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THE DISCRIMINATION OF WŁADYSŁAW KONOPCZYŃSKI IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Abstract

This article discusses the relation of the eminent Polish historian Władysław Konopczyński (1880–1952) to the newly established communist rule. As president of the Commission of History of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the editor-in-chief of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, and one of the few internationally known Polish historians who survived the war, the old Konopczyński enjoyed much prestige among his colleagues and in the Polish academia in general. For this and the other reasons indicated in the paper, the communist authorities choose him as the symbol of the 'bourgeois' scholarship and decided to discredit him and get rid of his person. The paper presents the ways in which the government exercised pressure on the scholar and his colleagues, causing Konopczyński's resignation from all his posts, and depriving him the opportunities to teach and publish. Finally, the moral and practical results of this campaign on the historian's collaborators and colleagues are analysed.

Keywords: history of historiography, Stalinism in Poland, relations between the academia and totalitarian rule

In 1945, with the loss of Vilnius and Lviv and the destruction of Warsaw, Cracow – a city barely affected by war, whose intellectual elites survived intact, while other cities lost theirs – possessed a scholarly potential unmatched throughout the country. To the new Communist government, the city posed a serious problem due to the persistence of old bonds in the community and lower degrees of social fragmentation, which made it much harder to subjugate. The results of the 1946 referendum testified to the popular dislike of a government imposed by the Soviet Union. Due to its persistently 'reactionary' opposition to the new order, the Cracow society was put under

surveillance and persecuted, with Minister of Education Stanisław Skrzyszewski – a pre-war student of pedagogy at the Jagiellonian University and active member of the Communist Party of Poland – excelling in that regard.¹ Cracow became a major hub for historical science, the seat of the Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne (Polish Historical Society, PTH) and the editorial board of *Kwartalnik Historyczny*.² This historical milieu found an undoubted leader in Władysław Konopczyński, who took an active part in the reconstruction of the discipline. The persecution he was subsequently subjected to exemplifies the conduct of the new government in the early years of the People's Republic of Poland and illustrates the extent to which contemporaneous officials sought to oppress scholars.³

For many people within the discipline, Konopczyński figured as the most accomplished of Polish historians of the first half of the twentieth century. The period of his greatest academic success in Poland and abroad occurred between the wars. A member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm (since 1930), the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (since 1922), Knight of the Order of the Polar Star (1924) and member of the French Legion of Honour (1939), he took part in many international congresses, and his works saw print in several different countries. Of the sixty-two volumes comprising his oeuvre, monographs devoted to the Bar Confederation, *liberum veto*, Poland during the Seven Years' War, the origin and establishment of the governmental committee, the Permanent Council, Stanisław

¹ For more, see Aleksander Kochański, 'Skrzyszewski Stanisław', in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* [hereinafter: PSB], xxxviii, 3 (158) (Warszawa and Kraków, 1998), 419–22; Witold Jan Chmielewski, *Stanisław Skrzyszewski wobec ludzi nauki w świetle własnych notatek listów i pism (1944–1950)* (Warszawa, 2014).

² The Polish Historical Society was established in Lwów in 1886 to provide support for the development of historical sciences. Its founding father was Ksawery Liske, who had also launched the first historical journal in Polish territories, the *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (Historical Quarterly).

³ For more, see: Rafał Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem. Spory o nowy model historii w Polsce (II połowa lat czterdziestych – początek lat pięćdziesiątych)* (Łódź, 1993), 44; Piotr Hübner, *Polityka naukowa w Polsce w latach 1944–1953. Geneza systemu*, i (Wrocław, 1992), 402; *idem*, *Siła przeciw rozumowi... Losy Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności w latach 1939–1989* (Kraków, 1994), 112–16; *idem*, 'Polityka naukowa i struktury organizacyjne nauki w latach 1944–1989', in Leszek Zasztowt and Joanna Schiller-Walicka (eds.), *Historia nauki polskiej*, x: 1944–1989, pt. 2: *Instytucje* (Warszawa, 2015), 86.

Konarski, and Kazimierz Pułaski warrant the most praise, while the formidable modern history of Poland earned him the greatest recognition. In his research, Konopczyński followed established methodological patterns, based on extensive archival investigations at home and abroad. His impressive knowledge of primary sources, breadth of interests, and ability to combine analysis with synthesis made him a prominent figure in Polish historiography, unchallenged by any contemporaneous historian in the eyes of many.

During the first three years after his return to the Jagiellonian University in January 1945, the scholar examined students and gave monographic lectures on the ‘Polish political writers in the eighteenth century’, ‘Polish foreign policy from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century’, and ‘Frederick the Great and Poland’. For two years, he lectured in the methodology of history, devoting particular attention to the conduct, purposes, and means of historical research. He also taught history of Poland during the inter-war period, though Kazimierz Lepszy, his close collaborator in the editorial board of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, “implored” him not to.⁴ The lectures served as a basis for a textbook that the professor intended to publish through the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU), but President of the Academy, Kazimierz Nitsch, declined, citing doubts concerning the impartiality of the author.⁵

Concurrently with his scholarly work, Konopczyński conducted a seminar attended by numerous illustrious scholars of the post-war period.⁶ The seminar addressed a wide array of topics, ranging from the Middle Ages to contemporary history. To students asking him about the proper uses of the new method of historical materialism, he jokingly responded: “Having stated that, say, Sieniawska gave her housekeepers such and such an instruction, you need to add a passage on how already Engels had established that in the contemporaneous organisation of the state’s productive forces, landowners

⁴ Konopczyński Family Archive in Warsaw [hereinafter: ARKW], Władysław Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’ (unpubl. MS), notebook 158, n.p., entry for 25 May 1948.

⁵ Konopczyński Family Archive in Gliwice [hereinafter: ARKG], Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, Kraków, 9 March 1948; quoted from Halina Heitzmanowa, ‘Profesor Władysław Konopczyński 1939–1952’ (unpubl. MS), 6. The work in question appeared in print in 1995 as *Historia polityczna Polski 1914–1939*, with an introduction by Tomasz Wituch.

⁶ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 153, n.p., entry for 27–28 Feb. 1946.

of every sex and character disposed of the peasants in a despotic manner, and so forth. Afterwards, you can calmly continue expounding on your discoveries.”⁷

Neither did Konopczyński resign from dangerous cooperation with the underground Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Party), a political formation he had belonged to for thirty years.⁸ He wrote polemics for the clandestine weekly *Walka* (Struggle) under a pseudonym.⁹ Though he was fortunate to avoid arrest, he was questioned and closely followed by the Communist secret police.¹⁰ So closely, in fact, that he noted in his diary: “a dark fellow had been following me.”

On 15 February 1945 the scholar was elected president of the Commission of History of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. For him, the position ranked among the highest in historical circles, next to that of the editor of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* and the president of the Polish Historical Society. Upon accepting the post, he named the following as the most crucial tasks for history of Poland as a science:

1. the systematic collection of sources in transcript to replace those destroyed by the invaders, in order to create a new base for our historiography,
2. the saving and preservation of remnants (traces) of destroyed sources left in the hands of scholars or their inheritors,
3. the collecting of public papers of activists of the recent period,
4. the establishment – by way of questionnaires and revisions – of a minimal, but rational publishing plan, to the detriment of less urgent and temporary pursuits,
5. the creation of a historical workshop in Cracow as a place where older and younger scholars could use the manuscript collections of the Commission

⁷ Biblioteka Jagiellońska [Jagiellonian Library; hereinafter: BJ], MS Przyb. 146/90, Władysław Konopczyński to Wanda Brablecowa, Kraków, 25 Nov. 1945.

⁸ Stanisław Rymar’s attempt to legalise the National Party ended in failure. Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 152, n.p., entry for 13 October 1945. For more, see: Tomasz Biedroń, ‘Próby legalizacji Stronnictwa Narodowego w Polsce w latach 1945–1946’, *Studia Historyczne*, xxxii, 4 (1989), 597–619; Jacek Majchrowski, ‘Rymar Stanisław’, in PSB, xxxiii, 4 (139) (Kraków *et al.*, 1991–1992), 506–9.

⁹ Biblioteka Naukowa Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności i Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Kraków [Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and Polish Academy of Sciences Scientific Library; hereinafter: BN PAU–PAN], MS 7785, vol. 3, Materials for a biography of the members of Liga Narodowa (National League), collected by Józef Zieliński, fol. 152v.

¹⁰ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 158, n.p., entry for 19 July 1948.

and a reference library on the history of Poland, starting from 8–10 thousand volumes of primary and secondary sources. The workshop would serve as a place for the development of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*.¹¹

In composing this programme, he followed two major assumptions:

1. that history at the current stage of the nation's existence is more than ever – and certainly no less than in the nineteenth century – a foundation for our cultural independence,
2. that because of the war, history had suffered losses graver than any other branch of knowledge. Biology is still the same biology, language and literature were shaken, but not impoverished, social life was enriched by many new experiences, the physics of man had become clearer, but the destroyed archives and monuments are irreplaceable. The conditions of this research into the past have decidedly worsened.¹²

To implement his programme, Konopczyński sought financial support, premises, acceleration of the publication process, and access to Soviet archives. Under his direction, the Commission of History of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences convened twenty-seven times, compared to just twenty-five during the entire inter-war period.¹³

The professor presented his postulates for the organisation of historical research in Poland on the pages of scholarly journals, as well. He vehemently opposed “accusations levelled against Polish scholarship, of its conservatism, parochialism, outmodedness.” He believed that “conservatism consists in the belief that scholarship develops properly only when there is continuity and consistency. As we take a new turn, we should not forget our previous interests, other than those that no longer remain valid.”¹⁴ He claimed that

as the horizons of our historiography broaden, so should it deepen, but not according to a pre-determined pattern. No intelligent peasant will find solace in persistent stories of the exploitation his forefathers were subjected to by landowners in hundreds and thousands of manors. In general, the

¹¹ BJ, MS Przyb. 137/61, ‘Sprawozdanie pożegnalne ustępującego przewodniczącego Komisji Historycznej PAU Konopczyńskiego’, Kraków, 24 June 1949.

¹² BJ, MS Przyb. 137/61, Władysław Konopczyński, ‘Komisja Historyczna PAU czym być powinna a czym jest’, [1949].

¹³ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 153, n.p., entry for 17 March 1946.

¹⁴ *Idem*, ‘Zadania i potrzeby nauk humanistycznych w Polsce’, *Życie Nauki. Miesięcznik Naukoznawczy*, i, 2 (1946), 85.

question of social history is not so facile as to require merely a push of the one button of the dialectical method to turn all that is dark and complex into light and simplicity. It is not that easy. We are facing the same tedious archival research as before, only the directions and approaches should be adjusted to the demands of the moment.¹⁵

Konopczyński put these views forward in the conviction that the humanities “can luckily survive and thrive at a relatively low cost ..., so long as there are enough books, so long as there are publishing houses and means of travel, so long as their roots are not cut and restricted of air.”¹⁶ To the oft-repeated question “if sufficient grounds exist for demanding of our historiography a radical break with the past and the taking of a new road”, the Professor responded that

no such grounds exist. The nation – as opposed to the government – had been following its proper historical path; the historians, for their part, have achieved moderate success, searching for truth with ease and candour, without succumbing to any pre-determined world-view. Our motto should thus be to rebuild – and in part merely reconstruct – on old foundations, and partly from old materials. Corrections will be necessary, perhaps even significantly so, but without upheavals and breakneck turns.¹⁷

Rafał Stobiecki rightly notes that Konopczyński’s declaration

expressed in a very clear way the sentiments shared by a significant majority of professional historians tied to the pre-war structures of Polish historical studies (universities, PAU, various research institutes). This milieu stressed a key problem concerning the future of Polish history-writing: the need for maintaining continuity of the historiographic tradition based on the achievements of the inter-war period and the previous generations of Polish historians.¹⁸

In spite of a firm distrust of any change, Konopczyński’s views on the new methodology were far from unequivocal.¹⁹ He believed that

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 87.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 89.

¹⁷ *Idem*, ‘Zadania nauki historycznej w Polsce dzisiejszej’, *Nauka Polska: Jej Potrzeby, Organizacja i Rozwój*, xxv (1947), 155; Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem*, 55; Hübner, *Polityka naukowa*, 21–2.

¹⁸ Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem*, 56.

¹⁹ Konopczyński pointed to the psychological and interdisciplinary aspects of historical studies in ‘Zadania i potrzeby’, 88–9. For more, see Tomasz Ochowski,

historical materialism, whether orthodox Marxist – that is, rooted in the Hegelian dialectic – or revisionist, continues to have a lot to say to historians, including those from Poland, and they should not be deterred by the fact that its radical worshippers think of it as the key to understanding not only economic, but also moral-cultural questions. It seems clear that in some economic circumstances, among particular forms of production, certain ideological ‘superstructures’ could not have appeared, and this negative explanatory value will certainly always remain historical materialism’s virtue. It is a different matter whether the appearance of, say, the steam engine or white gas can explain the rise of liberalism in some countries and totalism in others. The crossing of opinions at this point may prove productive. In the worst case, the two sides will go their separate ways, content with their own one-sided protocols: the one will claim that materialism does not explain all, while the other states all the inexplicable surplus is nought.²⁰

A year after Konopczyński’s promotion in the Academy, he was put at the helm of the Cracow Division of the Polish Historical Society (the election took place on 22 June 1946).²¹ He took over from the recently departed, formidable historian of law Stanisław Kutrzeba.²² As Konopczyński maintained close ties with Kutrzeba since the First World War, the death of the latter on 7 January 1946 filled him with deep grief. In a letter to his friend Jan Rutkowski, an economic historian from Poznań, he wrote: “when Kutrzeba died, you instantly felt our forces in history depleted. What an engine he was! How much will we have to make up for with our dedication, determination, sense of responsibility, solidarity, to keep the Academy and the Historical Society moving forward at the same pace (not to mention material

‘O użyteczności i bezużyteczności psychologii w badaniach historycznych. Wybrane opinie historyków polskich od lat czterdziestych do dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku’, in Andrzej Wierzbicki (ed.), *Klio Polska. Studia i materiały z dziejów historiografii polskiej po II wojnie światowej*, i (Warszawa, 2004), 88–91.

²⁰ Konopczyński, ‘Zadania nauki historycznej’, 173. Cf. Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem*, 57.

²¹ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 153, n.p., entry for 22 June 1946.

²² *Idem*, ‘Człowiek drogowaskaz’, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, ii, 3 (20 Jan. 1946); Adam Vetulani, ‘Kutrzeba Stanisław’, in PSB, xvi, 2 (69) (Wrocław and Kraków, 1971), 314–18; Rita Majkowska, ‘Polska Akademia Umiejętności w życiu Stanisława Kutrzeby’, in *Stanisław Kutrzeba 1876–1946. Materiały z uroczystego posiedzenia PAU w dniu 24 VI 1996 roku* (Kraków, 1998), 63–78; Piotr Biliński, *Stanisław Kutrzeba (1876–1946). Biografia naukowa i polityczna* (Kraków, 2011).

resources). Today, everyone thinks that this or that one keeps track of a given undertaking. Keeping track will not do; we need a concerted effort, and that is not very Polish.”²³

In spite of the enormous respect he received in historical circles, Konopczyński's position was weakened not so much by the independence of his views, as by a personal enmity on the part of Minister Skrzyszewski.²⁴ Konopczyński watched in horror as the totalitarian system he openly despised and vehemently criticised spread through Poland. Pressed to compromise and show deference toward the Communist dignitaries, he encapsulated his views in a famous statement during a scholarly conference in the lecture hall of the Jagiellonian University on 26 January 1946: “We hear demands that science should serve everyday life. Sure, may it serve in any capacity, may it enlighten. But may it never submit.”²⁵

The persecution of Konopczyński as a “zoological anti-Semite” began in the Spring of 1947. The problem of anti-Semitism was raised by Skrzyszewski and used as a pretext to remove the Professor from all positions.²⁶ Of note at this juncture is the opinion of one of Konopczyński's students, Henryk Barycz, who stated that “a zoological anti-Semite – as some sought to brand him after the war, with many unpleasant and tragic consequences for himself – he absolutely was not. He taught and promoted Jewish students, and his most accomplished pupil, whom he fiercely defended against his political

²³ Biblioteka Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk [Poznań Society of Friends of Sciences Library], MS 1515, fol. 114, Władysław Konopczyński to Jan Rutkowski, Kraków, 11 Feb. 1946.

²⁴ It should be noted that Skrzyszewski's attitude toward Konopczyński must have been affected by the Minister's pre-war conflict with Tadeusz Bielecki. Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 95, n.p., entry for 25 Sept. 1925: “Sobieski presses me about the Jews and St[anisław] Grabski, Bielecki about academic fees and some Communist called Skrzyszewski, who is about to become assistant professor of philosophy.” *Ibidem*, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 10 Jan. 1950: “From that point on, Skrzyszewski was under the misapprehension that I was the one who attacked him.”

²⁵ *Idem*, ‘Autobiografia’, ed. by Andrzej Biernacki, *Nauka Polska: Jej Potrzeby, Organizacja i Rozwój*, i (xxvi) (1992), 118; *idem*, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 152, n.p., entry for 26 Jan. 1946. The same statement, in a somewhat edited form, can be found on the Professor's tombstone.

²⁶ Piotr Hübner, ‘Represje polityczne – Władysław Konopczyński’, in *idem*, *Zwierciadło nauki. Mała encyklopedia polskiej nauki akademickiej* (Kraków, 2013), 585–8.

allies at habilitation, was Józef Feldman.”²⁷ At the news of the accusation of anti-Semitism, Kazimierz Tymieniecki advised Konopczyński to take to the press to publicise the story of how he hid a Jewish family in his rural estate at Młynik under Nazi occupation.²⁸

The attack began with the removal of Konopczyński from the seat of president of the Polish Historical Society. Initially, the scholar was allowed to partake freely in the meetings of the Cracow Division of the PTH due to the fact that, in the Provisional Government of National Unity, the position of Minister of Education was given to Czesław Wycech of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People’s Party, thereafter PSL), while Skrzyszewski received the nomination as an ambassador in Paris, where he would spend two years. In the Winter of 1947 president of PTH Ludwik Kolankowski decided to call a General Assembly of Delegates for 12 April in the centrally located city of Łódź. The meeting was to be preceded by a session of the General Board of PTH.²⁹ Historians from Cracow opposed the motion; in a letter to Kolankowski, Konopczyński seriously questioned why the General Board and the General Assembly should take place in the provincial Łódź rather than Cracow.³⁰ In response, Kolankowski claimed that the choice was motivated solely by the central position of the city, while Cracow remained the most suitable location for the seat of the Society. He also believed that the organisation should be headed by a native of

²⁷ Henryk Barycz, ‘Kilka wspomnień z lat akademickich i udziału w pracach koła historyków studentów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne*, 25 (1968), 117.

²⁸ ARKG, Kazimierz Tymieniecki to Władysław Konopczyński, Poznań, 14 July 1947 (MS): “I think that a press statement by Mrs. Widerszalowa (the mother) concerning the aid and safety received during occupation from the respectable Sir and Madam would have the desired effect.” The accusation of anti-Semitism related to a motion put forward by Konopczyński during a session of the Education Commission of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland in January 1923, concerning the introduction of *numerus clausus* at universities. On the other hand, in the 1930s Konopczyński sought a professorial nomination for Józef Feldman, a historian of Jewish origin, opposed the *numerus nullus*, and showed no discrimination based on origin toward his students.

²⁹ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 15 Feb. 1947.

³⁰ Archiwum Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa [Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences; hereinafter: APAN], PTH I-3, sign. 10, Władysław Konopczyński to Ludwik Kolankowski, [19 Feb. 1947]; Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 19 Feb. 1947.

Cracow, possibly Konopczyński or Franciszek Bujak.³¹ The Professor did not share Kolankowski's convictions; in his view, the post of president of PTH should be given to either Bujak, the pre-war president, or the ancient historian Ludwik Piotrowicz. As contemporary scholar Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski rightly observes, the conflict had political undertones: by naming Łódź as the location for the meetings, the Communist authorities sought to limit the influence of the conservative Cracow milieu. Party-aligned historians found allies among the pupils of Marceli Handelsman, gathered around Tadeusz Manteuffel, who sought to relocate the seat of the General Board of PTH to Warsaw.³² It should be noted that the Communists, knowing of the pre-war rivalry between scholars from Warsaw and Cracow, deftly exploited the long-standing enmities to play one group against the other.

Under pressure from historians from Poznań and Warsaw, who threatened to force through a change in the charter while arguing for an immediate "advance in the matters of the Society" and opposing any decisions taken "behind president Kolankowski's back", the resistance of their colleagues from Cracow broke, and an agreement was reached to convene the General Assembly of Delegates in Łódź.³³ The preceding meeting of the General Board of the PTH was devoted to a discussion of candidacies for the new president. Kolankowski pointed out that, "according to the charter, Cracow is the seat of the General Board of the Society, so we look forward to hearing from the representatives of that circle." Meanwhile, Manteuffel "stated that the General Board of the Society of Enthusiasts of History (Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii) in Warsaw passed a motion in support of a change in PTH's charter in the direction of moving the seat of the Society to Warsaw, but the case is made more complex by the fact that a fitting candidate for presidency is lacking." In turn, Skalkowski proposed that "the change of the charter be prepared for the next

³¹ APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 10, Ludwik Kolankowski to Władysław Konopczyński, Kraków, 28 Feb. 1947.

³² Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne w latach 1945–1958. Zarys dziejów* (Toruń, 2009), 20. Similar views were expressed by Konopczyński: *idem*, 'Dziennik', notebook 155, n.p., entry for 3 March 1947.

³³ ARKG, Tadeusz Manteuffel to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 30 March 1947; Gerard Labuda to Konopczyński, Poznań, 9 April 1947 (MS). See also Konopczyński, 'Dziennik', notebook 155, n.p., entries for 27 March 1947 and 5 April 1947.

General Assembly of the Society and the current Board be temporarily kept in office.” Eventually, it was decided that new leadership would be elected to finally do away with the temporariness.³⁴ Skałkowski put forward Bujak and Dąbrowski as candidates, while Kolankowski recommended Konopczyński.

Voting took place during the General Assembly of Delegates; Konopczyński was elected president, having received twenty-seven votes with three abstentions and one vote for Władysław Semkowicz.³⁵ Konopczyński recorded that “Kolankowski ceded leadership immediately after he had me elected.”³⁶ The result of the election dismayed Karol Maleczyński, a medieval historian from Wrocław, who demanded “with inconsiderate haste” that another General Assembly of Delegates be called. Declaring his position at an open session of the PTH, the new president named repossession of assets remaining in Lviv as a key problem.³⁷ Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski rightly concludes that the election of Konopczyński as president of PTH served to demonstrate the independence of the historical fraternity and assert its right to pursue traditional methods of research.³⁸

The new president attended to his duties with vigour. He called a meeting of the General Board for 23 April 1947 in Cracow, where he pushed through the candidacies of Stefan Inglot for secretary general, Tadeusz Solski for treasurer, Jan Dąbrowski for delegate for foreign relations, and Roman Grodecki and Kazimierz Lepszy for editors of *Kwartalnik Historyczny*. Then, the Board discussed the International Committee of Historical Studies’ invitation for a delegation of the PTH to take part in the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of the Spring of Nations in Paris, and obliged the president to travel to Warsaw to seek government funding for future activities.³⁹ Though most of his motions were passed, Konopczyński felt deeply dissatisfied with the progress of the meeting. In his diary, he mentioned his failure

³⁴ The three quotes from ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego PTH, Łódź 12 IV 1947 r.’ (APAN, PTH, wyk. [list] 919, sign. 35).

³⁵ APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 15, ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Walnego Zgromadzenia Delegatów PTH, Łódź 12 IV 1947 r.’

³⁶ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 12 April 1947.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 13 April 1947.

³⁸ Rutkowski, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne*, 21.

³⁹ APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 35, ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego PTH, Kraków, 23 IV 1947 r.’

to ensure changes in the charter. Upon returning home, his outlook became so bleak he considered resigning from his function.⁴⁰

At the meeting of the General Board on 1 May 1947 Konopczyński – having consulted Inglot and Solski – addressed the dire financial straits of the Society (a shortage of some 2.5 million zlotys) and informed those present that he had asked Minister Skrzyszewski for an audience.⁴¹ Impatient for a reply, he wrote to Deputy Minister Henryk Jabłoński, stating that, as a historian, he did not require any explanation as to the value of the PTH and its scholarly imprint, the *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, and that funding was necessary to keep them afloat. In addition, he informed of the invitation extended to the Society to take part in an international conference in Paris, devoted to the centenary of the Spring of Nations. He warned that “it would be a great and perhaps irrecoverable loss to Polish science if our representatives are absent from the session”, and finally implored the addressee to ask the Minister for a swift response to the previous letter.⁴² He also turned to vice-president of the PTH Władysław Tomkiewicz, pinning his hopes on the latter’s “peculiar ability to get things done with the authorities.”⁴³ Though Tadeusz Manteuffel’s attitude toward the new leadership of the Society was perfectly clear to Konopczyński, the former was still urgently asked to “obtain information from the ministry if and when an audience can be arranged.” He also demanded help in his pursuit of a ministerial grant to cover the debts and publication costs of *Kwartalnik Historyczny*.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 23 April 1947.

⁴¹ APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 35, ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego PTH, Kraków, 1 V 1947 r.’ See also APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 10, Władysław Konopczyński to Stanisław Skrzyszewski, Kraków, 26 April 1947.

⁴² APAN, MS III 280, j.a. 143, fol. 40, Władysław Konopczyński to Henryk Jabłoński, Kraków, 5 May 1947 (copy). Jabłoński only responded after three months, by which time the situation was already resolved – Czech scholar Ottokar Odložilík took up a post in the secretariat of the International Committee of Historical Sciences in Paris. See: ARKG, Henryk Jabłoński to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 9 Aug. 1947 (MS); Wiesław Bieńkowski, ‘Korespondencja Władysława Konopczyńskiego z Mieczysławem Haimanem z lat 1931–1947’, *Rocznik Biblioteki Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Krakowie*, xliv (1999), 437.

⁴³ APAN, MS III 280, j.a. 143, fol. 39, Władysław Konopczyński to Władysław Tomkiewicz, Kraków, 5 May 1947.

⁴⁴ APAN, MS III 192, j.a. 128, fol. 171, Władysław Konopczyński to Tadeusz Manteuffel, Kraków, 5 May 1947.

The issue was resolved during an audience Skrzyszewski gave to delegates of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Jan Dąbrowski and Tadeusz Kowalski. Dąbrowski relayed the conversation to Konopczyński through Helena Waniczówna-Wereszycka. She claimed that Skrzyszewski accused the scholar of “zoological anti-Semitism.”⁴⁵ In May 1947 Konopczyński was forced to resign as president of the PTH – in his own words, “Skrzyszewski denied me a personal hearing and refused any financial aid to the Society so long as it was led by a ‘zoological anti-Semite’. Any intelligent person knew this to be nonsense, but the actual offence occurred elsewhere: the government circles remembered my words spoken at a scholarly conference in the lecture hall of the Jagiellonian University on 26 January 1946.”⁴⁶

Still, the heavy and stigmatising charge of anti-Semitism must have been a hurtful blow to the scholar. Perhaps it was the sense of injustice at the accusation, exacerbated by the constant persecution that caused the Professor to suffer an acute heart attack on the night of 19/20 May.⁴⁷ Defeated and brought down by angina pectoris, the scholar passed his duties over to vice-president Stanisław Łempicki, an accomplished specialist in the history of Polish culture.⁴⁸ The General Board of the PTH accepted Konopczyński’s resignation on 14 June 1947. At Skałkowski’s behest, a motion was passed to send the Professor a letter of thanks for his contributions.⁴⁹ Then, Tomkiewicz described his visit to the Ministry of Education, during which he was promised that the question of financial support for the PTH will be resolved immediately after the election of new leadership for the Society. During the same session, the question of changes in the charter was also addressed. After a lengthy discussion, it was decided by eight votes to none, with three abstentions, that Warsaw should be recommended to the General Assembly as a new seat for the PTH.

⁴⁵ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 11 May 1947.

⁴⁶ Archiwum Rostworowskich, Kraków [Rostworowski Family Archive; hereinafter: ARK], Władysław Konopczyński to Kazimierz Nitsch, [1952] (copy).

⁴⁷ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 155, n.p., entry for 19–20 May 1947.

⁴⁸ APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 10, Władysław Konopczyński to Stanisław Łempicki, Kraków, 9 June 1947.

⁴⁹ The letter of thanks was only dispatched toward the end of September. See Jan Dąbrowski to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 20 Sept. 1947 (APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 10).

Finally, Manteuffel offered a recommendation for Dąbrowski as the next president of the Society.⁵⁰

On 15 June 1947 the General Assembly of Delegates approved Jan Dąbrowski's candidacy for president of the PTH (thirty-nine votes for, nine abstentions, one vote for Jan Rutkowski) and passed the motion for the moving of the seat of PTH from Cracow to Warsaw.⁵¹ During another session of the General Board, which took place in the afternoon, the members demanded that the president establish ties with the Ministry of Education.⁵² Following his election, Dąbrowski visited Konopczyński to give an account of the meeting. "He left relieved in his presidency when I wished him and the Society best of luck", the scholar recounts.⁵³

With Dąbrowski elected, relations between the Society and the Ministry improved. On 3 July 1947 the new leadership of the PTH was approved by the Vice-Minister of education Eugenia Krassowska, who promised financial aid.⁵⁴ Dąbrowski's deference toward the authorities was the result of a breakdown he suffered during an investigation in the Cracow trial of the activists of the PSL and the underground Freedom and Independence Organization (WiN). The records of the Cracow secret police state that he showed a "positive attitude toward the current reality" during interrogation and numbered among the "smartest professors of the UJ".⁵⁵ In a notebook entry dated 10 October 1947 Skrzyszewski observed with more than a hint of irony that "Dąbrowski was terrified at being interrogated for a number of hours in the night by the Security Department as part of the WiN case in Cracow. (Karol Buczek or some such named him as witness.) He bent like a folding knife and professed complete loyalty." Dąbrowski's intimidation by the security police played into

⁵⁰ APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 35, 'Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego PTH, Kraków 14 VI 1947 r.'

⁵¹ APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 15, 'Protokół z posiedzenia Walnego Zgromadzenia Delegatów PTH, Kraków, 15 VI 1947 r.'

⁵² APAN, PTH, wyk. 919, sign. 35, 'Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego PTH, Kraków, 15 VI 1947 r.'

⁵³ Konopczyński, 'Dziennik', notebook 156, n.p., entry for 19 June 1947.

⁵⁴ APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 10, 'Sprawozdanie z audycji prezydium PTH u wice-minister Eugenii Krasowskiej, Kraków, 3 VII 1947 r.'

⁵⁵ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Kraków [Institute of National Remembrance Archive; hereinafter: AIPN], sign. 010/4191, vol. 2, fol. 54, 96.

the hands of the Minister, allowing him to impose his own conditions when time came to initiate cooperation. Skrzyszewski informed Dąbrowski that he would “treat him according to his conduct; for now – I told him – he has my trust and should work diligently. He was the happiest man alive.”⁵⁶ Broken by dramatic experiences, Dąbrowski would follow the commands of the authorities for fear of repression.

The Minister used Dąbrowski not only to remove Konopczyński from the PTH, but also to ensure that the Conference of Scholarly Societies and Institutions Conducting Historical Research, organised “under the auspices of PAU, would resign from its current direction and that Konopczyński would be replaced with Grodecki.”⁵⁷ In order to fulfil the Minister’s requirements, Dąbrowski took Szafer along to visit the scholar’s apartment to relay “the conversation he had with Skrzyszewski on the way back from Białowieża. The Minister showed him an invitation to the conference and erupted in fury upon seeing the name listed within: ‘Konopczyński convenes the first post-war meeting of historians! This is an act of provocation for the government! The government can withdraw all support for the Academy!’” The Professor recounts how, having related the tale, “both began to pressure me to resign as host and withdraw my scheduled talk on collections. Dąbrowski offered to relay my concessions to Warsaw. I said, ‘Ask them if they are going to arrest me.’”⁵⁸ Having received a response in the affirmative, the scholar bowed to the pressure, resigning from his role as host and withdrawing the planned talk. However, he did not hide his indignation at the conduct of the Ministry or the fact that, during the conference, he “was made to cower in the penultimate row from the anger of the Minister.”⁵⁹

Konopczyński was well aware of the compliance of his former colleague; in his diary, he noted that the UB (political police) pressured Dąbrowski into following the example of Kazimierz Piwarski, who

⁵⁶ Both quotations from Chmielewski, *Stanisław Skrzyszewski*, 122.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*; ‘Protokół Konferencji Towarzystw i Instytucji Naukowych Uprawiających Badania Historyczne, zorganizowanej przez Komisję Historyczną PAU 26–27 X 1947 r. w Krakowie’, *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej PAU*, ser. 2, iv, 4 (1948).

⁵⁸ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 156, n.p., entry for 7 Oct. 1947.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, ‘Autobiografia’, 116; *idem*, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 156, n.p., entry for 26 Oct. 1947.

tied his scholarly fortunes to the new authorities.⁶⁰ Though he had no evidence, Konopczyński believed that the historian must have signed ‘some pact with the devil’ while interrogated by security policemen – otherwise, he would not have been set free.⁶¹ According to Kazimierz Lepszy, the case also involved the ‘historian of choice’ of the Communist authorities, Karol Maleczyński, who insisted that Konopczyński be pressured into resigning as host of the event since “Warsaw is ready to boycott the conference because of that unlikeable person.” Lepszy lamented the fact that “Piwarski and Dąbrowski give free rein” to Maleczyński and oppose the conference because they had not called it. He advised that Konopczyński “push [Dąbrowski] against the wall” and demand that he pledged to do nothing to hurt the conference.⁶² The letter indicates that Lepszy, still loyal to Konopczyński at the time, was unaware of Dąbrowski’s hypocrisy.

The authorities exhibited the same hard-line approach during the 7th Congress of Polish Historians in Wrocław in 1948, which Konopczyński chose to miss, seeing it as a political rather than scholarly event. During the proceedings, it became evident that the Communist authorities intended to enforce the ideological re-education of the historians. Orthodox Marxism reigned supreme in speeches delivered by Żanna Kormanowa, who attacked the presentations of Roman Lutman and Stefan Inglot.⁶³ In a letter to the members of the Organising Committee, Konopczyński wrote: “I received news from different parts describing the views of my scholarly activities espoused by figures of influence in the state. Thus, not wishing to spoil the meeting with an all-too-lively defence of my position, I decided against travelling to Wrocław, to devote the time I would have expended on the meeting to other productive endeavours.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Idem*, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 156, n.p., entry for 18 Sept. 1947. The entry alludes to Kazimierz Piwarski’s ties to the new government.

⁶¹ Oral account of Wanda Mrozowska, Konopczyński’s daughter, Gliwice, 29 April 1998, recording owned by the author. Materials from the collections of the IPN Archive in Cracow do not offer an unequivocal confirmation of the account.

⁶² The three quotes come from ARKG, Kazimierz Lepszy to Władysław Konopczyński, [Aug. 1947] (MS).

⁶³ For more, see Tadeusz P. Rutkowski (ed.), *Powszechne Zjazdy Historyków Polskich w Polsce Ludowej. Dokumenty i materiały* (Toruń, 2014), 123.

⁶⁴ APAN, PTH I-3, sign. 28, fol. 318, Władysław Konopczyński to Stanisław Herbst and Aleksander Gieysztor, Kraków, 12 Sept. 1948.

Other historians disliked by those in power also missed the congress.⁶⁵ Of the elder professors, only Franciszek Bujak and Ludwik Kolankowski took part, which Konopczyński held against them.⁶⁶ Even before the congress, the scholar decided to resign from the post of president of the Cracow Division of the PTH. He felt discouraged from working for the local circle of historians and increasingly isolated.⁶⁷ He handed in his resignation on 20 May 1948.⁶⁸ His successor, Kazimierz Piwarski, was the co-founder of the Marxist Association of Historians.⁶⁹

The last scholarly institution that allowed Konopczyński to give talks was the critical section of the Cracow Division of the PTH, of which he was the founder. In October 1950, under pressure from party-aligned historians – particularly Józef Garbacik – the Board of the Cracow Division of the PTH closed the critical section. Prior to that, Konopczyński was visited by Kazimierz Lepszy and Henryk Mościcki, who announced that “PZPR [Polish United Workers’ Party] indicated that the Cracow Division of the PTH requires ideological oversight and Konopczyński had to be neutralised.”⁷⁰ The Professor informed his visitors that he would not resign of his own accord and that the authorities would have to close the section. He discussed the details of this ‘Sonderaktion Konopczyński’ in letters to Skałkowski and Czapliński, who distanced themselves from Mościcki and Lepszy.⁷¹ Such was the sorry end of the scholar’s involvement with the PTH.

In 1950, after three years at the helm of the PTH, Dąbrowski was replaced by Manteuffel. Assessing the situation inside the Society after his departure, the Professor wrote: “Under Manteuffel’s name, Polish historians are mustered by Roman Werfel, Prof. Żanna Kormanowa, and instructors brought over from the east. This will continue until someone smart and fearsome tells them authoritatively, as linguists were told, that they are committing Talmudism and babbling

⁶⁵ For more on the meeting, see: Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem*, 93–8.

⁶⁶ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 159, n.p., entry for 23 Sept. 1948.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, notebook 158, n.p., entry for 12 May 1948.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, entry for 20 May 1948.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, entry for 25 May 1948.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, notebook 163, entry for 2 Oct. 1950.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, entry for 11 Nov. 1950; Władysław Konopczyński to Adam Skałkowski, [1950].

nonsense.”⁷² The phrase “smart and fearsome” refers to Joseph Stalin, whose notorious then-recent publication entitled *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (1950) lambasted the dogmatism of Marxist linguists from the school of Nikolai Yakovlevitch Marr, branding them as “Scholastics” and “Talmudists”. In this context, the term ‘Talmudism’ is not, as has been suspected, an echo of the “zoological anti-Semitism” Konopczyński was accused of, but rather a conscious invocation of the language used in Stalin’s aforementioned work. The reference to Stalin’s views perfectly illustrates the ailing Konopczyński’s tendency to accept certain aspects of historical materialism.

Throughout his thirty-year involvement in the PTH, Konopczyński was the *spiritus movens* of the organization. He breathed life into the rigid Cracow Division and inspired members to conduct group research. As the Professor suffered his personal drama, the Society itself was beset by a crisis, turning from an independent entity into a tool for the use of a totalitarian system. Konopczyński’s withdrawal condemned the idea of independent historical research and free association among Polish historians to failure.

In reaction to his critique of the 7th Congress of Polish Historians in Wrocław, and in view of the fact that he had reached retirement age (65 years), Vice-Minister of Education Eugenia Krasowska removed Konopczyński from active duty on 31 October 1948. The scholar learned of the decision in the staircase of the Academy, upon meeting Zdzisław Jachimecki, who asked him: “Władziu, is it true?” ‘What, then?’ ‘That you’re retired.’”⁷³ Members of the Board of the Department of Humanities of the Jagiellonian University intended to hand leadership over to Kazimierz Lepszy; Konopczyński held vain hopes of promoting Władysław Pocięcha, the author of a monumental work on Queen Bona,⁷⁴ as his successor.⁷⁵ In a letter to his daughter Halina, he stressed that “the man may know the fifty-year period of his speciality like no one else. But he’s getting on a bit and won’t leave

⁷² Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Poznańskiego [Poznań University Library; hereinafter: BUP], MS 36 IV, fol. 762, Władysław Konopczyński to Kazimierz Nitsch, [1952].

⁷³ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 159, n.p., entry for 23 Oct. 1948.

⁷⁴ Bona Sforza (1494–1557), second wife of the Polish king Sigismund I.

⁷⁵ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 159, entries for 27 Oct. and 20 Dec. 1948; *idem*, ‘Pięćdziesiąt lat polskiej historiografii powojennej’, *Przegląd Powszechny*, 229, 3 (1950), 215.

the embraces of Queen Bona nor find favour with the youth.”⁷⁶ Much to his surprise, his position was taken over by Celina Bobińska, who had been expelled to Cracow following the rift between her husband, Władysław Wolski, and Bolesław Bierut.

Konopczyński devoted his final lecture to the creator of the Cracow school of history, Józef Szujski. The lecture hall was filled to the brim with students and schoolchildren who brought flowers for the Professor.⁷⁷ A few days before, during an information meeting of the Historians’ Circle which he curated, he looked at the plaque commemorating Sonderaktion Krakau and stated:

But in all this you must retain the independence of spirit, the one professors of the UJ died for at Sachsenhausen, and seek the truth, pursue the truth. Do not believe there is any class truth – there are only class sins that must be atoned. Truth is singular. They will tell you of their new method, of *lux ex Oriente*. Judge for yourselves the value of current historiography – backed by hundreds of thousands of volumes, and yet denied the name of history – against that of the Marxist historiography we are yet to see appear.⁷⁸

The Cracow scholar’s deportment invited critique from a Soviet comrade, Ivan Ivanovich Udaltsov, who concluded that

Konopczyński, an elderly man, stands in clear opposition to democratic Poland. For instance, he failed to appear at the Congress of Polish Historians, even though his talk was in the programme, because, as he explained in a private letter, “he already knows what this congress will end in.” In his time, Konopczyński was tied to the Polish underground; he is familiar to those people and has maintained these relations. Thus, he is a central figure for the opponents of the struggle that is going to be waged by a group of Marxist historians.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, Kraków, 8 Dec. 1947; quoted from Heitzmanowa, ‘Profesor Władysław Konopczyński’, 5.

⁷⁷ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 159, n.p., entry for 29 Oct. 1948.

⁷⁸ Quoted from Jan Małecki, ‘Ułomki wspomnień lat 1945–1950’, in Krzysztof Baczkowski (ed.), *Dzieje Koła Naukowego Historyków Studentów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1892–1992. Wspomnienia seniorów* (Kraków, 1992), 135.

⁷⁹ ‘Stenogram wspólnego posiedzenia Sekcji Historycznej Wszeczwiązkowego Towarzystwa Kontaktów Kulturalnych i Sekcji Naukowej Komitetu Słowińskiego, 3 XI 1948 r.’; quoted from Zbigniew Romek, ‘Materiały źródłowe’, in Wierzbicki (ed.), *Klio Polska*, i, 207–8. See also Jan Szumski, *Polityka a historia. ZSRR wobec nauki historycznej w Polsce w latach 1945–1964* (Warszawa, 2016).

Based on these assumptions, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland engaged in the decisive, ostentatious fight with Konopczyński that would serve as a warning for other 'defiant ones'.

The repression of the scholar culminated in his removal from the post of editor-in-chief of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*. The crisis was inspired by the Communist authorities in May 1949. As a pretext, the censors withheld the profile of Feliks Dzierżyński (Felix Dzerzhinsky), in which the editors disclosed the religious fervour he was consumed with in his youth and described him as an unstable neuroasthenic. Breaking a taboo imposed by the dominant stratum, Helena Waniczkówna-Wereszycka wrote: "Dzierżyński left the impression of a person neglectful in his clothing, nervous, constantly biting his nails, dependent on Russian ideology and literature for his thinking and argumentation."⁸⁰

The progress of the conflict was described by the Professor himself in a memorandum to the leadership of the Academy, in which he stated that the profile was originally ordered in 1939 with Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski.⁸¹ After the war, Konopczyński decided that the article was no longer suited to the contemporary political situation and requested a new version from the Institute of National Memory, an entity of the Praesidium of the Council of Ministers, which failed to provide one. In these circumstances, Helena Waniczkówna-Wereszycka produced the profile in the name of the editorial board, to which "the Cracow Office of Control of the Press decided that Dzierżyński's profile did not even belong in the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*." Konopczyński also noted that this attack on the editors of the dictionary occurred at a time when historical circles were teeming with "behind-the-scenes campaigns supposedly instigated by the dominant political forces of the country. These campaign do not shirk from common lies."⁸² One historian from Warsaw spread the rumour that Konopczyński spoke ill of the political situation in Poland while in Sweden, criticised the censorship, and used an article on the wartime tragedy of Polish historiography – published in *Historisk Tidskrift* in 1948 –

⁸⁰ BJ, MS Przyb. 81/61.

⁸¹ Anna Prokopiak-Lewandowska, *Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski (1899–1962). Życie i dzieła* (Warszawa and Bełchatów, 2012).

⁸² Quotes from Archiwum Nauki Polskiej Akademii Nauk i Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, Kraków [Polish Academy of Sciences and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences Science Archive; hereinafter: AN PAN-PAU], PAU, KSG 564/49.

to accuse the Red Army of destroying Polish archives and libraries.⁸³ Konopczyński promptly commissioned a Polish translation of the text, which allowed the leadership of PAU to dismiss the accusations as unfounded, but the campaign of slander did not abate.⁸⁴

Secret talks between Minister Skrzyszewski, Jan Dąbrowski, and Władysław Heinrich, along with the threat of a withdrawal of funding for publications, led to a dramatic meeting on 17 May 1949 between president Kazimierz Nitsch, Adam Krzyżanowski, and Konopczyński.⁸⁵ Afterwards, the scholar tendered a written resignation from the posts of editor of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* and president of the Historical Commission of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.⁸⁶ “I resign for reasons beyond my influence, at the behest of one of the political parties”, he firmly stressed.⁸⁷ The Professor learned of the decision to have him removed from all posts already a week before from Władysław Szafer, who promised “that if I was removed from the PAU, he would go, too.”⁸⁸ In a conversation with Dąbrowski, Konopczyński pleaded again: “Ask them, if they are going to arrest me.”⁸⁹ With the threat of arrest confirmed, the scholar abandoned all posts immediately, quite to the surprise of the unprepared Kazimierz Nitsch.⁹⁰ Asked by Konopczyński why he did not resign from his function in protest, Nitsch responded: “And who will replace me? Lehr-Spławiński? Spławiński and Dąbrowski? That would have been a complete mess.”⁹¹

On 24 June 1949 the Commission of History of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences gathered for a farewell meeting, during which Roman Grodecki briefly expressed his gratitude to Konopczyński for his work as president. The election of his successor took place next in a secret ballot, with Grodecki designated as president, and Dąbrowski and Piwarski as his deputies.⁹² The latter two were particularly to

⁸³ Oral account of Wanda Mrozowska, Gliwice, 29 April 1998. The author confirmed this information in conversations with Małecki and Hübner.

⁸⁴ AN PAN-PAU, PAU, KSG 564/49.

⁸⁵ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 160, n.p., entry for 17 May 1949.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, entry for 18 May 1949.

⁸⁷ AN PAN-PAU, PAU, KSG 564/49.

⁸⁸ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 160, n.p., entry for 8 May 1949.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, entry for 9 May 1949.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, entry for 17 May 1949.

⁹¹ Konopczyński, ‘Profesor Jan Dąbrowski’, 11.

⁹² *Idem*, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 160, n.p., entry for 24 June 1949.

the liking of the current government; Dąbrowski was known for his loyalism, while Piwarski was a member of the Voivodship Committee of the PZPR and co-founder of the Marxist Association of Historians.

Immediately before his official resignation as the editor of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, Konopczyński summoned all collaborators to his office and informed them of his decision behind closed doors.⁹³ At a special meeting on 20 May 1949, the board of the Academy regretfully accepted his resignation, thanking him for many years of work in the position. In his place, temporary editors were installed – professors Aleksander Birkenmajer, Juliusz Kleiner, and Henryk Mościcki.⁹⁴

However, the personnel changes seemed insufficient to the authorities, who were preparing to terminate the dictionary. Persecution in the press began with an article entitled ‘The printed organ of the *endecja* [national democrats]’, published in *Kuźnica* on 21 August 1949. The author, signed “grz”, unscrupulously slandered Konopczyński and his oeuvre, stating:

For all the undeniable value of the entire work, a number of entries in the dictionary are harmful, regressive, and tendentious. Particularly tendentious are the profiles of clergymen, nationalists supposedly tackled to ward off tendentiousness, and progressive activists. The general angle of the dictionary, the direction taken by its editor-in-chief, is harmfully and incomprehensibly anachronistic. Władysław Konopczyński’s tireless efforts do not counterbalance the pernicious effect of his political and social attitudes.⁹⁵

The Professor knew perfectly well who hid behind the acronym; in one of his letters, he asserts: “In the Spring of 1949 Minister Skrzyszewski decided to destroy the dictionary. Perhaps he did not close the publishing house, but he ordered that the editor be removed on the basis of a silly article by Konstanty Grzybowski, which I was prevented from replying to by the censors.” Assessing the conduct of scholarly elites in Poland, Konopczyński wrote:

I wasn’t particularly affected by Minister Skrzyszewski’s campaign of extermination. I have worked and continue to work no worse than I did prior to my resignation. Material losses are nothing compared to the moral thrashing my more kindly treated – or less persecuted – colleagues are

⁹³ *Ibidem*, entry for 10 May 1949.

⁹⁴ AN PAN-PAU, PAU, KSG 546/49.

⁹⁵ *Kuźnica*, 33 (21 Aug. 1949).

made to suffer. I may not even have lived until seventy if I was made to lecture to auditoriums polluted by informants or plead with censors at the office of control of the press. Meanwhile, all those dismissals and ejections, starting with the crisis at PTH, the harassment, proscriptions, groundless accusations, hurt not my own person, but the dignity of Polish scholarship and the spiritual energy of the entities that should have reacted to the assaults, but didn't, constantly hiding behind the same sacrificial lamb. *Hoc fonte derivata clades*. This degradation of our historiography will not be easily made up for or forgotten.⁹⁶

Konopczyński was fiercely and remorselessly attacked from all sides using slander. In April 1950 the Marxist scholar Celina Bobińska published an article entitled "Toward a breakthrough in historical studies" on the pages of *Nowa Kultura*, in which she accused the Professor of representing "a radically fideist worldview", whose form "could serve as a handy source material for the study of reactionary philosophy of history, of the class hypocrisy of bourgeois objectivism." The Professor's successor believed that Konopczyński's works "reek of narrow-minded clericalism, which turns his articles into a denigration of the freedom of thought, scepticism, and anti-clericalism of Polish Enlightenment." In her view, the widely renowned scholar was an intellectually limited "obscurantist".⁹⁷ The Professor reacted by stating that Bobińska "bombed me to the ground, but the bombs were filled with perfume."⁹⁸ Unable to respond to the charges on the pages of *Nowa Kultura*, the scholar wrote a deeply sarcastic letter to the author, in which he assured her that

all my libels of any size are combated with commendable diligence by the Office of Control of the Press, while scholarly institutions such as the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences or the Polish Historical Society adjust to this tendency. In the old times, we would still have been able to converse, but *Nowa Kultura* rules out such discussions. Thus I can do little more than to thank you for taking the time to look through a few of my articles and remind the readers of my existence at a time when I am seldom allowed to address them.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ ARK, Władysław Konopczyński to Kazimierz Nitsch [1952] (copy).

⁹⁷ Celina Bobińska, 'O przełom w nauce historycznej. Na marginesie narady historyków-marksistów', *Nowa Kultura*, i, 2 (9 IV 1950).

⁹⁸ Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, [no place], 6 May 1950; quoted from Heitzmanowa, 'Profesor Władysław Konopczyński', 10.

⁹⁹ BUP, MS 36 IV, fol. 761, Władysław Konopczyński to Celina Bobińska, Kraków, April 1950 (copy).

Konopczyński sent copies of the letter to Adam Skałkowski, Karol Górski, and Emil Kipa, who were also attacked by Bobińska.¹⁰⁰

In 1951, at the 1st Congress of Polish Science convened under the patronage of President Bolesław Bierut and Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, Żanna Kormanowa spoke in the historical subsection of a “chauvinist ballast” and “racist fury” she detected in *Dzieje Polski nowożytnej* (History of Modern Poland) in the shape of hatred of Jews and Ruthenians.¹⁰¹ Prevented from responding in public to this “masterpiece of falsehood ... cut to fit the Bobinians and Kormanics”, Konopczyński sent letters to colleagues, stating: “I strove to retain impartiality, as I believe it to be almost synonymous to academic honesty, but I could not stretch my objectivity to the extent of viewing the Koliyivshchyna through the eyes of Catherine II or Zalizniak.¹⁰² Besides, anyone capable of reading my works intelligently and attentively knows that I write of peasants without any social prejudice, and reserve most criticism for the nobles and magnates. Pray tell, how is that indicative of racist fury or chauvinism?”¹⁰³

Konopczyński’s final years were painful and saw him seek solace in prayer and meetings with a friend – Dominican Father Jacek Woroniecki. Woroniecki was among the few frequent visitors of the Professor who were not members of his own family; his other pupils and colleagues gave in to fear and turned their backs on him.¹⁰⁴ The scholar’s solitude is captured perfectly in the letters he wrote to his daughter Halina: “Foreign spirits are either completely gone or send name day greetings by mail, or arrive late, in utter dark.

¹⁰⁰ BUP, MS 36 IV, fol. 760, Władysław Konopczyński to Adam Skałkowski, Kraków, 20 April 1950.

¹⁰¹ Żanna Kormanowa, ‘Referat podsekcji historii, sekcji nauk społecznych i humanistycznych I Kongresu Nauki Polskiej’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lviii, 3–4 (1950–1951), 268–9.

¹⁰² Maxim Zhalizniak – a Zaporozhe Cossack, leader of Koliyivshchyna, i.e., the 1768 uprising of Russian peasants and Cossacks against the Polish nobles and Jews with an ultimate death toll of over 100,000.

¹⁰³ Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław [Ossoliński National Institute Library; hereinafter: BO], MS 14011 II, vol. 5, fol. 205–7, Władysław Konopczyński to Emil Kipa, Kraków, 27 June 1951; *ibidem*, MS 18578 II, fol. 87, Władysław Konopczyński to Władysław Czaplński, Kraków, 27 June 1951.

¹⁰⁴ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 166, n.p., entry for 28 Jan. 1952. Interestingly, though raised in a rationalist and non-religious atmosphere, Konopczyński became a practising Catholic toward the end of his life.

... Some former colleagues cross to the other side of the road to avoid meeting the 'leper'. That's particularly painful when it comes to former students."¹⁰⁵

Separation from Kazimierz Lepszy, a student of many years and collaborator in the PSB, was especially painful. Their relationship, initially very cordial, cooled under Nazi occupation and turned downright hostile in the second half of the 1940's. In April 1948, when Minister Skrzyszewki declined to sign Lepszy's professorial nomination, the candidate sent a letter to the Minister's wife, Bronisława Skrzyszewska née Mandelbaum, director of the archives of the Ministry of Public Security, claiming to have severed all ties to his former teacher and soliciting her support.¹⁰⁶ Lepszy's request was ignored because the "Dame of Marxism" (i.e., Bronisława Skrzyszewska) had already "decided he was a covert *endek* [national democrat]."¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, relations between the two scholars worsened even further. Konopczyński recounted: "Lepszy is now in that type of fix where he should at least pretend to disown me if he wants to avoid being left in the cold; at stake is the post left by Piwarski."¹⁰⁸ "That Lepszy had already fixed a few dates at the PTH and the critical section. Askenazy was right: named against his true nature."¹⁰⁹

Repressions were not aimed solely at Konopczyński, but also at his students and family members. For instance, Przemysław Smolarek saw the printing of diaries of the Sejm for 1701–2, scheduled with the imprint of the Commission of History of the Warsaw Scientific Society (TNW), held up.¹¹⁰ In anger, Konopczyński wrote to a member of the Commission, Janusz Woliński: "I also don't suppose they were driven by prejudice against Dr. Smolarek, who never put a foot wrong. This is mostly about me."¹¹¹ In his response, Woliński promised to

¹⁰⁵ Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, Kraków, 26 Nov. 1948; quoted from Heitzmanowa, 'Profesor Władysław Konopczyński', 7–8.

¹⁰⁶ BJ, MS Przyb. 792/73, Kazimierz Lepszy to Bronisława Skrzyszewska, Kraków, 28 April 1948; Aleksander Kochański, 'Skrzyszewska z Mandelbaumów Bronisława', in PSB, xxxviii, 3 (158) (Warszawa and Kraków, 1998), 418–19.

¹⁰⁷ Konopczyński, 'Dziennik', notebook 157, n.p., entry for 3 December 1947.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, notebook 156, n.p., entry for 10 Sep. 1947.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, notebook 159, n.p., entry for 29 Nov. 1948.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, notebook 159, n.p., entry for 29 Nov. 1949.

¹¹¹ ARKG, Władysław Konopczyński to Janusz Woliński, Warszawa, 22 April 1950 (MS, copy).

support Smolarek's case, but did not hide that everything hinged on the decision of Tadeusz Manteuffel, the vice-chair of the Commission of History of the TNW.¹¹² In a letter to Emil Kipa, the scholar asked for

a secret message explaining why my latest M.A., now a 'foreign' Ph.D., who devoted at least a year of heavy, unrewarding toil to this work, not only cannot see it printed, not only did not receive his royalties (for 250 pages of text), but was not even granted a single penny by the TNW outside of the 30,000 zloty first advance which only covered his own costs. Mr. Smolarek is left penniless – and on the verge of a breakdown. The likes of him should at worst be cheered on and supported, not pegged back.¹¹³

In response, Kipa claimed that the TNW was financially dependent on grants from the Ministry of Education and thus far possessed no funds for the publication of the diaries.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, he informed that Director Adam Stebelski proposed to employ Smolarek in the Central Archives of Historical Records, but the offer was declined because it did not fulfil the scholar's ambitions.¹¹⁵ When another intervention failed, Konopczyński sounded the alarm, stressing that the case involved "one of my last and best students, who suffered more than most for the very reason that I taught and supported him."¹¹⁶ Due to lack of support from contemporaneous authorities, the diaries of the Sejm were not published and went on to spend twelve years in the drawer. TNW paid Smolarek only a part of his royalties.¹¹⁷ Left with no subsistence, Konopczyński's student succumbed to depression, which his teacher tried to counteract by inviting Smolarek to Młynik and ordering him on various research missions.¹¹⁸

¹¹² *Ibidem*, Janusz Woliński to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 25 April 1950 (MS).

¹¹³ BO, MS 14011 II, fol. 197, Władysław Konopczyński to Emil Kipa, Młynik, 11 Aug. 1949.

¹¹⁴ ARKG, Emil Kipa to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 16 Aug. 1950 (MS).

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, Emil Kipa to Władysław Konopczyński, Warszawa, 30 Aug. 1950; Przemysław Smolarek to Władysław Konopczyński, Łódź, 31 July 1950 (MS).

¹¹⁶ BO, MS 14011 II, fol. 199, Władysław Konopczyński to Emil Kipa, Kraków, 6 Oct. 1950.

¹¹⁷ Konopczyński, 'Dziennik', notebook 163, n.p., entry for 1 Dec. 1950.

¹¹⁸ ARKG, Przemysław Smolarek to Władysław Konopczyński, Łódź, 31 July 1950 (MS).

In 1948 Smolarek wrote his M.A. thesis entitled 'Kampania mołdawska Jana III roku 1691' [The 1691 Moldavian Campaign of Jan III]. As his supervisor went into retirement, the student was forced to continue his scholarly career at a seminar conducted by Kazimierz Piwarski, where he wrote the doctoral dissertation entitled 'Rzeczpospolita wobec wojny północnej 1700–1721' [The Commonwealth and the Great Northern War, 1700–21]. Unable to find employment in Cracow or Warsaw, Smolarek left for his native Łódź, where he joined the staff at the local university. He worked for a few months at the Department of the History of Poland and Polish Law under Stanisław Śreniowski, but a political disagreement with his superior led to his resignation.¹¹⁹

Konopczyński was not the only scholar persecuted by the Communist authorities. In Cracow, his fate was shared by several other distinguished men of learning: Franciszek Bujak, Eugeniusz Romer, Karol Buczek, Władysław Semkowicz, Ludwik Piotrowicz, Feliks Koneczny, and Henryk Wereszycki. Like Konopczyński, they openly condemned the state of Polish science and the falsifying of history. Others, in turn, opted to cooperate with the 'people's' government, receiving many rewards in return: their books found print, they were given scholarships and sent abroad. However, even they could not feel entirely safe, for the favour of the 'popular' leaders was a fickle thing: "Suddenly a bolt from the blue" – Konopczyński noted. "Piwarski in disfavour, unmasked by the party as a former nationalist, insincere democrat, living like a bourgeois. Toppled from rector's office, the dean' office, all presidential posts, cast to Poznań for atonement."¹²⁰ Karol Estreicher suspected that "Piwarski's dismissal was partly the work of Teodor Marchlewski. This devious, cynical, self-centred rector, who never responded seriously to any questions, laughing off everything, seemingly did his best to have Piwarski ejected from the party and from the Jagiellonian University for casting his weight about and seeking to take over from him."¹²¹

Yet, the most numerous group consisted of scholars who could neither muster an open challenge to the system nor make themselves

¹¹⁹ Czesław Ciesielski, 'Smolarek Przemysław', in PSB, xxxix, 2 (161) (Warszawa and Kraków, 1999–2000), 248–9.

¹²⁰ Konopczyński, 'Profesor Jan Dąbrowski', 9.

¹²¹ Karol Estreicher, *Dziennik wypadków*, ii: 1946–1960 (Kraków, 2002), 235. For more, see the Kazimierz Piwarski casebook (AIPN, 010/4191, vol. 1–2).

sign ‘treacherous pacts’. They left in silence, choosing to live off the sales of their book collections, translations from western languages, cheap private lessons, and copying manuscripts in type. The Professor grieved: “The Jagiellonian University presents a scene of spiritual destruction. Displacing the dead or deactivated (sometimes through imprisonment) are the young, nimble, often promising Marxists, who either come of their own or are sought after.”¹²²

In May 1952, at his home, surrounded by a narrow group of guests, Konopczyński celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his academic career. As the host of the jubilee, his most beloved student Władysław Czapliński gave a eulogy for the Professor, followed by a reading of thirty statements about himself and a fragment of his autobiography by the jubilarian. His most faithful students gifted him an album on the altar of Veit Stoss. In a letter to Czapliński, the scholar voiced his pessimism:

We live under a barrage of stinky werfels¹²³ – I have already been treated with gas, the pest, leprosy, but others have more to lose. I can only sympathise and will not deplore them for avoiding the compromising contact with myself. As a native of the Kingdom, raised in the Apuchtin period,¹²⁴ I still believed one could turn away from certain others outwardly while remaining inwardly fixed. However, I see that some of my colleagues in Cracow do not enjoy that ability of natives of the Kingdom. Out of necessity, I divide people into those who avoid me, and those who do not. Some of the former would have wished I never existed. But since I do and intend to haunt others after my death, the panic is all the more palpable. This relationship between myself and the historical world is the result of pressure exerted by random conditions, but with a hint of personal intrigue.¹²⁵

In December 1951 Konopczyński’s health deteriorated significantly – he suffered another cardiac arrest and doctors gave him little hope of improvement. In spite of that, the Professor did not withdraw from

¹²² Konopczyński, ‘Profesor Jan Dąbrowski’, 10.

¹²³ Allusion to Roman Werfel (1906–2003), an energetic Communist activist under Stalinism, editor-in-chief of *Nowe Drogi* and director of ‘Książka i Wiedza’ publishing house.

¹²⁴ Allusion to Aleksandr Lvovich Apukhtin (1822–1903), the Russian curator of the Warsaw School District, the creator of a Russified system of education in the Kingdom of Poland based on spying on students and denunciation.

¹²⁵ BO, MS 18578 II, fol. 89, Władysław Konopczyński to Władysław Czapliński, Kraków, 18 Jan. 1952.

scholarly work, choosing instead to finish his works, arrange notes, and read new books in history as well as titles from the school reading list – including his favourite *Trilogy* by Henryk Sienkiewicz – while confined to bed, in between “horrid” pains in the heart.¹²⁶ In a letter to his daughter Halina, he wrote: “At times, I give in to a *furor biographicus* – then I turn out six or ten profiles for the books, of persons no one else should – or would think to – write about.”¹²⁷ By writing profiles for the biographical dictionary, he sought to leave an inheritance his family would be able to monetise after his death. In a letter to Halina, Jadwiga Konopczyńska – ill and distraught at the disastrous condition of her husband’s health – informed of her efforts to curb “Wladek’s energetic activities, but in the meantime, I thank God that he has that internal energy and psychic activity – if it wasn’t for that, he would be no more.”¹²⁸

On 6 May 1952, after 160 days spent in bed, the scholar went out for his first walk, establishing a new daily routine.¹²⁹ In July, he decided the air of Cracow did not favour him and, following consultation with his doctor, travelled to Młynik with his daughter and her husband.¹³⁰ There, he made light of his condition and the cardiac arrests he had suffered and applied himself to the orchard and beehives. His heart did not survive the strain.¹³¹ Konopczyński died of a cardiac arrest on the night of 12/13 July 1952 in his beloved manor at Młynik. On 16 July, he was interred at the Salwator cemetery in Cracow, fulfilling his wish to be buried next to the grave of his friend of many years, the accomplished dramatist Karol Hubert Rostworowski. The funeral procession set out from the academic collegiate church of St. Anne, led by Bishop Stanisław Rospond. In spite of fierce pressure from the authorities, the scholar’s death

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, MS 14011 II, vol. 5, fol. 218, Władysław Konopczyński to Emil Kipa, Kraków, 9 June 1952.

¹²⁷ Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, Kraków, 10 Nov. 1949; quoted from Heitzmanowa, ‘Profesor Władysław Konopczyński’, 9.

¹²⁸ Władysław Konopczyński to Halina Heitzmanowa, Kraków, 17 Dec. 1951; quoted from Heitzmanowa, ‘Profesor Władysław Konopczyński’, 10.

¹²⁹ Konopczyński, ‘Dziennik’, notebook 167, n.p., entry for 6 May 1952.

¹³⁰ BN PAU–PAN, MS 7853, fol. 142, Władysław Konopczyński to Stanisław Kozicki, Kraków, 3 July 1952.

¹³¹ Oral account of Wanda Mrozowska, Gliwice, 29 April 1998, recording owned by the author.

was commemorated at a private reception by the members of the Warsaw Scientific Society. Meanwhile, the scholarly circles of Cracow maintained a fearful silence over the Professor's demise. President of PAU Kazimierz Nitsch only informed members of his death on 13 September 1952.¹³²

While Władysław Konopczyński's post-war fate constitutes an individual case study, it perfectly illustrates the struggles faced by Polish scholars in the first years under Communism. It provides answers to questions concerning the choices they made and the price they were made to pay for independence and academic impartiality. Konopczyński's case is the most typical and best recorded in secondary sources. Since research into the activities of the Communist repression apparatus in the academic community has only begun recently, the fates of other persecuted historians are known only in fragments, in spite of the appearance of quality monographs and articles.¹³³ A complete assessment of the impact of Marxist elites on historians will only be possible in ten or more years' time. For now, the influence Communists had on scholarly life in Poland can only be illustrated with singular examples, of which Konopczyński's case is the most telling.

Though a complete view of the policies of Communist authorities toward historical studies is thus far unattainable, certain limited attempts can be made. It seems that the milieu of historians in Cracow presented three kinds of attitudes. The first consisted in an open struggle against the system and rejection of all compromise; the second – in a clear and official approval of the new reality; and the third – of applying various techniques of adjustment and a far-reaching conformity. The first approach was mostly represented by historians associated with Władysław Konopczyński and Henryk Wereszycki, the second by the circle of Marxist historians led by Kazimierz Piwarski, Celina Bobińska, and Józef Sieradzki, and the third, most common, by historians whose fear of repression motivated

¹³² Hübner, *Siła przeciw rozumowi*, 212.

¹³³ For more, see Piotr Hübner, 'Przebudowa nauk historycznych w Polsce (1947–1953)', *Przegląd Historyczny*, lxxviii, 3 (1987), 451–79; Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem*; Rutkowski, *Nauki historyczne w Polsce 1944–1970. Zagadnienia polityczne i organizacyjne* (Warszawa, 2007); Zbigniew Romek, *Cenzura a nauka historyczna w Polsce 1944–1970* (Warszawa, 2010).

active support for the new authorities – such as Jan Dąbrowski or Kazimierz Lepszy.¹³⁴

trans. Antoni Górny

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¹³⁴ For more, see Stanisław Salmonowicz, 'Profesorowie i studenci w dobie stalinizmu w Polsce (1944–1956)', in Grzegorz Miernik (ed.), *Polacy wobec PRL. Strategie przystosowawcze* (Kielce, 2003), 82–3.