level of schooling (including nurseries) and ending with the last one. In any other case every school shall create a different citizen, citizens of the first, second, and third class, which is unacceptable in a democratic state: in a state that is intended to consist of citizens and citizens only. That does not mean that there cannot be any ethnic, religious, political, and social differences between the citizens: to the contrary, the citizens may be, as Marshal Piłsudski proposed, a rainbow of opinions ranging from the darkest violet to the reddest red, as long as the attitude of 'the self' towards the state is pure and subordinate"¹⁷.

The third area of educational work that Pohoska defined are social and political organisations. She emphasises that one must realise that for a number of these organisations "civil education is not a goal: to the contrary, they tend to see civil education as the teaching of some social or political doctrine! We must oppose such understanding of education. A particular social or political doctrine must raise its followers, it is its God-given right and the fundamental condition for its, development, however, it only has this right if it forgets not about the duty to educate Polish citizens, who should be ready to keep the side of the state in case of its conflict with the doctrine. It is obligatory to promote state education for all these organisations that are based on the state, that include people of various social and political attitudes. Nevertheless, if we delved into the ideology of our political opponents as well as supporters and find within them an ultimate political plan, then, except for those against the state itself, we would find one core idea: the good of the Polish state. On this basis a common educational and civil ground for all the political options ought to be established. The role of the supporters of the state, that is, those who through their social and political work present the state as a value higher than the interests of social groups, is to convince other groups that they should stand on a common ground of civil education for the sake of the common good that they serve"¹⁸.

Pohoska also notices the necessity to form proper civil attitudes; she wrote: "when we raise the structure of our statehood after years of enslavement, we must raise such structure in the souls of the citizens, as well. This cannot be done in any other way than through a powerful new

¹⁷ The same, pp. 23–24.

¹⁸ The same, p. 24.

¹⁹ The same, pp. 19–21.

educational ideal in the souls of our teachers and parents, and in the awareness of the entire society. An emotional regeneration of the entire Polish nation needs to take place. The mentality must be changed from that of slaves to that of free men. (...) our idea must lie in the education of a citizen who is aware of his duties to the state, who is capable of fulfilling these duties, and who possesses an inner will/imperative to fulfil the duties. The latter is manifest every day through one's love, veneration, and respect for the State. The three conditions: awareness (understanding), and will, or emotion, are fundamental to the creation of a civil spirit"¹⁹.

It is the idea of Pohoska that an aware citizen, i.e., a citizen meeting "the three conditions", is an individual who is "independent and creative, (...) an individual who must take an active stance towards the ideas of respect and necessity: an individual who can rule and who can obey"²⁰. The author of "Civil Education" emphasises the essential role of an individual's responsibility in fulfilling the role of a citizen: "an individual ought to understand that his responsibility increases when he manages the strength and efforts of others. And to the contrary, an individual subordinate in his work is more responsible for his efforts, so he needs to be helped in his work, rather than interfered. These are some fundamental rules of social life, especially a social life within an organisation. An individual who has received civil education needs to have a deep understanding of the common good and he must be deeply convinced of that one's own good needs to be sacrificed for the good of others. The belief that the common good is not a sum of the goods of all individuals is the basis of civil morality. That is because a different understanding leads to egoism, to subordination of the good of the society to individual issues and needs"²¹. What is more, Pohoska claims that a citizen is obliged to "to try and understand the political, social, and economic structures of the contemporary Polish state: he should be engaged in politics, which does not mean that he has to be a member of a party – it is necessary that he has a deep interest in the life of the state, and takes an active, rather than passive, stance towards the phenomena around us"²².

Pohoska clearly defines the civil awareness of a group, at the same time defining the very notion of a group. She wrote: "a group can be a family, an association, a community of people aware of their

²⁰ The same, p. 21.

²¹ The same, p. 21.

²² The same, p. 22.

distinctiveness and of purpose (...). The members of the group ought to be deeply convinced that they can, and that they sometimes have to make their own interests subordinate to the interests and the needs of the group, however, the interests of the state can never be subordinate to those of the state. Every group, without any exceptions, must serve the state and its good in every respect"²³.

Pohoska is convinced that "an individual who has received civil education needs to have a deep understanding of the common good and he must be deeply convinced that one's own good needs to be sacrificed for the good of others"²⁴. Moraczewska explained that it is only he "who sees the State as his precious home, whose happiness is entirely connected with the happiness and the development of the state, it is only he who can really call himself a citizen in the full sense of the term!"²⁵.

Joanna Dufurat points out that being active in politics was one of the requirements of the promoted image of a "new female citizen". The activity was to consist in taking an interest in current political affairs, and voting. The leaders of the Association would underline that participating in elections was one of the most important civil duties to be fulfilled by women²⁶. However, greatest emphasis was put on the value of women's social activity in the model of women's citizenship propagated by the Association. Leokadia Śliwińska, one of the leaders of the organisation, claimed that social work that encouraged a proactive stance and initiative among the members of ZPOK was to constitute an essential element in the process of civil education understood as a way of shaping the morality of the members and raising their sense of self-esteem²⁷. Śliwińska stated that "to educate a citizen means to teach him to develop the values of everyday life so that each moment becomes a part of the common good. That means that social work ought to be developed so that it is well-thought-out and loved and introduces an order of justice and good where there used to be ignorance and harm. That means to create strength in place of weakness"²⁸.

In the image of an active woman citizen developed by ZPOK great importance was attached to, as J. Dufurat properly points out, "feminine

²³ The same, p. 22.

²⁴ The same, p. 21.

²⁵ Moraczewska, Z. (1929): Wydział Uświadomienia Obywatelskiego [Department of Civil Awareness], *Praca Obywatelska*, Issue 3.

²⁶ Dufurat, J.: op. cit., p. 172.

²⁷ Śliwińska, L. (1933): Obowiązki członkiń ZPOK [Duties of the members of ZPOK]. *Praca Obywatelska*, Issue 24, p. 4.

²⁸ Dufurat, J.: op. cit., p. 172.

nature” and the competences related to the traditional social roles of women, that is, those of mothers and wives. These roles give women’s citizenship a unique value in the life of the nation and the state²⁹.

At the same time, bringing up the society was one of the duties of modern, active women citizens. Women citizens were to take care that “Polish society is raised to a high level, that ethics, in the broad understanding of the term, unconditional honesty in public and private life, a deep sense of honour, civil courage, righteousness in the choice of methods, and nobleness in action were in the blood of the contemporary generation and became the qualities of all the citizens of Poland”³⁰. Women also need to “carry the values of order, harmony, selflessness in politics, ability to make creative efforts, and a healthy social instinct”³¹.

Dufurat points out that the domination of social work in the efforts of the ZPOK members was a necessity. It resulted from the way that their leaders believed that there was a connection between the little interests that women held in public affairs and their livelihood. Women were poor, they had too many responsibilities on their homes and families, they lacked leisure time and education³². That is why care for a proper development of women’s education, increasing their professional skills, combating discrimination on the labour market, and establishing supportive institutions had to become a crucial element of the process of women’s civil education³³. Moraczewska admitted: “we are aware of the fact that to allow all women to reach such a high level they must be raised from the hopeless dullness and immensely hard labour of everyday life. They need support in carrying the burden of maternity, which often takes up all their strength, they need to be protected from the lawlessness of marriage, family, and professional relationships (...). Once they are free of the burdens that drive them to the ground it will be easier for them to learn to think like true citizens”³⁴.

The beliefs of the leaders were reflected in the structure and the programme of the Association which combined the work of the society and the state with everyday efforts to strengthen the social and economic position of women.

²⁹ The same, pp. 172–173.

³⁰ Moraczewska, Z. (1932): *Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet* [Women’s Civil Work Association]. Warszawa, p. 11.

³¹ Odezwa [Proclamation] (1930). *Prosta Droga*, Issue 36, p. 1.

³² Dufurat, J.: op. cit., p. 173.

³³ The same, p. 173.

³⁴ Moraczewska, Z. (1932): *Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet* [Women’s Civil Work Association]. Warszawa, p. 11.

In practice, ZPOK was a social organisation whose mission was to “pull up” women, who were mostly uneducated, by encouraging them to become engaged in public affairs. That is why it was one of the forms of the activity of the Association to organise readings and lectures on social and civil problems, and to set up educational centres, day rooms, to organise training courses, and to publish newspapers and magazines. Specialist and legal advice centres were run for women and girls looking for work or with private and family life problems. Help and support centres were established³⁵. In relation to their original understanding of the idea of civil education, the members of the Association made vast efforts in day rooms, Labour Circles, and numerous methodology courses; they organised public readings and conducted discussions on the general matters of the state in which masses of women of all social groups in Poland participated. They would constantly strive for self-improvement, and they raised their intellectual, moral, and civil standard.

To bring their ideas into effect, the Association took on an original organisational structure: the basic local and organisational Units were organised in towns and villages. They were, in turn, combined into Poviats Associations at the poviat level. At the level of voivodships the Poviat Associations were combined into Voivodship Associations. These would report directly to the Head Office in Warsaw, which, in turn, was divided into departments dealing with all the matters of the life of the state and the society. The work was carried out by the specialised Departments. Offices analogous to the Departments of the Head Office were organised with the Boards of Voivodship Associations, Boards of District Associations, and the Units.

In total there were 8 Departments at the Head Office: the Department of Civil Education, Women’s Affairs, Care for Mothers and Children, Economic Production, Rural Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Press, and the Financial Department. From the perspective of the aims of the Association, that is, bringing into effect the ideal (model) of a woman citizen, the Department of Civil Education was the most important one³⁶.

The Civil Education Department organised and ran: education, readings, discussions, instructor training courses, training courses, day rooms, clubs, Labour Circles, libraries for instructors, reading rooms, travelling instructor training courses, and vocational schools. The Department developed the civil awareness of its member and prepared

³⁵ Chojnowski, A.: op. cit., p. 167.

³⁶ *Almanach. Kalendarz Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet. Rok 1932.* (1932). [Almanach. Calendar of Women’s Civil Work Association. Year 1932] Warszawa, p. 229.

them for social and political work. The educational and civil efforts of the Department were mostly undertaken in the day rooms ran by the institution, where courses, lectures, discussions, and practical Labour Circles were ran, following a curriculum of state education as a logical entirety³⁷. That is how the work in day rooms became one of the most developed forms of the educational and civil work of ZPOK, which aimed to educate and form new citizens. It became the main area of the activity of ZPOK; it had first-rate educational qualities, and it made it possible to simultaneously influence “the mind, the emotions, and the will of an individual, to develop his personality, and to prepare him for an active role in social life”³⁸. The work in day rooms was carried out by Offices of Civil Education in the entire country.

The curriculum of civil education in day rooms was defined by an activist of the Association, Ludwika Wolska, in a brochure published in Warsaw in 1934 titled “Civil education in social organisations”. According to Wolska, the aim of civil education in day rooms was to form a citizen who “understands the value of the Polish state, knows about the life of the state, and who is aware of his life duty to increase the power and might of the state through independent, individual effort, who is aware that fulfilling this duty is his responsibility before future generations, and who can properly assess the gravity of honour and good name, and, as a result, who constantly, consciously, and free willingly makes his own interests subordinate to those of the State. Nevertheless, the basic condition in the education of a good citizen is the moral value of an individual”³⁹. Wolska pointed out that the main goal of the work in day rooms was to “educate the heretofore passive and unaware girls and women to be thoughtful, loyal, and active citizens”⁴⁰. That is why the members of the Association used the day rooms to pass down “civil knowledge” and to form “proper civil attitudes and civil action”⁴¹.

³⁷ Moraczewska, Z. (1933): *Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet* [Women's Civil Work Association]. Second edition. Warszawa, p. 12.

³⁸ Praca świetlicowa. Instrukcja dla świetlic Z.P.O.K. (1934). [Work on day rooms. Instructions for ZPOK day rooms] Warszawa, p. 3.

³⁹ Praca świetlicowa..., op. cit., s. 8–9.

⁴⁰ The same, p. 5.

⁴¹ The same, p. 4.