

School Strikes in the Bytom Commune in 1906 and 1920

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Lusek, J. (2017). School Strikes in the Bytom Commune in 1906 and 1920. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 9/1, 55–77.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries Upper Silesia was the arena of spectacular social and political movements. An experimental area in this regard was Bytom (Beuthen) along with its commune, where the Polish and German communities would clash and where even the tiniest of animosities were blown up to the scale of diplomatic scandals due to the propaganda.

The school strikes in 1906 and 1920 had a significant impact on the awakening and formation of the Polish consciousness in Upper Silesia. The school strikes that took place in Upper Silesia in 1906 were aimed at introducing the teaching of religion in the Polish language. In the Bytom commune the strikes were incidental in character; they did not gain the support of the Polish political elites. As a consequence, no Polish minority schools were created in Bytom before World War 1. The situation changed significantly only during the twenty-year period between the wars. In 1919 a conference of teachers in Bytom gave rise to the Upper Silesian Teachers Association and in 1923 the Polish-Catholic School Association for Opolian Silesia was founded. The main objective of the former was to admonish the authorities about giving equal rights to the Polish language and the right to create Polish schools, while the latter aimed to work out a legal basis for a private and public Polish minority school system, organising courses for teachers as well as materially supporting youth organisations and creating scholarship funds. The authorities not fulfilling the postulates for organising regular classes in Polish became the direct reason for holding a strike in the summer of 1920. The strike also encompassed the Bytom commune with 11.4 thousand participants (34.3%).

Key words: *school strikes; Upper Silesia; Bytom*

Even though we are under Prussian government we have not forgotten to respect the beliefs of our ancestors, speak Polish nor dress as our ancestors used to (...).

Who are we then? We are indeed not Prussian, but Polish.

"Dziennik Górnośląski" 1848

Upper Silesia was a place of spectacular socio-political activity at the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The awakening national identity – thanks to the influence from Galicia and Greater Poland and later the hopes of the Polish to annex the area of the newly reformed Poland and the insurgents and Silesian Uprisings before the plebiscite were vital in building a basis for the rights of Polish minority schooling. Bytom was an experimental educational area. Both the city and the district were places where the Polish and German camps often clashed, and even the slightest of conflicts were escalated by propaganda to the rank of a political scandal. After the plebiscite, Bytom became a border town. Efforts were made to show its German heritage by naming it the last bastion of Germany at the East borders of the country, which was reflected by the well-developed network of educational institutions at all levels of education. Taking into regard the development of Polish minority schooling in Bytom one should notice the systematic work of the Polish Government and pro-Polish educational organizations in the area. They satisfied the need for regular Polish language and religion lessons in the district, and in Bytom proper two centers of Polish culture were created – the Polish Gymnasium and the Polish People's University, which raised the elite of Polish intelligentsia.

1. Strike incidents in schools in 1906

At the onset of 20th century discrimination against the Polish minority in the Opole district was constantly escalating, especially towards teaching in Polish. Polish language was dominant in that area, especially in rural districts. In the cities German-speaking clerks, owners of industry and overseers in it, were a majority. The structure of language corresponded to the level of education. The early 1870s saw the escalation of germanization. Several bills passed in Upper Silesia were used as model bills for other areas called Polish in the borders of Germany. The overall goal was the total elimination of teaching in the Polish language and making German the sole language used in education, regardless of the school type. The first decrees were made by the government of the Opole (Oppeln) district in September 1872 they were local bills consulted with the ministry of education. It was the local nature of the changes that allowed for public discussion on teaching to be omitted and for the use of Polish in that part of Prussia.¹

¹ Schneider, K. – Bremen, E. (1886). *Das Volksschulwesen im preußischen Staate in systematischer Zusammenstellung der auf seine innere Einrichtung und seine*

Along with the language, also school books and aids in Polish were banned. The only instance of allowing religion to be taught in Polish was in the lower grades of primary schools but only if German was used simultaneously.² There was a ban under penalty of fines and even imprisonment on organizing free private lessons of Polish in Opole district.³ However, there was a special reward fund for teachers whose results in teaching German in primary schools were promising.⁴ From 1905 onwards there were special donations to teachers in German schools with a "large percentage of Polish children" i.e. 20% of children taking part in classes.⁵

From 1876, according to the authorities of the Opole district, German became the official language. The changes were excused by the need to make German more accessible to the Polish and to strengthen the bonds between Polish youths and German ones. At the same time German people were given protection against polonization. The main obstacle in realizing the aforementioned goals was seen by the authorities in the overcrowding of schools and the lack of leverage in assigning teaching posts. On July 15th, 1886, a new bill giving the government the sole right to employ new teachers in areas called Polish, the Opole district included, was passed. Local government in accordance with the school boards gave an opinion about a prospective teacher, but the final decision was made by government clerks.⁶ Public schooling in Upper Silesia and Greater Poland employed over 13.6 thousand teachers including about 5 thousand (37%) Polish teachers. According to Prussian authorities, at least two thousand Polish teachers needed to be let go, on the grounds of their involvement in pro-Polish activities.⁷ The eviction act of 1885 was also a factor in this situation and its aim was to rid Prussia of

Rechtverhältnisse, sowie auf seine Leitung und Beaufsichtigung bezüglichlichen Gesetze und Verordnungen. Bd. 3. Berlin, pp. 474–481; Kwiatek J. (1987), *Górnośląska szkoła ludowa na przelomie XIX i XX wieku*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, pp. 18–19.

² Schneider, K. – Bremen, E., op. cit., pp. 474–477; Głowacki, H., *Szkolnictwo i oświata na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1816–1914*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, Sign. A 48. Vol. 6, p. 37; Borodziej, Ł. (1972). *Pruska polityka oświatowa w okresie Kulturkampf*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, pp. 127–132; Trzeciakowski L. (1987). *Kulturkampf w zaborze pruskim*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, p. 187.

³ Borodziej, Ł., op. cit., pp. 207–208.

⁴ Kwiatek J., op. cit., p. 20.

⁵ Ibidem. pp. 27–28; Musiot, T. (1970). *Strajki szkolne na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1906 i 1920*. Warszawa-Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, p. 24.

⁶ Borodziej, Ł., op. cit., p. 189.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 192; J. Kwiatek, op. cit., s. 28.

all people without a permit to live there. About 26 thousand people were deported, all in accordance with the law.⁸

People in Congress Poland had to deal with a similar situation. In January 1905 there were numerous workers' strikes in Russia and Congress Poland. Apart from the big cities like Warsaw or Łódź there were factory strikes and students' demonstrations in towns near the German border like Częstochowa, Sosnowiec and Dąbrowa Górnicza. The Revolution brought tangible positive changes on Polish land under Russian occupation, such as the right to found Polish institutions such as the Polish School Motherhood. Polish was also allowed to be used at commune halls.⁹

Echoes of society's displeasure reached Upper Silesia. According to the census of 1905 Upper Silesia had a population of two million, 1.2 million of which were either Polish-speaking or bilingual (Table 1). In 1906 in Bytom city commune there were 10.1 thousand students, among whom 5.8 thousand spoke Polish and 4.3 thousand spoke German. In the rural commune 30.8 out of 35.5 thousand students spoke Polish. There were only 4.7 thousand German-speaking students. Opole district had similar tendencies. Most of the German-speaking students lived in cities and Polish-speaking students were the majority in the country. Overall, there were 411.1 thousand students in Upper Silesia, of whom 288 thousand spoke Polish and 109.6 thousand German.¹⁰

Table 1. The censuses of 1905, 1910 and 1925 with regard to speaking Polish in Bytom and the Bytom rural commune.

Commune	Population 1905	Population 1910	Population 1925	Native language-German 1905	Native language-German 1910	Native language-German 1925	Native language-German and Polish 1905	Native language-German and Polish 1910	Native language-German and Polish 1925	Native language-Polish 1905	Native language-Polish 1910	Native language-Polish 1925
Bytom c.	60 273	71 679	84 625	38 513	41 766	63 658	1 816	2 360	18 686	22 644	27 294	2 188
Bytom r.	168 109	60 155	78 377	122 965	12 944	29 837	4 867	4 176	38 133	122 965	42 505	10 310
Total	2 035 651	1 267 062	1 360 814	757 200	613 624	810 966	55 230	51 586	384 574	1 158 828	581 701	151 168

Source: Golachowski S. (1950). *Materiały do statystyki narodowościowej Śląska Polskiego z lat 1910–1939*. Poznań–Wrocław: Instytut Zachodni, p. XVI.

⁸ Brożek, A. (1963). *Wysiedlenia Polaków z Górnego Śląska przez Bismarcka 1885–1887*. Katowice: Śląsk, p. 34; Borodziej, Ł., op. cit., p. 184.

⁹ *Rewolucja 1905. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* (2013). Piskała, K. & Marc, W. (Eds.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, p. 132; Davies, N. (1981). *Boże Igrzysko*. Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, p. 841; Musioł T., op. cit., p. 17–18.

¹⁰ Musioł, T., op. cit., p. 20 and 60; Idem. *Szkolnictwo polskie w rejencji opolskiej 1919–1939*. Katowice: Śląsk 1964, p. 55.

The Upper Silesian school strikes of 1906 were directed toward introducing the teaching of religion in Polish. There were only isolated incidents of school strikes in the Bytom commune. Political dissension was a major factor against the consolidation of the pro-Polish movement. The letter asking Cardinal Georg Kopp from Breslau, who was called “an enemy of the Polish” by the press, for support of the strike to introduce the teaching of religion in Polish was the butt of many a satirical article, especially those in “Gazeta Robotnicza”. Even political leaders Adam Napieralski and Wojciech Korfanty had a negative attitude towards the strike. Social circles were unable to force a direct confrontation and fruitful discussion, despite putting considerable effort into it. The meeting which was planned to take place in Zygmunt Seyda’s¹¹ apartment on October 18th 1906 was fruitless. The following meetings planned in Bytom and Oświęcim, where representatives from educational societies from Greater Poland and Galicia were to be present, fell through. The only meeting happened in Katowice through the initiative of Rev. Aleksander Skowroński. Its aim was to prepare a rally about the “religious upbringing of Polish children”. During the rally there were plans to give the participants postcards depicting the fight for teaching Polish in Upper Silesian schools. They were ordered at a printing press in Lviv¹². From 1904 Skowroński himself was the representative of Silesia in the Polish Central Election Committee. During the strike in 1906 he was the leader of a small group of Silesian clergy openly supporting the teaching of religion in Polish. He was elected a member of parliament on January 25th 1907. Due to the displeasure of Cardinal Kopp he forfeited his mandate.¹³

At the direct suggestion of Cardinal Kopp the planned assembly in “Reichshalle” fell through. The meeting was cancelled and the preparation committee, set up by Rev. Skowroński, was dissolved. The protest was a public one. There were numerous newspapers which

¹¹ Zygmunt Seyda (b. 18th April 1876 in Poznan, d. 25th [28th] January 1925 in Warsaw), lawyer, national activist, journalist and member of Prussian and Polish parliament; he was affiliated with Polish National Democracy. One of the top activists of Greater Poland and the Silesian National Democracy. He was a member of Reichstag as a Polish minority representative between 1907 and 1918. A member of the House of Deputies of Prussian Landtag in Berlin 1908–1918. Between 1919 and 1925 he was a member of the Polish parliament and its vice-Speaker from 1922. He took part in writing the March Constitution. Trzeciakowski, L. (2003). *Postowie polscy w Berlinie 1848–1928*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, p. 491.

¹² Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu (APO), Rejencja Opolska, Wydz. II. Sign. 251, Raport prezydenta Rejencji Opolskiej, 22 X 1906; Musioł T., *Strajki szkolne*, p. 30.

¹³ Czaplński, M. (1977). Skowroński Aleksander. In *Śląski Słownik Biograficzny*. Kantyka, J. – Zieliński, W. (Eds.). Katowice: Śląski Instytut Naukowy, pp. 379–383.

reflected the displeasure of society, such as: “Górnoślązak”, “Gazeta Robotnicza”, “Gazeta Opolska” and “Dziennik Śląski”¹⁴. This situation divided the Upper Silesian clergy into “pro-Polish” and “pro-German” camps. The German Centre Party also opposed the requests of the Polish-speaking people. The strike did not spread but was confined to a dozen or so towns where the parents refused to send their children to religion lessons in German. It was mostly in the Zabrze (Hindenburg) and Gliwice (Gleiwitz) communes, with the main point in Zabrze.¹⁵ The parents were threatened with significant fines and with losing their jobs. At some point the threats contained legal action and a jail sentence. German employers and courts became an excellent warranty of discrimination. There were even attempts to take the children via court rulings or putting minors into correctional houses. The individual drama taking place in Upper Silesia communes was commented on by the regional and international press. At the turn of 1906 and 1907 the strike slowly died out. The teachers eliminated any signs of Polish culture. There were numerous court cases ending with fines for defamation as German teachers had official government status. Fines were also given to owners of newspapers sympathetic to the strike, such as “Dziennik Śląski”, “Górnoślązak”, “Katolik” and “Gazeta Robotnicza”.¹⁶ The matter of the state manipulating the free will of its citizens had even gone to parliament, as it was discussed in November and December 1906, as well in the newly elected parliament in 1907. The deputies made the following statement: *We ask the Chancellor what he intends to do to effectively stop Prussian authorities from meddling with the freedom of conscience and the right to raise children in accordance to one’s spiritual beliefs and the rules of one’s Church guaranteed by the Civil Code.*¹⁷ Sadly, this problem was not resolved in a way that would satisfy the Polish.

2. Between Germany and Poland- the state of Polish minority schooling in Upper Silesia after World War One

The socio-political changes which happened after World War One in regard to German state administration had a visible effect on the

¹⁴ *Gazeta Robotnicza* (1906), Issue 90; *Gazeta Opolska* (1906), Issue 89; *Górnoślązak* (1906), Issue 254; *Dziennik Śląski* (1906), Issue 265.

¹⁵ *Der Schulstreik in Oberschlesien*, *Volkswacht* (1906), Issue 364.

¹⁶ *Schlesische Zeitung* (1905), Issue 40; *Gazeta Robotnicza* (1907), Issue 49, pp. 51 and 54.

¹⁷ Musioł, T. *Strajki szkolne*, pp. 41–43.

reorganizing of the educational system, including the Polish-speaking people's requests. In Upper Silesia the situation was particularly strained, as there were two camps forming there with opposing views on who Silesia should belong to – pro-German, which opted for staying in Germany, and pro-Polish, which wanted the lands to be returned to the Polish Motherland. The situation became complicated due to the upcoming plebiscite and political lobbying and general antagonistic attitudes related to it.

Before World War One Bytom had no minority schools even though a large percentage of its population spoke Polish. The first bills proposed by the government to make impromptu educational changes were in essence preserving the status quo. The hardest problem to solve was how to introduce teaching in Polish in a relatively instant manner. On November 20th, 1918 Germany allowed for religion to be taught in Polish, and on December 31st, 1918 for reading and writing to be taught in Polish. Classes were only offered if requested beforehand by the parents. However, due to the procedures being murky the bill had a reverse effect, mainly because of Polish inaction, successful blocking of Polish initiatives and hiring Polish-unfriendly Germans as teachers of the Polish language.¹⁸

Rules regarding the regular teaching of Polish in public schools were introduced on 1st February, 1919. They were to take place in the overall teaching program. Under no circumstances were they to be just an extracurricular activity. There were two hours weekly dedicated to teaching Polish. The Silesian dialect was also allowed to be used. However, teachers of Polish were to be paid less.¹⁹

The rights and obligations of the Polish minority of the Opole district concerning education were regulated in part by the Reich Constitution of 1919. Article number 113 described the right to use one's native language including the right to be taught it.²⁰ It was not ratified, however. Minority schooling was not discussed by the Prussian Constitution of

¹⁸ Rozczulająca uprzejmość rządu niemieckiego (1919). *Dziennik Śląski*, Issue 69; Lusek J. (2012). Próby ideologizacji bytomskiego szkolnictwa w latach 1933–1939. In *Bytom w cieniu dwóch totalitaryzmów. Szkice z dziejów miasta 1939–1989*. Rosenbaum, S. (Ed.) Katowice: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Oddział w Katowicach, pp. 58–59; Eadem (2010). *Szkolnictwo niemieckie i polskie w Bytomiu w latach 1740–1945*. Opole, p. 24.

¹⁹ Zdrojewski, E. (1934). *Szkolnictwo polskie na Śląsku Opolskim do roku 1929*. Katowice: Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych, pp. 1–5.

²⁰ Ernst, R. (1992). *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte, Bd 4: Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1919–1933*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, pp. 151–179.

1920 either. Article 73 was too vague – local parliaments had the right to allow foreign people to be taught in a language different than German.²¹

In 1919 local social activists initiated the groundwork for a People's Council in towns and communes. Wojciech Korfanty and Józef Rymer were a part of the Council's Commissariat. Bytom was the seat of the Head People's Council Sub commissariat. Its Education Department headed by Józef Eckert was founded in January 1919. It had sub-departments with each of them responsible for a different level of education. The department for folk schools' teacher preparation was headed by Jan Reginek, middle schools-Władystaw Komischke and public schools- Emanuel Imiela. The subcommissariat was disbanded very quickly on May 14th, 1919.²²

After the plebiscite was announced, the Central Plebiscite Committee, under the leadership of Parliament Speaker Wojciech Trąbczyński (Parliament Speaker 1919–1922, Senate Speaker 1922–1927), was established in Warsaw. Its aim was to help the Upper Silesians during the plebiscite. In 1920 the Interallied Governing and Plebiscite Commission took control of Upper Silesia. The school sub-department headed by Robinet de Clery fell under the Internal Affairs Department of the Commission. Poland was represented by the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat, which had an Education Department founded in 1920 and headed by Władystaw Komischke. It was divided into sections: Polish classes (headed by Wawrzyniec Magiera), public schools (Paweł Kaiser), seminars and seminar courses (Tadeusz Przysiecki) kindergartens (Emanuel Krzoska) and administrative (Emanuel Imiela).²³

In communes, as per the Head of the People's Council, there were plebiscite committees – Bytom's was headed by Dr. Jan Hlond. Each school district appointed a school expert. In Bytom, those experts were: Wojciech Baron (Bytom I), Sebastian Stach (Bytom II) and Ignacy Dworaczek (Bytom III). Experts were supported by School Care and School Deputations. They consisted of parents, teachers, local government members and clergy. Their main goal was to care for the physical and mental development of the youth, and their priority was

²¹ *Verfassung des Freistaates vom 30. November 1920* (1920). Berlin; Lusek, J., *Próby ideologizacji*, p. 58; Koehler, P. – Menschig, E. (1911). *Verordnungen betreffend das Schulwesen des Regierungsbezirks Oppeln. Bd. 1*. Breslau, pp. 634–641.

²² *Ze spraw szkolnych* (1919). *Katolik*, Issue 15; *W sprawie nauki polskiej w szkołach ludowych* (1919). *Katolik*, Issue 33.

²³ Karuga, W. (1968). *Organizacja Polskiego Komisariatu Plebiscytowego dla Górnego Śląska*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, p. 34.

patriotic and civic education. They were not permitted, however, to alter the educational process.²⁴

3. In the name of the Polish language school strikes of 1920

The main obstacle the Education Department had to overcome was organizing and teaching the Polish language and religion in Polish, as well as taking care of orphanages and courses for teachers. On January 11th 1919 parents in Upper Silesia were given the opportunity to have their children taught Polish and religion also in Polish. The declaration to do so was signed by 94 thousand people, which meant that 22% of children of school age (430 thousand) were to be taught Polish.²⁵ Between January and March 1920 there are several preserved reports of the representatives of communal plebiscite committees, including the Upper Silesia Teacher Association, who oversaw the daily affairs of villages in the Bytom rural commune. One of the first reports, from February 26th, stated that Polish and religion classes are taught in nearly every public school, mainly using the Upper Silesian dialect. Only three schools gave the names of their teacher. Those were the schools in Rozbark (Rossberg), Szombierki (Schomberg) and Nowy Bytom (Friedenshütte). The report stated:

Polish was most likely taught in virtually every town in the Bytom commune. Religion classes [in Polish] are for students of every grade. Reading and writing in Polish starts in the fourth grade. The condition of receiving tuition in Polish is that the parents give a written request. The classes are given by teachers of the Upper Silesia dialect. It is difficult to discern what patriotic influence they have on children. In Rozbark religion was taught by Mr Krzanowski who is seen as Polish. He was stripped of the post and it was given to Mr Nowak, who calls his pro-Polish colleagues traitors. In Szombierki religion in higher grades is taught by Mr Rosemann and Mr Skowronek, who allegedly are not able to do it

²⁴ Musioł, T. *Strajki szkolne*, pp. 60, 68–73; Krupa, W. (1966). *Organizacje Polskiego Komisarjatu Plebiscytowego dla Górnego Śląska*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, p. 34; Madeja, J. (1960). *Sprawy szkolne za czasów plebiscytowych*. *Kwartalnik Opolski*, Issue 2, pp. 67 and 74.

²⁵ W sprawie nauki polskiej w szkołach ludowych (1919). *Katolik*, Issue 33; Lukaszek H. (1930). *Das Schulrecht der nationalen Minderheiten in Deutschland*, Berlin, p. 26; Musioł T. (1961). *Publiczne szkoły powszechnie mniejszości polskiej na Śląsku Opolskim w latach 1923–1939*. Katowice: Śląsk, p. 56.

competently, while the lower grades are taught by Mr Rozkwitalski, who is fluent in Polish. In Freie Vereinigung in Bytom the teachers are Messrs: Kunert, Bittner, Rissmann – vacationed for this purpose, in Frydenshuta [German Friedenshütte, Silesian dialect Fryncita] Ertel, in Rozbark Neugebauer – dean. Mr Cyrus from Frydenshuta is the secretary of the German Inspector Association in Opole – vacationed. The Upper Silesian Teacher Association in the Bytom commune.²⁶

To realize the goals for teaching Polish qualified teachers were needed. Out of 65 thousand teachers in Upper Silesia only 368 of them were Polish. They came to Upper Silesia after World War One. They came mainly from Greater Poland, but some were from Galicia. According to the statistics in 1919 in the Bytom commune there were only 11 qualified teachers who could teach the Polish language.²⁷ On March 18th, 1919 district authorities passed an edict in which they promised to secure the necessary number of Polish-speaking teachers and to provide funds for their preparation.²⁸ In most schools Polish language classes were taught by German teachers.²⁹

According to 1920 statistics in the plebiscite area German administration carried out 112 immediate courses which were attended by 1200 teachers, while the aforementioned Education Department had seven courses for 224 students up to 1922.³⁰ The bad staff situation was to be improved by a teacher exchange with Greater Poland.³¹ Their numbers were too few, however, to properly organize a correct Polish teaching system.

In 1920 under the patronage of the Bytom Teachers Seminar there was a series of one year seminars which were to prepare qualified teachers for Upper Silesia minority schools. They took place in a rented hall of a Bytom hotel “Lomnitz” (1920) and the boarding house for Classic

²⁶ Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach (APK) 12/15, Polski Komisariat Plebiscytowy dla Górnego Śląska w Bytomiu (1918–1921), Sign. 112. Organizacja nauki języka polskiego w szkołach. Sprawozdania terenowych Komitetów Plebiscytowych dla Wydziału Szkolnego (1921), pp. 4–5.

²⁷ APK, 12/15, Sign. 152, Związek Nauczycieli Górnoślązaków (1920–1921), pp. 46–48; Sign. 124, Statystyka szkół na Górnym Śląsku (1920–1921), p. 21.

²⁸ Polska szkoła w świetle prawnych przepisów (1924). *Nowiny Codzienne*, Issue 8.

²⁹ Agitacja antypolska w szkołach (1919). *Katolik*, Issue 26.

³⁰ APK, 12/15, Sign. 152, pp. 46–48; Ze spraw szkolnych (1919), *Katolik*, Issue 15; Musioł T., *Szkolnictwo polskie*, pp. 61 and 70; Klon F. (1960). Kształcenie nauczycieli śląskich w okresie plebiscytowym. *Kwartalnik Opolski*, Issue 2, pp. 86–89.

³¹ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. I. Hauptabteilung Repositorium 76 Seminare. Preußische Lehrerbildungsanstalten (1810–1939), Sign. 1 b nr 25. Gebietsabtretungen (1919–1924).

Gymnasium students (1921). There were three Polish language courses for teachers in total, from 1920 till 1922. Outside of Bytom there were also courses in: Zabrze, Gliwice, Orzech, Tarnowskie Góry (Tarnowitz), Rybnik and Katowice (Kattowitz). Course participants were mainly manual workers or from a farming background from Upper Silesia. 66 women in total finished the courses. They were employed by Polish schools and preschools.³²

Maria Chwałówna, a teacher in Leki in Koźle (Cosel) commune and Katowice, recounted her time in an all-female high school, which had little respect towards Polish even from Polish-born intelligentsia, and the Bytom seminary where she became convicted that she should work for her Motherland:

When I was sent to high school I was astonished that no other girl spoke Polish and that speaking Polish was laughed at. Generally the opinion was that Polish is ugly and only simple unintelligent people speak it. Yet it was even worse in the Bytom seminary. Most of my classmates came from Polish families. They were ashamed of their language and Polish surnames. There was a large garden at the seminary, where Polish workers worked. I often translated conversations between the teacher and the workers. (...) In the "Katolik" bookstore I bought myself Polish language manuals. When we were saying goodbye the principal of the seminary R. [Stephan Reinke] told us we needed to work for an idea, but sometime our ideas may become shattered and then we need to find new ones. I thought to myself then: I'll set myself an idea so lofty no one will be able to shatter it nor will it fall. POLAND will be my idea.³³

In March 1919 there was a teachers' conference in Bytom. It began the formal association of Polish language teachers in Germany – Upper Silesia Teacher Association. In 1923 the Polish Catholic School

³² APK. 12/15. Sign. 111. Organizacja kursów języka polskiego dla nauczycieli. Programy, obsada (1920), p. 6; Sign. 141. Utworzenie i organizacja seminariów nauczycielskich dla Górnoszlązaków (1920), pp. 43 and 57; Klon F., op. cit., p. 85; Gawlik, S. (1979). *Dzieje kształcenia nauczycieli na Śląsku Opolskim (1765–1975)*. Opole: Instytut Śląski, pp. 88–89; Lusek J., op. cit., pp. 263–264; Eadem (2007/2008). Instytucje kształcenia nauczycieli w Bytomiu z końcem XIX i w I połowie XX wieku. *Oberschlesisches Jahrbuch*, Issue 23/24, p. 67.

³³ In September 1920 she was excluded from "Deutscher Lehrerverein" for admitting to being a part of the Upper Silesia Teachers Association. During the 3rd Silesian Uprising she was a medic in a field hospital of the Uprising Army in Toszek. Muzeum Górnoszląskie w Bytomiu (MGB). Sign. H-1978. Księga Pamiątkowa Pracy Społeczno-Narodowej Kobiet na Śląsku od roku 1880–1922. Maria Chwałówna. Z moich wspomnień o Polsce, pp. 219–220.

Association for Opole Silesia was born. The main goal of the former was to fight for the equality of Polish language and the right to establish Polish schools. Many teachers did not want to become involved with the Association for fear of discrimination, much less to become a part of it. Edward Hoinka – a teacher from Karb (Karf) – wrote the following to the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat: *with the current tense situation in Upper Silesia, one needs to be careful*. Nevertheless, the Association grew in numbers- in January 1920 there were over 130 of them, including 20 from the Bytom commune.³⁴ The main goal of the latter association, founded in 1923, was to build legal grounds for public and private minority schooling in the Opole district, preparing courses for teachers and funding youth organizations and stipend funds.³⁵

In May 1920 right before school strikes began, there were a few dozen initiatives to make Polish more accessible to children and adults in Upper Silesia. Religion classes were held in all public schools. Polish language was taught in the secondary school in Nowy Bytom and public schools in: Brzeziny/Birkenhain (in 5 sections for 450 students), Chropaczów/Schlesiengrube (in 7 sections for 390 students), Rozbark (in 5 sections for 400 children), Nowy Bytom (in 4 sections for 160 children), Karb (8 sections for 540 students), Szombierki (3 sections, 300 students), Dąbrowa Wielka/Gross Dombrau (8 sections, 850 students), Rokitnica/Rokitnitz (7 sections for 460 students) and Szarlej/Scharley (8 sections). Polish was taught by 65 teachers, among whom those sympathetic to Polish as reported by the Education Department of the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat numbered only around 25.³⁶ There were also kindergartens and courses for adults in: Lipiny (Lipine), Szombierki, Miechowice (Miechowitz), Nowy Bytom, Chropaczów, Karb, Rokitnica and Brzeziny. Kindergartens were meant for the children and the activities there were to familiarize them with Polish traditions – games and songs. Classes for adults were separated into age groups: 14–28 and older than 28 – people who worked– the latter courses took place in the

³⁴ APK, 12/15, Sign. 108. Sprawozdania z prac Wydziału Szkolnego, p. 6; Sign. 152, p. 50; Rozczulająca uprzejmość rządu niemieckiego (1919). *Dziennik Śląski*, Issue 69.

³⁵ APK, 12/645, Magistrat Miasta Bytomia (1742–1945). Sign. 4271, Polnisch-Katholischer Schulverein (1923); Popiołek O. (1959). *Wykaz organizacji i instytucji polskich na Śląsku Opolskim*. Katowice: Śląsk, pp. 25–26; Musiot, T. *Publiczne szkoły powszechnie*, pp. 47–50; Wawrzynek, W. (1963). *Polskie stowarzyszenia akademickie na Śląsku Opolskim w latach 1924–1939*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, p. 8.

³⁶ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, Sprawozdania składane Wydziałowi Szkolnemu przez terenowe Komitety Plebiscytowe (1920), pp. 73 and 105.

evenings. The classes covered reading, writing, speaking, grammar, and the history and geography of Poland and Upper Silesia.³⁷

August Motyka – a teacher involved in teaching classes in Polish – had an accurate if harsh opinion of the enthusiasm of people without correct organization and awareness of the weight of the undertaken action. He wrote the following to the Education Department of the Polish Plebiscite Committee:

The reason why school strikes in Upper Silesia broke out is widely known. In this letter I want to express my experiences and thoughts regarding employing strikers by immediate forces. How is it from an educational standpoint. Children are coming in droves, which is a very good sign, but they lack perseverance, which is caused by the following: children see that their presence is voluntary so they are loud, late and do not bring writing utensils or their notebooks are just stacks of dirty papers stuffed into their pockets. Teachers' words have little meaning, and last in the heads of students for a very short time, because the classes are seen as unimportant as it is taught in the afternoons and the classes are full of children of both sexes and different levels of education and psyche. Keeping order, which is required for learning, is impossible with children lacking the idea of how our case is important. Other than that, I want to put emphasis on the danger of teaching them only the activities they enjoy, such as playing and singing. However, singing and playing must be regular for the children to come in the first place. Reducing classes to only playing can make all our efforts for naught, or at least just a trifle compared to morning classes in German. We have to do our best to facilitate love towards our native language through teaching and intellectual work, which will give games a grounding. For example, a soldier tired by several days' worth of marching can only then know what rest is, or we can appreciate the benefits of evenings and Sundays after working hard all week. Teaching via exercises in reading, writing and speaking requires goodwill that the children, with rare exceptions, lack, and that forces the teacher to use some kind of leverage over them to enforce obedience. However, commissariat teachers lack said leverage. This means that when a teacher reacts in a energetic manner to enforce order he may cause some of the children not to come back, because they feel offended. When a teacher does not want to cause dissent he acquiesces to the rowdiness. This causes the children to feel that they can get away with murder, which unfortunately affects the

³⁷ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, pp. 105, 137, 151 and 167.

learning experience in a very negative manner. The chaos can be prevented by sorting children into smaller classes divided by age and abilities. It is better to spend twice the amount of time, but in proper decorum. The teacher would influence the parents to send their children to classes regularly. The gathering of children from all social strata combined with assigned homework will also prompt different social strata to cooperate, be they manual workers or farmers.³⁸

German authorities were not very prompt in acquiescing to the requests of parents regarding regular Polish classes, which resulted in a strike which took place in 1920. The strike also reached the Bytom commune, and it was only schools from the rural commune which took part in the strike. Out of 33200 children of school age 11400 (34.3%) students in 36 out of 56 schools (Table 2) took part in it. The following towns and villages took part in the strike: Bobrek, Brzeziny, Brzozowice (Brzozowitz), Chebzie (Morgenroth), Chropaczów, Dąbrowa Miejska (Stadt Dombrau), Dąbrowa Wielka, Godula (Godulla), Kamień (Kamin), Karb, Łagewniki (Hohenlinde), Miechowice, Orzegów (Orzegow), Piekary (Deutsch Piekar), Rokitnica, Rozbark, Szarlej and Szombierki³⁹

Table 2. Number of public schools and teachers in Bytom city and rural communes (1920)

School District	Catholic schools		Evangelic schools		Jewish schools	
	Number of schools	Number of teachers	Number of schools	Number of teachers	Number of schools	Number of teachers
Bytom I	11	204	2	20	1	6
Bytom II	22	279	1	2	-	-
Bytom III	21	278	2	3	-	-
Bytom IV	2	13	1	2	-	-
Total	56	774	6	27	1	6

Source: APK, 12/15, Sign. 124, Statystyka szkół na Górnym Śląsku (1920–1921), pp. 8 and 16.

The demands of the strike committees were the same in most places. Parents demanded that classes for lower grades were to be taught in

³⁸ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, Strajki szkolne polskich dzieci (1920–1921), pp. 23–24.

³⁹ APK, 12/15, Sign. 109, Żądania polskiej ludności wprowadzenia obowiązkowej nauki języka polskiego (1920); Sign. 118, Doniesienia i zażalenia nauczycieli niemieckich prowadzących propagandę antypolską (1920–1921), p. 120; Musioł, T., *Strajki szkolne*, p. 104.

Polish, and in upper grades in Polish and German. German teachers were to stop discriminating against teachers teaching in Polish and to stop forcing children to observe religious practices in German. Sadly, there are very few surviving documents pertaining to the strikes of 1920. They are mostly memoirs and short excerpts from school chronicles, and the main sources are reports of Communal Plebiscite Commissariats.⁴⁰ School strikes in the Bytom commune lasted from June to the middle of September in 1920.

The first school to strike, on June 1 1920, – was the public school in Szombierki. According to the statistics on June 12 1920 there were almost 900 strikers, which constituted about 90% of the school's students.⁴¹ In the report from June 1 1920 Staniendas – head of the communal plebiscite committee stated:

The plebiscite committee in Szombierki made the following requests on behalf of the local citizens on May 20 1920: 1. First, second and third grades are to be taught only in Polish; 2. Higher grades in Polish and German; 3. Classes should end at noon, not 1 p.m.; 4. German "Jugendspiele" are to be abolished; 5. Teachers may not force children to attend school mass (Schulmesse); 7. Teachers will not terrorize Polish schoolchildren; 8. Unless our demands are met by June 1st, Polish parents will not send their children to school. On May 31st our delegation went to the village elder with our written demand but was met with an unacceptable response we can under no circumstances agree with. That means what has been promised has been done. Today, on June 1st, the Polish schoolchildren's strike in Szombierki begins. (...) Staniendas. Head of C.P.C.⁴²

A strike was also started by the school in Brzozowice. In the public school chronicle it stated:

In 1920 there was a strike because of a lack of response to our demands regarding teaching in Polish. The strike demoralized students because it was radical and lasted for a very long time. After the strike finished, the teaching of Polish and religion in Polish was introduced.⁴³

⁴⁰ On June 11, 1920 Polish Plebiscite Commissariat informed regarding the bill of May 17, 1920: *Please send "notices" of reasons, size (the number of strikers) and the circumstances of a school strike and important occurrences which accompany it.* APK, 12/15, Sign. 107, Wytyczne co do sprawozdawczości dla Wydziału Szkolnego oraz wydawane przez Wydział Szkolny terenowym Komitetem Plebiscytowym (1920–1921), p. 17.

⁴¹ Szombierki pod Bytomiem. Walka o szkołę polską (1920). *Katolik*, Issue 77.

⁴² APK, 12/15, Sign. 109, pp. 123 and 133.

⁴³ Musioł, T. *Strajki szkolne*, p. 107.

A tense situation between pro-Polish activists and a local teacher caused a strike. Jan Gajek and Wincenty Świder – spokespeople of the commune plebiscite committee noted that the teacher used corporal punishment on the children who talked about the strike to their peers.

On Saturday Mr Schumnik (...) beat our children in a beast-like manner for telling others about the school strike beginning on Monday (...) both boys were beaten with a thick stick, the so called Zeigestock (map pointer) 3/4 of an inch thick and 75 centimeters long. Each boy got 24 strikes on their bottom while the teacher insulted and threatened them. (...) Generally Mr Schumnik is a most unpleasant person who insults and discriminates against the Polish on every occasion he gets.⁴⁴

Walenty Świder in his report for the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat from June 26th 1920 wrote about the strike: German classes were boycotted while Polish ones were taught.

I hereby report that the strike is going on; around 85% of children do not go to school. Supplemental Polish classes are given by an academic Mr Wiśniewski, until noon in the class of Mr Czaja, and in the afternoon in the school (...) from Saturday on there is a second teacher – Mr Motyka.⁴⁵

On June 15th 1920 the Education Department got a report from Dąbrowa Miejska. As with other places, local authorities, German teachers and the police were trying to prevent the school boycott. Corporal punishment towards the children was used liberally and parents were fined heavily. Wincenty Matysik, commune secretary of the plebiscite commissariat wrote:

On Monday, June 14 1920 a school strike started in a public school. There are 477 students and on the 14th there were only 20 children in the school. Today, that is June 15th, there were a lot more students attending, due to a lack of foresight of some of the mothers, who brought the children to school themselves. Some due to threats of severe repercussions for absence from the teachers. One of the teachers, Mr Peterek, chased children down the road and sent them to school. He took one girl from the road with him to the school. Teachers also took books and schoolbags from attending children, so that no one knew they were in school and that they would come the next day. The same can be said about the policeman Mr Honisek who collected children and walked them to school. On Monday the 14th there was a 13-year-old schoolboy named Jerzy Cipar who encouraged children to skip school without harming

⁴⁴ APK, 12/15, Sign. 118, p. 50.

⁴⁵ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, p. 10.

anybody. One of the mothers of a child named Schudey made a complaint about him that he was meddling with her children and she wouldn't let her children go on strike. When the teacher to whom the mother complained was going back from school he found the boy by chance and hit him twice on the head with his cane so hard that the cane broke. The teacher's name is Jerzy Pilep. There are two witnesses to that incident – Richard Bulik and Teodor Jendrysik. Furthermore, Mr Giller punished a boy named Brysch on the 10th and 11th even before the strike, for merely speaking out of turn during classes, in such a barbaric fashion that the boy's right hand became swollen and the flesh separated from the bones. The boy's mother went with him to the local doctor for a forensic examination, but he refused and insisted on operating on the hand immediately. There is also the incident of police sergeant Mr Pyka, an enemy of the Polish cause, who visited Mr Wilczek at Tarnogórska Road 62 D and asked him why he did not send his children to school and later told him not to with threats of repercussions, but Mr Wilczek told him he knew best when to send his children to school and then he asked him to leave and never come back. I ask the Education Department to notify the authorities of this to stop the terror and discrimination against the Polish and to punish the German teachers. People are outraged and ready to lynch the Prussian henchmen. I further ask the Department to check if parents really may be fined for not sending their children, for the fear of being fined causes some of them to break the strike. I ask Mr Commissar once more to take immediate action against the teachers to punish them or even cause them to get fired. Local teachers said that if this area was annexed by Poland and they had to teach Polish they would leave Upper Silesia at once. Up until now there was only one hour of Polish a week in a very lackadaisical manner, where the teacher taught in German and the children were punished severely for even the slightest mistake to dissuade them from learning Polish.⁴⁶

Another school which participated in a strike was the public school in Brzeziny. In a report from June 27th 1920 there was a lot of information regarding the cost of the strike and the need to resolve the situation and resume classes. The commune secretary of the plebiscite commissariat wrote:

Since June 11 our children have been striking. To keep them together we organize trips to different places under the guidance of their teacher, Mr Skrabania, who teaches the children out in the open. The trips cost our

⁴⁶ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, pp. 7–9.

Committee over 300 marks because we buy something on almost every trip. Yesterday, on June 26th the Education Department had a meeting to discuss the strike. One of the guests at the meeting was Mr Neumann, a Kreisschulinspektor from Bytom. We established that up to the third grade, that is for children aged 6 to 9, classes should be given only in Polish, and only after that in both Polish and German. We demanded information on how many teachers would be able to do that. There are 6 male and 2 female teachers. We were required to approve two teachers, but we can only approve one of them if he is an Upper Silesian and can speak Polish fluently. The second teacher, who has been teaching here since April, was denied on the basis of not being able to speak Polish. The Kresischulinspektor said in regard to the strike that we should send our children to school because a lack of education affects them negatively and that in the Zabrze, Katowice and even Chebzie (Morgenroth) communes the children resumed classes. I would like to ask whether we should stop the strike or not. Up to today no agreement was reached during the meeting. We await the decision of the Education Department. We also demanded that our children not be threatened or discriminated against after returning to school, because we would have to take other precautions. We also demand that politics not be practiced in schools. We also wanted to have patriotic pictures removed from schools. At the meeting was our enemy, a dean named Będzinka- we talked to him about politics until he had enough of it. To our response to their claims that they were teachers by the grace of God even the Kreisschulinspektor cringed. When the Kreisschulinspektor told us to send our children to school he assured us that Polish representatives will sit in all departments and that our demands will be taken into consideration when we present them to the Commission. We ask the Education Department how we should respond and that we would appreciate an answer as soon as possible. Out of 900 children 678 are striking.⁴⁷

Among the strikers were also students of the public school in Szarlej. On June 10th they made demands regarding introducing teaching in Polish. One teacher, Mr Jejtner did not make much out of those demands, which caused a boycott. As in other schools, during the strike children were taught in Polish, in Jana Kubański's inn by Antonina nee Rokicka [Niedbalska],⁴⁸ and she recorded:

⁴⁷ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, pp. 15–18.

⁴⁸ Antonina Rokicka-Niedbalska (b. March 7th 1893, d. April 23th 1975), pedagogue. She was affiliated with the Polish Military Organization and took an active part in Silesian

I came to Upper Silesia in the spring of 1920 (...) I immediately started to secretly teach Polish to the children of miners in Szarlej. The children yearned to learn (...). At that time the locals demanded the introduction of Polish into schools. There were school strikes here and there. Lessons took place [in Szarlej] in the biggest exhibit hall of [Jan] Kubański. The mere act of the students assembling lasted for half an hour, as all children from all the classes, a few hundred of them, came at once. They took their places at the restaurant tables and I stood next to the blackboard (...) Classes went on for over two hours without breaks. (...) The parents approached me and said: "Polish is so beautiful". One time a local named Lizurek came to the hall and warned me that the Germans wanted to arrest me. There was a German police officer right on his heels (...). The children shot to their feet and started shouting: "We won't go to the German school". (...) At that moment the windows flew open and mothers' arms showed through them. The hall became half empty. Children who stayed banged their fists on the tables and shouted: "We won't go to the German school". At the same time people carried the Germans out. They came back with a direct order: "Missy teacher, we won't let any harm happen to you". I had some doubts whether to stay or go. I acquiesced to the demands of the people inspired by their heroic attitude. I began teaching nearly everyone, because they were thirsty for the Polish language.⁴⁹

The police used firearms during the arrest of Anna Rokicka which made the incident famous in all of the Opole district. Even Robinet de Clery from the Education Department of the Interallied Governing and Plebiscite Commission intervened.

There was also a strike in Dąbrowa Miejska Seweryn Dziembowski; the school sub-inspector wrote in his report from June 1920:

During the school strike (four fifths of the school population) afternoon classes were given outside of the school. After the strike ended there are two Polish courses being organized and they should start on July 1st.⁵⁰

Fines which were given to the parents of the striking children were designed to deter them from continuing the boycott. Appeals to remove

Uprisings. During World War Two she was a part of the resistance under the codename "Magda". She retired at the rank of lieutenant. She was awarded with the Order of Polonia Restituta, Cross of Independence, Upper Silesia Star and the Golden Badge of Polish Teachers Association for her efforts in teaching the blind. She wrote many articles for typhological journals. *Monografia Cmentarza Bródnowskiego* (2007), Warszawa: Urząd Dzielnicy Warszawa Targówek.

⁴⁹ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, p. 23.

⁵⁰ APK, 12.15, Sign. 163, p. 186.

the fines were sent to the Education Department of the Plebiscite Commissariat in Bytom and it then intervened to the authorities of the Opole district and the school inspectors. They used the precedent of strikes in Westphalia, where the children held a strike because of religious reasons⁵¹. The punishment was especially harsh for parents of students in Szarlej. In November 1920 they protested against repercussions in a plea to the Education Department:

The Plebiscite Committee in Szarlej has appealed to the inspector several times but without any visible success. Parents who refused to pay the fines were taken to court. From other towns in our commune we heard nothing like that. Only in Szarlej do they punish incessantly for striking. This means that the people are bitter and we need to resolve the situation as soon as possible. We implore the Education Department to take care of the matter.⁵²

Among those intervening to abolish the fines were: Jan Hlond and Władysław Komischke from the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat and Robinet de Clery from the Interallied Governing and Plebiscite Commission. However, the authorities of Opole district flat out refused.⁵³

The strike did not stop the kindergartens and language courses from running even though some of the people responsible for them were reassigned to working with the striking children. In Bytom the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul ran a Polish kindergarten where there were around sixty children. There were also kindergartens in Rozbark, Piekary and Miechowice. The main language used there was German, but they also taught Polish. Classes containing fun and games were taught in Bytom, Brzozowice, Karb, Bobrek, Lipiny, Świętochtowice (Schwientochlowitz), Piekary, Rozbark, Orzegów, Dąbrowa, Miechowice, Chropaczów, Szarlej, Nowy Bytom, Łagiewniki and Hajduki (Bismarkhütte). The classes in Miechowice were taught by a teacher named Ms. Firlusowa. About 80 children took part in those. She also founded an education club. In Karb the classes were taught by Mr Mrozek from Biskupice (Biskupitz). He taught six days a week both in the mornings and afternoons. Classes in Bobrek had a similar timetable and were taught by Mr Mroczek, a teacher from Biskupice. In Chebzie the classes were taught by Mr Bothor from the industry department, twice a week. He also gave private lessons. In Lipiny Polish language classes were held in a girls' high school. The Christian Mothers Association had

⁵¹ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, p. 35 (18 August 1920).

⁵² APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, p. 49.

⁵³ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, pp. 34 i 53.

a Polish kindergarten there. Polish language courses were also organized by the Płomień Society. The classes were taught by Czauderna with Dean Skiba teaching commerce-related language. In Orzegów Polish classes were given to three groups, 400 children in total.⁵⁴ Among the teachers of Polish in the Bytom commune were: Szweda, Tomaszewski, Pillich (Secretary of the Saint Jack Education Society in "Schlesischer Hof" hotel in Bytom), Stefan Przybylski, Jerzy Scheurich, Henryk Winkler (Polish Red Cross member who ran a Polish library near Bismarck Smelter), Gracjan Drozd, Wiśniewski, Gawlik, Józef Nawrath, Konrad Szczurek, Anna Pająkowa, Rozalia Krypczykówna, Monika Śładkówna, Anna Kaprolówna, Anna Musiałkówna, Anna Zabiegalanka.⁵⁵

In August 1920 vocational courses for railway employees were given in the People's University in Bytom. The courses were taught by August Motyka and Dr Landowski. The building in which the People's University was located was also the Polish Women's Society headquarters.⁵⁶ It was also the seat of the Romanian library run by Janina Żnińska which after the death of Dr Łuk in Jassy, Romania was transported to Upper Silesia. Żnińska organized a handicraft club for Bytom children affiliated with the People's University. It was just a ruse to teach children Polish songs and carols. At her initiative traditionally clad Silesian dolls were made. The set of eight dolls was a representation of a traditional wedding. It was sent to Poznań and deposited in a museum there.⁵⁷

Another charity activist in the Bytom commune was Maria Znatowicz-Szczepańska – wife of Head Consul of the Polish Consulate in Bytom – Aleksander Roman Szczepański (1922–1929). She came from Królewiec (Königsberg). Her motto was: "Each Pole should help other Poles through their work". In the consulate room in Bytom she held games for children and taught them to sing Polish songs. There was an annual Christmas

⁵⁴ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, pp. 179–183, 186, 207, 277–284, 359–361.

⁵⁵ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, pp. 441.

⁵⁶ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, pp. 412–414.

⁵⁷ During the plebiscite the library was moved to the Polish Consulate in Bytom. Janina Żnińska oversaw it until 1927, when books were given to the Bytom Education Association. It was finally given to the Silesian Museum in Katowice. Janina Żnińska was born in Wąbrzeźnia in Pomerania, and in 1895 she moved to Bytom. A merchant by trade, she spent her free time practicing her acting in amateur actors' groups of industrial societies. She was also a skilled director. She was an active member of the Polish Women's Society, the "Sobótka" Society as well as being the founder of the Singing Clubs Association and the "Iskra" Reading Society. During World War One she set up a sewing room in the People's University. She initiated collecting clothes which were repaired and given to the Homeless Committee. In 1925 Żnińska moved to Katowice. MGB, Sign. H-1978, Janina Żnińska, pp. 180–183.

Eve with presents at the consulate. Children who were to attend their First Holy Communion were given candles and prayer books. On the day of the Communion the children were invited to a formal breakfast. Znatowicz-Szczepańska organized sewing courses during which there were morality, religion and hygiene lectures. The lack of a minority school for Polish children forced them to organize separate classes to teach reading and writing in their native language. The courses took place during winter with qualified teachers. In 1923 the Szczepański family moved to the United States to Chicago, where Aleksander Szczepański got the post of Head Consul.⁵⁸

The Bytom commune strike lasted until fall 1920. On August 12th Dr Magiera of the Education Department of the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat reported:

Because the strike resulted in inquiries by inspectors in schools we agreed to end it. We should be mindful of teachers with a hostile attitude toward the Polish and complain about them to the commune inspectors.⁵⁹

In all districts of the Bytom commune the difficulties in teaching Polish because of German propaganda were emphasized. There was a distinct lack of Polish schoolbooks- one of the reports stated: "Katolik" primers and Komischke's reading books cannot be implemented as there are no bills regarding the use of Polish school books. There was a problem with establishing education clubs and libraries. Seweryn Dziembowski, school sub-inspector reported in June 1920: Tiny collections are called a "Library" even though they consist of a few ragged books.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The school strikes in 1906 and 1920 had a definite effect on the birth of Polish national identity in Upper Silesia. The first of them happened only in one place while the latter was region-wide, a result of the tense atmosphere caused by the lack of clarity about who Upper Silesia belonged to and also by the enthusiasm following the First and Second Silesian Uprisings. After the plebiscite on March 20th 1921, two thirds of Upper Silesia was left in Germany. Poland got most of the Bytom rural commune – 65% of its area. The divide was based on the results of the voting – 59% of the people voted for Poland in the rural commune, and

⁵⁸ MGB, Sign. H-1978, Marja Znatowicz-Szczepańska, pp. 392–393.

⁵⁹ APK, 12/15, Sign. 120, p. 33.

⁶⁰ APK, 12/15, Sign. 163, p. 186; Sign. 109, p. 3.

only 25.33% voted for Poland in the city. Most of the Poles living in the areas which remained in Germany moved to cities which lay on the other side of the border – Królewska Huta, Siemianowice or Katowice. With the stabilization of the socio-political situation after the plebiscite in the late 1920s and 1930s, Polish courses were systematically cancelled in Upper Silesia (Table 1). The 1933 Opole district census showed that 100 thousand people used Polish as their native language and that there were 266 thousand bilingual people. In the Bytom commune, both city and rural, the number of people speaking Polish or bilingual people also decreased systematically. There were only 10 courses of Polish for 111 students and 33 courses of religion for 1100 students. In 1938 there was only a single religion class in Polish for 9 people. In 1939 the courses were cancelled completely. This tendency also applied to minority schools. A Polish minority school (Minderheitsschule) was established in 1927 in Dąbrowa Miejska, in Public school no. 10. In 1927 there was just a single class with six students in 1928 and five in 1929.⁶¹ In 1933 there were only 17 minority schools for 189 children in the Opole district. In 1939 there were six schools with 49 students left.⁶²

⁶¹ APK, 12/666, Kreisschuleinspektion Beuthen I (1879–1941), Sign. 2, Statistik Schulverhältnisse (1904–1938, pp. 209–213; *Statistisches Handbuch der Stadt Beuthen* (1928), Beuthen, pp. 108–116; *Schematismus der Volks- und Mittelschulen Schlesiens. Bd. 3: Oberschlesien* (1931), Breslau 1931, s. 12; *Heimatbuch der Stadt Beuthen OS*, Beuthen 1928, s. 110; *Deutschlands Städtebau. Beuthen OS* (1929). Berlin–Halensee: Magistrat Beuthen OS, p. 68.

⁶² APO. 1, Nadprezydium Prowincji Górnos Śląskiej w Opolu. Sign. 122, Statistik über des Minderheitsschulwesen, pp. 28, 83 i 127; Sign. 123, Statistik über des Minderheitsschulwesen, pp. 74, 173, 205, 208, 251a i c, 304, 324 i 348; Orzechowski, K. (1949), Zagadnienie asymilacji mniejszości na tle szkolnictwa polskiego na Górnym Śląsku. *Przegląd Zachodni*, Issue 5/6, p. 409; Musioł T., *Publiczne szkoły powszechnne*, pp. 53 and 55.