

A TRAITOR, A THIEF AND A COMEDIAN

THE IMAGE OF THE CZECH IN THE POLISH SATIRICAL PRESS OF THE FIRST YEARS OF INDEPENDENT STATEHOOD (1918–1926)

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At the beginning of February 1919 Józef Piłsudski, the Chief of State at the time, in an interview given to a correspondent of „Il Secolo”, an Italian daily, assessed the situation in all districts of newly reborn Poland as extremely difficult. In the Poznań Voivodeship, battles with the Germans were being fought. In the north, the troops of Bolshevik Russia had seized Vilnius and were approaching Brest and Grodno, with Warsaw as their next target. Moreover, at the same time, the Czechs attacked from the south. Troops entering Cieszyn Silesia on 23 January pushed the defending Poles as far as behind the Vistula line. In the interview, Piłsudski saw the Czech attack as „(...) unqualified treason”.¹ The bitter words of the Chief of State were a reflection of difficult relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia in the first years of regaining independence. The border conflict over Cieszyn Silesia and its resolution dictated by powerful countries, beneficial for the Czechoslovak side, did not constitute a good basis for forming amicable relations between Poland and its southern neighbour. Within the following years, the improvement of mutual relations was certainly not aided by differing priorities of the foreign policies, particularly the matter of forming relations with Germany and Bolshevik Russia. The object of discord also included the relations with Hungary. Poland endeavoured to establish a common border, which would significantly undermine the Czechoslovak interests. Furthermore, both states attempted to take a leading role in the region, and their concepts of political governance in Central – Eastern Europe were mutually exclusive.²

1 Piłsudski, Józef: *Pisma zbiorowe. Wydanie prac dotychczas drukiem ogłoszonych*, vol. 10. Warszawa 1938, p. 178. The same was also quoted by Pilarski, Sebastian: *Między obojętnością a niechęcią. Piłsudczycy wobec Czechosłowacji w latach 1926–1939*. Łódź – Warszawa 2017, p. 14. All quotations were translated from Polish to English by Joanna Drosik.

2 Przeperski, Michał: *Nieznośny ciężar braterstwa. Konflikty polsko-czeskie w XX wieku*. Kraków

Difficult relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia were extensively discussed and commented on the pages of national press, with the latter creating the image of the southern neighbours and influencing the readers' opinions through it.³ This took a special form in satirical magazines, which in a very vivid, subjective and blunt manner commented on Polish foreign policy. However, on the one hand they inevitably generalized it, creating simplifications of reality, on the other, they concentrated on the aspects of events viewed by the authors of such publications as the most significant.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of an analysis of the image of the Czech created by the Polish satirical press in 1918–1926. The initial year of the time frame is related to the establishment of independent states of Poland and Czechoslovakia and the beginning of forming relations between them. The final date is set by the seizure of power by Józef Piłsudski in May 1926, which substantially influenced the form of Polish internal and foreign policies.

The main questions, which we sought answers to during the research process, concerned the media coverage regarding the Czechs and Czechoslovakia created in satirical magazines. Both the form and the contents of the coverage were within the scope of interest – how and what was commented on while covering Czech – related issues? How was a typical Czech presented? What were his features and attributes on the pages of Polish satirical magazines? What was the effect intended by the authors of satires? In order to answer those questions it was necessary not only to analyse the contents of the magazines, but also to gain knowledge on the authors and environments related to specific satirical titles. Moreover, to understand the position that the discussed type of press occupied in the public space of the time, it was necessary to present the circumstances conditioning the development of the press. Data significant here included the circulation volume, potential territorial reach, as well as information on reading rates and illiteracy.

This paper uses the notion of a *political satire*. It refers to „a form which ridicules a specified phenomenon, containing critical and polemical accents”,⁴ with regard to broadly defined politics, that is the area of human activity connected with the state and power,⁵ therefore also the matter of relations between states

2016, p. 208; Pilarski, S.: *Między*, p. 14; idem: *Zarys stosunków polsko-czechosłowackich 1918–1933*. Toruń 2008, p. 279–280.

3 Opinions on Czechoslovakia and its policy varied considerably, depending on political leanings of specific press titles. More on the attitudes of specific Polish political parties towards Czechoslovakia in: Walczak, Henryk: *Stanowisko polskich ugrupowań politycznych wobec Czechosłowacji w latach 1918–1925*. Szczecin 1999.

4 Maślanka, Julian (ed.): *Encyklopedia wiedzy o prasie*. Wrocław 1976, p. 218.

5 Bankowicz, Marek: *Słownik polityki*. Warszawa 1996, p. 186.

and nations. During the research process we identified four categories of materials published on the pages of satirical magazines. These include the following: humorous rhymes, humorous stories, short jokes and caricatures. All these types of the political satire constitute a great source enabling historians to research national stereotypes defined as „(...) a visual depiction, impacting the awareness of specific societies and nations, concurrently constituting a manifestation of existing views, beliefs and emotional attitudes”⁶

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The restoration of Poland’s sovereignty in 1918 had a positive impact on the development of the Polish press market. This stemmed from regaining full political freedom and liberating from anti – Polish practices, as well as from the development of technology, communication and the unification of the press law. Despite economic problems, a high illiteracy rate⁷ and a social structure unfavourable for reading, the demand for the press regularly increased.⁸ Low educational levels constituted a great opportunity for easy-to-read satirical magazines flourishing during the interwar period.⁹ It stemmed from the fact that such press applied a different set of rules than serious information and opinion – forming titles. A simple form and scarce amounts of text resulted in such press becoming really popular within the less educated part of the society. It is estimated that during the interwar period there were 20–25 satirical magazines in Poland each year. In the first years after regaining independence, however, that number was slightly smaller. Most of the magazines were ephemeral, only few of such periodicals managed to gain a strong position in the publishing market and maintain it for a longer period. It usually resulted from financial failures. However, such titles were replaced with new ones of similar nature.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, a stable position on the Polish publishing market within the period discussed here could only be enjoyed by three magazines: “Mucha”, “Wolna Myśl – Wolne Żarty” and “Szczutek”.

Satirical press was not homogeneous, neither in the artistic aspect, nor as far as the published content was concerned. Even though practically all titles addressed political events, still the contents of some of those constituted a marginal

6 Szarota, Tomasz: Karykatura jako źródło do dziejów stereotypu. *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 2, 1978, p. 255.

7 According to the national census of 1921, 34,6% of society were unable to read or write, see.: Leszczyńska, Cecylia (ed.): *Historia Polski w liczbach*, vol. V. Warszawa 2018, p. 145.

8 Paczkowski, Andrzej: *Prasa polska 1918–1939*. Warszawa 1980, p. 9.

9 Stępień, Tomasz: *Zabawa – Poetyka – Polityka*. Katowice 2002, p. 29.

10 Paczkowski, A.: *Prasa*, p. 285-286.

part of the publishing sheets. Generally, we may distinguish two main types of satirical titles, based on the contents published on their pages. The first type includes magazines for the most part concentrating on humour of slightly erotic undertones, whose artistic quality was not very good. During the discussed period such periodicals included e.g. “Amorek”, “Bocian” or “Nowy Dekameron”. The other type of satirical press included titles whose main objective was to comment on the political reality in a humorous manner. These included such magazines as “Szczutek”, “Mucha” and “Kocynder”. Their contents, as far as their artistic quality was concerned, were far better than the materials published on the pages of the erotic magazines mentioned above. An interesting title, practically qualifying as both types, was the “Wolna Myśl, Wolne Żarty” magazine, publishing numerous materials of strictly erotic contents, however, with great interest, it also commented on national and foreign affairs. Similarly to the other remaining satirical magazines, its contents were addressed to the masses and thus were purposely easy to read, and their artistic quality was not very high.¹¹

For the purposes of this article the “Mucha”, “Szczutek”, “Wolna Myśl Wolne Żarty”, “Bocian” and “Kocynder” magazines were examined. As for the latter two titles, the outcome of the query was negative. On their pages between 1918–1926 there were no materials related to the Czechs or Czechoslovakia. For this reason both periodicals were not included in the source base of this publication.¹²

Warsaw’s “Mucha” was the most popular magazine of the period. Its publisher and editor was Władysław Buchner.¹³ Each number consisted of eight pages. In 1925 the circulation volume was approximately 35 000 copies. The largest circulation volume of “Mucha” was at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. The contents of the magazine frequently included anti-Semitic, anti – German, anti – Czech, anti

11 Piątkowski, Bohdan: Uwagi o współpracownikach prasy humorystyczno-satyrycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. *Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego* 3, 1976, p. 312.

12 The “Bocian” magazine in the interwar period was published in Łódź. Its editor was Konstanty Krumłowski, a writer and a satirist. The contents published on its pages were characterized by erotic undertones and the politics had a marginal presence. See.: Paczkowski, Andrzej: *Prasa...*, p. 286. The first number of Upper Silesian magazine “Kocynder” was issued in June 1920 in Mikołów. Later, the seat of the title was relocated to Bytom and Katowice. The title was published by a publishing firm of a Polish social activist Karol Miarka (the younger), involved in the fight for incorporating Upper Silesia into Poland. “Kocynder” was one of the tribunes of this movement, therefore the materials published on its pages in the vast majority addressed Polish – German relations. See: Glensk J.: “Kocynder” [ed:] *Encyklopedia Powstań Śląskich*. Opole 1982, p. 216.

13 Władysław Buchner (1860–1939) – a journalist, a poet and a satirist. He cooperated with humorous magazines published in Warsaw. In 1888–1939 the editor of the “Mucha” weekly. He was punished for his journalistic work by the Russian partition’s authorities. See.: *Internetowa Encyklopedia PWN*, encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3881524/buchner-wladyslaw.html [16. 12. 2020].

– Russian elements, etc. With its satires “Mucha” spared not one of its neighbours. The nature of the magazine was right – wing, nationalistic even. After the May Coup, however, it began sympathizing with Józef Piłsudski’s camp.¹⁴

In 1919, on the last page of the Łódź opinion – forming biweekly “Wolna Myśl” a new addition was made *A satirical – humorous corner*. It was a foretaste of the magazine’s new edition, as in 1921 its name changed into “Wolna Myśl, Wolne Żarty”. The title began coming out as a weekly and became a satirical magazine. The editor in chief was Edmund Kokorzycki.¹⁵ While many humorous magazines were declaring bankruptcy, “Wolna Myśl, Wolne Żarty”, most likely due to its distinctive form, combining elements of a magazine of almost erotic nature with elements of an opinion – forming title, was flourishing. For many years there had been no such titles in Łódź, so the new weekly filled the void on the market, which boosted its popularity, and its circulation volume was as high as even 30 000 copies.¹⁶

“Szczutek” was issued in Lviv in 1869–1926. Between 1918 and 1920 its editor in chief was Alfred Altenberg,¹⁷ followed by Kazimierz Grus.¹⁸ Similarly to “Mucha”, it was published on eight pages. It was “Szczutek” where the first Polish comic strip, entitled *The adventures of Crazy Gregory*, was published. Mostly due to financial reasons, but also because of growing competition, the magazine was discontinued in 1926.¹⁹

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14 Paczkowski, A.: Prasa, p. 286.

15 Edmund Kokorzycki and his wife Halina were owners a press company owning a half of the humorous press market of interwar period Łódź. See: Cieśla, Bronisław: Łódzkie czasopisma humorystyczne w międzywojniu. Łódź 2014, p. 21.

16 Kaszubina, Wiesław: Notatki o prasie łódzkiej. Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego 7, 1968, p. 185–186.

17 Alfred Altenberg (1887–1924) – a bookseller, a publisher and a bookbinder. A graduate of Wyższa Szkoła Realna in Lviv. Together with Kazimierz Grus and Stanisław Wasylewski he founded a satirical magazine entitled “Szczutek”. See: Internetowy Polski Słownik Biograficzny, [20. 11. 2020].

18 Kazimierz Grus (1885–1955) – a caricaturist, a draughtsman and an illustrator. His professional career began in the Petersburg’s “Satrikon” magazine and Moscow’s “Budilnik”. After World War I he came to Lviv, where he co – authored the “Szczutek” weekly. He was known as the author of caricatures addressing the fight for the Polishness of Silesia. He also cooperated with the following magazines: “Kocynder”, “Mucha”, “Cyruk Warszawski”, “Tęcza” and “Szpilki”. See.: Ruszcyc, B. Ferdynand – Urbański, Jacek: Karykaturzyści polscy. Antologia biograficzna od początków do współczesności. Warszawa 1994, p. 79.

19 Bergmann, Olaf: „Prawdziwa cnota krytyk się nie boi...”. Karykatura w czasopismach satyrycznych Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Warszawa 2012, p. 26.

The border conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia, growing at the end of 1918 was reported in a special Christmas – New Year issue of “Szczytek” of 29 December. On the second page of the magazine a rhyme entitled On Christmas Day was published, signed by Jan Bury. It was the pseudonym of a popular journalist, Stanisław Wasylewski.²⁰ The rhyme addresses the situation in post – war Poland. According to the author, it was filled with paradoxes, as the society so enthusiastic about regaining the sovereign state entity did not see the problems facing the country. The author describes chaos of the Polish internal affairs along with all conflicts mentioned in January 1919 by Józef Piłsudski in his interview for “Il Secolo”. He also mentions the issues with Germany, fights with the Ukrainians along with regional antagonisms in Gdańsk, the Chełm Land, Spis, Podlasie and the vicinity of Minsk. The entire penultimate stanza addressed the Czechs:

*If not for the brotherly noose
That Pepik is preparing for us
Saying: >>I will get sem Silesia,
And Zakopane belongs to the Czech, too²¹*

The fragment quoted above is interesting for a few reasons. Firstly, an entire stanza of a seven – stanza rhyme was devoted to the Czechs. Other international conflicts were compressed into two stanzas. This could mean that the author viewed the conflict over Cieszyn Silesia as a particularly significant issue, even though his rhyme was created in Lviv occupied by the Ukrainians. The policy conducted by the Czechs was considered here to be treason of a fraternal nation. It was similar to the words of Józef Piłsudski quoted at the beginning of the article. There was also the name “pepiczek”, frequently used by the Poles in its shorter version – “pepik”, as an ironical way of describing the idea of the Czech language, which for the Polish people sounds soft and funny, almost infantile. “Pepik” is a diminutive of the popular name Josef.²² Moreover, Wasylewski ironically presented his idea of the Czechs being greedy and in his opinion intending not only to seize Silesia, but also Zakopane.

20 Stanisław Wasylewski (1885–1953) – a Polish journalist, essayist, literary critic, translator, author of memoir papers, an editor of several Polish press titles. He worked for e.g.: “Gazeta Poranna”, “Szczytek”, “Rzeczpospolita”, “Wiadomości Literackie”, “Dziennik Poznański” and “Tęcza”. See.: Czachowska, Jadwiga, Szalagan, Alicja (eds.): Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury. Słownik biograficzny, v 9. Warszawa 2004, p. 60–61.

21 Bury, J. [Stanisław Wasylewski]: W dzień Bożego Narodzenia. Szczytek, the specimen number, 1918, p. 2.

22 Łuczyński, Michał: Czech oczami Polaka – próba rekonstrukcji stereotypu. *Respectus Philologicus* 15, 2009, p. 138.

After military actions in Cieszyn Silesia had ended and the agreement on temporary armistice had been signed, the issue of “Szczutek” of 9 February 1919 published an interesting drawing by Antoni Stanisław Procajłowicz.²³ It was perversely entitled “Kde domov moj...” which was a direct reference to the Czechoslovakian national anthem. The drawing shows a pair of Czechs wearing civilian outfits, playing the harp and singing – most likely the abovementioned song “Kde domov můj” (Illus. 1). The situation takes place in the vicinity of a Polish village, which we can guess thanks to the sign *inn* hanging on one of the buildings in the centre of the drawing. The Czechs were depicted as individuals concealing some sort of deception under the guise of friendly intentions illustrated by playing the harp and singing. One of them is hiding a machine pistol behind the instrument, which indicates his true intentions and willingness to plunder. This was yet another depiction of the idea of the treacherous nature of Poland’s southern neighbours. Beneath the drawing, a rhyme was published, entitled *You, Czech!*. Its author makes a direct accusation of treason: *the most vile enemy is the one invading our land treacherously – it is a czech!* [original spelling]. The author, hiding under the initials Józ. Rel., spelling the name of the neighbouring nation in lower case, most likely intended to belittle the Czechs. His rhyme was not only an accusation against the aggressors, but also an appeal to the Poles. The author appealed to mothers to teach their children aversion towards the Czechs, merchants were supposed to cease trading with them, miners to remember that the Czechs were worse than the Prussians and soldier should start sharpening their bayonets and be ready to fight. The author decided that the Czechs were in fact crypto – Germans: *O >brother< czech! When you rid of the Slavonic mask off your Teutonic face, it indeed is a good thing – “na zdar” shall occur no more, you czech!* The author ended the rhyme calling again upon “the free nations of the world” to stop believing the positive legend of the Czechs and make a fair judgement of the violations they committed.²⁴

It should be noted that the Polish – Czechoslovakian conflict was also reported in the inaugural strip of the first Polish comic cartoon.²⁵ It was a satirical romantic novel entitled *With fire and sword, that is the adventures of crazy Greg*,

23 Antoni Stanisław Procajłowicz (1876–1949) – a Polish painter, graphic designer and illustrator. Connected with “Młodość” magazine and with “Kalendarz Robotniczy”. Since September 1914 in the Polish Legions The artistic director of the National Printing House in Cracow. He designed illustrations for magazines and books. See: Milewska, Waclawa – Zientara, Maria: *Sztuka Legionów Polskich i jej twórcy 1914–1918*. Kraków 1999, p. 510.

24 Rel., Józ.: *To Czech! Szczutek* 6, 1919, p. 5.

25 Rusek, Adam: *Tarzan, Matolek i inni. Cykliczne historyjki obrazkowe w Polsce w latach 1919–1939*. Warszawa 2001, p. 28.

published on the pages of “Szczutek” every week since 9 February 1919.²⁶ Kamil Mackiewicz²⁷ designed the graphic part of the strip, and the texts were authored by Stanisław Wasylewski, already mentioned here. The title was a reference to Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel *With fire and sword*, whose plot was set during the Cossack uprising led by Bohdan Chmielnicki against the Polish nobility in 1684. Cossacks, that is ancestors of the Ukrainians, were depicted there as enemies of the Polish statehood, allying with the Crimean Khanate and the Russian Empire. The reference to this classic Polish novel, made by the Lviv magazine during another Polish – Ukrainian conflict, cannot have been incidental. It is also interesting that apart from the Ukrainians (the Russians), the other enemy whom the main character of the comic strip was supposed to fight, was none other than the Czechs. Even though that theme only appeared once, it seems important to mention it. Using that element may indicate the importance ascribed by the authors to the conflict with the Czechs. In spite of Lviv being significantly far away, it was considered just as important as the local war with the Ukrainian people.

The conflict over Cieszyn Silesia was internationalised, and its resolution was delegated to the states of the Entente, debating in Paris on the organization of the post – war order in Europe. With time, more and more concerns were voiced regarding the conflict being resolved to Czechoslovakia’s favour. This resulted from the actions taken by the Entente’s representatives, evidently favouring the Czech side. An example of such actions was the lack of reactions to ceasing coal deliveries from the industrial Ostrava – Karvina coal basin, guaranteed by the resolutions of the Paris Peace Conference. Another example could be the lenient approach towards the regulations of the Czechoslovakian local authorities, undermining the resolutions of the same conference.²⁸ The belief that the powerful states were favouring Czechoslovakia was solidified even more in a caricature published on the pages of “Szczutek” on 15 June 1919; the caricature was entitled *From the meeting of the Council of Four*. The illustration shows impersonations of four powers: the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy, considering helping the Czechs. In the author’s interpretation, the leaders of the Entente viewed Czechoslovakia as a victim of the Hungarian aggression and wanted to help by making amends for the suf-

26 Ogniem i mieczem, czyli przygody szalonego Grzesia – powieść współczesna, rozdział I. Szczutek 6, 1919, p. 8.

27 Kamil Mackiewicz (1886–1933) – a caricaturist, book illustrator and captain in the Polish Army. He cooperated with the following satirical magazines: “Szczutek”, “Mucha” oraz “Szopka”. See.: Maj, Ewa: Humor polityczny w prasie Narodowej Demokracji: przypadek satyrycznego tygodnika „Szopka” 1922–1925. *Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej* 4, 2019, p. 98.

28 Przeperski, M.: *Nieznosny*. Kraków 2016, p. 188–189.

ferred loss.²⁹ The compensation was supposed to be the town of Borysław located in the Eastern Małopolska region or Upper Silesia. In this way the author illustrated his opinion regarding favouring Czechoslovakia by the Entente states, which was additionally supposed to be performed to the detriment of Poland and its lands in Silesia and Eastern Małopolska.³⁰

The Czech depicted as a schemer, who through manipulating facts wanted to gain favours from powerful states, was frequently present on the pages of satirical magazines. An example of that could be an anonymous rhyme entitled *We must be ready*, published on 2 April 1920 in the “Mucha” weekly. The rhyme addressed the situation in Cieszyn Silesia. According to its author, the Poles were continually wronged by the Czechs who resorted to “provocations, rapes, murders”. Additionally, they did not have to do it spontaneously or arbitrarily, but by permission or even inspiration of their own authorities who “want to gain the law by their fists. Hordes of bandits and gendarmes”. In this rhyme, the Czech was presented as a skillful schemer, trying to manipulate the Plebiscite Committee. According to the author, in the past the Czech was “(...) a servant to the Germans (...) and tsars”, and now he himself would like to become a partitioning invader. The Czech was ascribed the qualities of a thief and an aggressor. Moreover, a wider context of relations in that region of Europe was addressed:

*The Hungarians look from afar,
Getting their armed troops ready,
Only waiting for the moment,
When the Czechs engage in war against Poland,
The Slovaks are full of excitement,
Then they will join the battle,
As they can stand no more,
The new State of Czechoslovakia³¹*

The author of the rhyme suggests that the solution to the problematic situation should be... throwing the Czechs out of the window, i.e. defenestrating them from Silesia. In his opinion, it would be in accordance with famous events from

29 In reality, the situation was completely different. The failure in fighting Hungarian communists undermined the prestige of Czechoslovakia in the international arena. The president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, and the prime minister of Great Britain, Lloyd George accused the makers of the Czechoslovakian policy of taking autonomous actions against the Hungarians, resulting in an unnecessary escalation of the conflict in Central Europe. See: Essen, Andrzej: *Polityka Czechosłowacji w Europie Środkowej w latach 1919–1932*. Kraków 2006, p. 30–31.

30 Z posiedzenia Rady Czterech. Szczutek 24, 1919, p. 4.

31 Musimy być w pogotowiu. Mucha 14, 1920, p. 2.

the history of the Czech nation: *Following your traditions, we will throw you out of the window.*³²

Authors publishing on the pages of satirical weeklies frequently used irony while describing the reality. It was also used to characterize the Czechs and the ideas of their policy. For example, authors wrote about their forbearance contrasting with accusations appearing in the press with regard to their greediness and imperialist inclinations. The evidence of that was supposed to be the fact that the Czechs did not deprive the Poles of... Prague – one of the main districts of Warsaw, bearing the same name as the capital city of Czechoslovakia. Once in a while, the authors also indicated that the Czechs did not want to claim Pilzno in Lesser Poland, whose name was, coincidentally, the same as the name of a town in western Czech famous for its bear production.³³

In July 1921 Poland's policy towards Czechoslovakia changed, which was related to personnel changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Konstanty Skirmunt was appointed as the new minister, and the envoy in Prague was Erasmus Piltz. Both diplomats considered closer cooperation with Czechoslovakia to be the best solution in order to secure peace for Poland, which was supposed to show the power states, especially France, that the Polish policy in Central – Eastern Europe was “peace – keeping and constructive”.³⁴

The change of the Polish policy towards Czechoslovakia was criticised by satirical press, with the latter accusing the politicians of acting in an instrumental manner and disregarding the victims of the war in Cieszyn Silesia. Such an attitude was expressed in a rhyme published on the pages of “Szczutek” on 21 July 1921; it was entitled *A Polish – Czech alliance* and its author was hiding under the initials J. G:

*Forgotten bloody fight
Cieszyn, murders and hatred campaigns
Warsaw officially thunders:
A Czech and a Pole are two brothers!
As we face the truth today
You yourselves will have to say
That the worst enemies are here
In Poland, between you and me.*³⁵

32 Ibidem.

33 Wśród warszawskich polityków. *Szczutek* 7, 1919, p. 7; *Szczutek* 47, 1921, p. 11.

34 Skirmunt, Konstanty: *Moje wspomnienia 1866–1945*. Rzeszów 1997, p. 121.

35 G., J.: *Sojusz polsko-czeski*. *Szczutek* 30, 1921, p. 7.

Signs of friendly attitude towards Poland sent by Czechoslovakian diplomats at the time were also viewed in a negative light. Such signs included, for example, support given to Poland by Czechoslovakia regarding the division of Upper Silesia. Politicians from the land of the Vltava River hoped that an advantageous resolution of the territorial dispute would make the Poles come to terms with the loss of the territories in Cieszyn Silesia.³⁶ An example is a caricature authored by Zdzisław Czermański³⁷ published in “Szczutek” on 28 July 1921, entitled *Pepiczek wooing Poland* (Illus. 2). The drawing shows an obese person wearing a court jester’s costume – a jacket with a ruffle collar, large black buttons and pompomed shoes. He is accompanied by a sitting girl wearing a ball gown and a traditional regional Cracovian hat. Without any doubt, the couple is an impersonation of a Czech – a flippant comedian, and a Pole – beautiful and inaccessible. Presenting two such different images of human beings, Czermański achieved the effect of a contrast, in an apparent manner showing Poland as a positive character – a beautiful and smart girl, and the Czech as a negative character – a grifter only appearing friendly, but in fact one cannot take him seriously, as his only goal is to seduce the girl. Similarly, Poland must not take the friendly gestures of the Czechoslovakian diplomats seriously. Using the caricature, the author expressed his view on the contemporary Polish – Czechoslovakian relations.³⁸

The Czech was presented not only as an overweight comedian, but also as a dwarf. An example of that is a caricature published in the “Mucha” weekly on 13 January 1922 (Illus. 3). It shows impersonations of a Pole, a Romanian, a Serbian and a Czech. The three former were drawn as large – sized people, holding a pedestal signed *The Little Entente* on their shoulders. The Czech looks like a small, ridiculous dwarf next to them. The contrast between the impersonations of the countries certainly expressed the author’s opinion on their meaning in the international arena. The role of the Czech was presented as a very minor

36 Pilarski, S.: Zarys, p. 89.

37 Zdzisław Czermański (1901–1970) – a graphic designer and a caricaturist. A soldier of the Polish Legions of “Szczutek”, “Cyrulik Warszawski”, “Wiadomości Literackie” and pro – Piłsudski “Głos Prawdy”. He was the author of an “Marszałek Piłsudski w 13 karykaturach” (*Piłsudski in 13 caricatures*) which contributed to creating a positive image of Józef Piłsudski. In later years and during the World War II emigration he cooperated with the following magazines: French “L’Illustration”, British “Graphic” and American “Look”, “Fortune Magazine”, “Time”, “Esquire” and “Life”. See.: Wróbel, Elżbieta: Zdzisław Czermański – zapomniany kronikarz Dwudziestolecia. In: Dwudziestolecie znane i nieznanie. Szkice o prozie międzywojennej. Częstochowa 2012, p. 173–217; Czachowska, Jadwiga – Szałagan, Alicja (eds.): Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury. Słownik biograficzny, v. 2. Warszawa 1994, p. 100.

38 Czermański, Zdzisław: Umizgi Pepiczka do Polski. Szczutek 31, 1921, p. 9.

one. Moreover, he is not holding the pedestal, representing the base of the Little Entente, only putting a ladder and intending to climb it and take a place right on the top. The caricature was entitled *Where horses are being shoed, a frog gets its foot in the door*. This was an allusion to the author's opinion on Czechoslovakia presenting itself as the leader of the Little Entente, but in reality putting the least effort into strengthening that alliance. The author clearly thought that Czechoslovakia wanted to take all credit for the merits of Poland, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This could be further proved by the Czech's words placed underneath the caricature: *The Little Entente is ready! The Pole, the Romanian and the Serb are holding the entire edifice, and I'm the largest, I'll climb to the top and I'll the edifice's crown!*³⁹ Including Poland into the group of countries building the Little Entente at first sight might seem surprising. However, at the turn of 1920–1921 the issue of the form of the Central European alliance remained open, and the Romanian diplomats were soliciting the inclusion of Poland. Unfortunately, those attempts did not hold prospects of success and failed because of the Polish – Czechoslovakian aversion and its source in the form of Cieszyn Silesia.⁴⁰

In 1922 the “Mucha” weekly published a series of satirical rhymes addressing various nationalities. On 17 February a rhyme referring to the Czechs was published as the fourth of the series. It opens with a question whether the Czechs deserved their sovereign statehood entity. The author is not sure of that. He indicates that the Czechs are building their own state at the expense of enslaving other, “fraternal” nations. They are dishonourably abusing the latter's difficult situation to *by pillaging artificially feed their body*. The author definitely meant Poland and the seizure of Cieszyn Silesia, as well as Hungary losing some of their northern territories for the benefit of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the rhyme contains an accusation that the Czechs enslaved the Slovaks:

*And how many of you are there? You are nothing but
A miniscule quantity in your artificial country!
And you want to rule with a whip and anger?
To enslave free Slovaks in serfdom?
In vain do your statesmen
Pull the wool over the entire world's eyes
As the Slovaks have risen and will tell the world
That they want to be free and will allow no traps!*⁴¹

39 Gdzie konie kują, tam żaba nogę nadstawia. Mucha 2, 1922, p. 6.

40 Essen, Andrzej: Polska a Mała Ententa 1920–1934. Warszawa 1992, p. 41.

41 Czechy. Mucha 7, 1922, p. 2.

The issue of Slovakia was an important aspect of Poland's policy towards Czechoslovakia. There were attempts to support the Slovakian autonomists' efforts, which was supposed to weaken the unity of the Republic. The issue of Slovakia also constituted an argument in diplomatic operations, it counterbalanced the voices rising in Czechoslovakia promoting Eastern Małopolska becoming independent of Poland. Moreover, it constituted a common element of Poland and Hungary in their policy towards Czechoslovakia, which resulted in those two countries getting closer.⁴²

The theme of enslavement, or the Slovaks being abused by the Czechs, was frequently used by the authors of Polish political satire. The issue of "Mucha" of 17 March 1922 contained a caricature by Waclaw Lipiński⁴³ entitled *How the Czech makes his living* (Illus. 4). The drawing shows a field and a roan cow standing in the middle of it. The ground underneath the cow is divided with a balk with the word "Morawa" on it. The front part of the animal's body and its head are placed in a grass area described as Slovakia. There is a bare-foot boy wearing meagre clothes, grazing the cow and holding its string. He is a Slovak, sadly looking over to the other side of the balk, as it is there where the cow's udders are, and a person wearing a Czechoslovakian military beret and a bunch of passkeys – a symbol of theft⁴⁴ is milking the cow. The person is a Czech, getting all the cow's milk and filling a bucket named "Prague". A Hungarian and a Pole are watching from a distance, apparently waiting for the right moment. The drawing is accompanied by the following description: *It is not a myth today that Mr. Czech is a parasite! How does he make his living? It is no news that the Czechs are supported by the cow that thanks to the cunning raison d'état grazes in Slovakia, gains weight there, and the Czech milk it in Prague. Let us learn, dear Poles, that being honest is not a virtue, mimic the Czechs' behaviour and we will be well – liked by the "Antante"*.⁴⁵ Again, we can find here a reference to the issue of Czechoslovakia being favoured by western power states.

42 Pilarski, S.: Zarys, p. 138–139.

43 Waclaw Lipiński (1898–1974) – a painter, drawer and caricaturist. He cooperated with the following magazines: "Świat – Światło", "Mucha", "Diabeł Lubelski", "Żółta Mucha" and "Wolne Żarty". In 1920 and 1924 he exhibited his paintings and watercolours in a Warsaw's art gallery Galeria Sztuki Zachęta. See: *Czasy Wojen i Pokoju. Karykatura polska 1918–1939*. Warszawa 2004, p. 155. The bibliographical information was obtained courtesy of the specialists from the Department of Scientific Development of Resources of the Eryk Lipiński Museum of Caricature in Warsaw.

44 The silhouette of a Czech wearing a military beret and a bunch of passkeys was in Poland a typical image used by the authors of Polish satires, present in numerous places, at various times and in a number of forms, see:

Mucha 7, 1922, p. 4; Mucha 8, 1922, p. 3.

45 *Z czego żyje Czech*. Mucha 11, 1922, p. 3.

Moreover, the Czech was depicted as a person abusing the Slovak economically. He was straightforwardly named “a parasite”, feeding on the Slovakian resources and labour.

Another conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia during the interwar period was the territorial conflict over Jaworzyna Tatrzańska. In this case again the Polish satirical press did not remain indifferent and presented very vivid reactions, thus contributing to strengthening the negative image of Poland’s southern neighbour. Jaworzyna Tatrzańska is a village in Spis – a region located at the border between Poland and Slovakia. The conflict over its territorial dependency was maintained concurrently with the conflict over Cieszyn Silesia. As a matter of fact, its outcome was quite similar. The fate of Jaworzyna was to be decided by a plebiscite. However, due to numerous conflicts participated by Poland at the time, especially the war with Bolshevik Russia, the preoccupied Polish government agreed, under pressure from the Entente, to resolve the conflict by the decision of the Council of Ambassadors. The latter granted the territory in question to Czechoslovakia, which resulted in the Polish side feeling deceived and stolen from. The territorial gain of the southern neighbour to the detriment of Poland fighting in the east was viewed as a stab in the back administered by the Czechs.⁴⁶ As a result, this small village became another symbol of the border conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia.

The theme related to those events may be found in the August issue of “*Wolna Myśl, Wolne Żarty*” in 1923. The Czech character in the illustration was presented in a way characteristic of the time. He is wearing a traditional Czechoslovakian military beret with a brooch on the side, holding a bunch of passkeys in his hand, which is supposed to suggest his thieving intentions. He departs from Jaworzyna, which can be told by his placement in the drawing as compared to the location of the border pole with the village’s name.⁴⁷ With this illustration, the author reminds us of the Czechs seizing the territory. The title *Benes’s thieving action* also indicated that despite the passed time, the memory of the wrongs inflicted by the Czechs to the Poles was still alive within the Polish society.

The issue of Jaworzyna, as well as the relations between Poland, France and Czechoslovakia, were also addressed in the issue of “*Mucha*” of 1 February 1924 (Illus. 5). Once again, the Czech was presented as a character wearing a military beret, this time standing on the edge of an abyss. His additional attribute is a smoking pipe in his mouth, as he is amused by watching the Pole and the Frenchman talking on the other side of the abyss. Right next to the Czech there are some passkeys, a rifle and a container of gasoline. Without any doubt, those attributes

46 Przeperski, M.: *Nieznośny*, p. 205.

47 *Akcja złodziejska Bene-sza. Wolna Myśl Wolne Żarty* 33, 1923, p. 5.

were supposed to indicate the Czech's aggressive nature and thieving intentions. Both edges of the abyss are connected by a footbridge named "The Czech – French alliance", with a huge boulder named "Jaworzyna" lying on it. The Frenchman is indicating the footbridge to the Pole, probably counting on the latter stepping onto the bridge. He is saying: *Dear Pole, make amends with the Czech. There is a bridge of concord right in front of you. The Pole is responding: Yes, but the boulder lying there will never let me cross that bridge.*⁴⁸ The drawing was the result of the author's opinion assuming that it was not possible for Poland and Czechoslovakia to come to an agreement, even despite serious efforts of the French diplomats, attempting at the time to establish a strong alliance in Central – Eastern Europe, so that they could counterbalance the Germans and become a barrier against Russia. The obstacles in that case included Jaworzyna seized by the Czechs, and the Czechs' attitude towards Poland as such, in the author's opinion very unfavourable, which was expressed by the passkeys and weapons, most definitely not representing positive attitudes or declarations of peace.

The image of the Czech in the context of the conflict over Jaworzyna Tatrzańska was also represented in various satirical rhymes. Similarly to caricatures, also here the Czech was presented as a person willing to take someone else's property. An example of that is a rhyme of July 1924. This time, the Czech was contrasted with a Russian and a German, i.e. eternal enemies threatening the Polish statehood. According to the author, the Czech is lying in wait for the right moment to seize the Polish land. The entire rhyme is written in a style intentionally imitating the Czech language, or rather the image of the language in the Polish people's eyes:

*My friends are a Russski and a Kraut
A Polack won't grab Jaworzyna back
I'm telling the truth as I am a Czech
The three of us will get Poland well*⁴⁹

Apart from satirical illustrations and rhymes, the satirical press also published short, ironic information notes. Those were supposed to look like actual news, concisely describing a domestic or foreign event. This was yet another contribution the Polish satirical press made to creating a stereotype of a Czech. In the note presented below, a journalist of "Wolne Myśli, Wolne Żarty" describes an alleged proposal made put forward by a Czech named Beniek. The name of the character, Beniek, is a clear reference to the prime minister Beneš. He is described as a "little man for big business". In return for Jaworzyna Tatrzańska, he offers

48 Chciałby nas pogodzić. *Mucha* 5, 1924, p. 6.

49 Kwartet polityczny. Czech (vel. Pepiczek marnotrawny). *Wolna Myśl. Wolne Żarty* 28, 1924, p. 3.

some parts of Greenland or the Gobi desert.⁵⁰ The humorous technique in this case consists in the abstractness of the proposal and presenting the little character as an impersonation of the Czech country as a minor state.

The character of the Czech appeared occasionally in the Polish satirical press as a participant of European political events. One of such events was the Conference of Lausanne, held after the Greco – Turkish war had ended (1919–1922). Its main purpose was to negotiate the new order in the region. Apart from that, the participants were doing their own businesses. The representatives of Czechoslovakia were not present, which did not escape the notice of the journalists of “Mucha”, who addressed that in the issue of July 1923 (Illus. 6). The illustration published there, authored by Waclaw Lipiński, shows tall people very easy to identify thanks to their characteristic outfits. These are the participants of the conference, representing the United States, Great Britain, Italy and France. They are facing the Polish flag. In the drawing there is another person, it is a Czech. He is definitely shorter than the other characters. He is waving a banner with the word “Czechy” and wearing a characteristic beret with a brooch. He is standing behind the tall characters’ backs and yelling:

*What? You gentlemen cannot solve
The issue of the Dardanelles and Constantinople?
That’s because you’ve forgotten me. Ask me!
I’ll handle the Turk at once and will deal with it for 10%⁵¹*

The words quoted above are a reference to the absence of Czechoslovakia from the conference. The main technique used by the author here is showing the difference in the height of the Czech and other representatives of the other participants, which was without a doubt a proof of his marginalization in the international arena. The Czech was demanding attention. An interesting fact is that the other characters are facing the Polish flag, even though Poland was not a signatory of the Treaty of Lausanne. Poland only signed the Treaty of Peace between Poland and Turkey drafted within the frames of the League of Nations. This indicates the author’s hypocrisy in this case. In his opinion, the Poles played a far more important role in the European political arena at the time in comparison to “little Czechs”, marginalized by everyone.

Another example of presenting the Czech as a little man was an illustration published in the issue of “Mucha” of 22 February 1924 (Illus. 7). The satire was printed on the title page of the issue, which indicates that the theme was impor-

50 Traktat czesko-polski. Wolna Myśl. Wolne Żarty 14, 1925, p. 6.

51 Ten chce być zawsze najpierwszy. Mucha 27, 1924, p. 4.

tant for the publishers. In the illustration we can see a huge gate and the sign “The League of Nations” above it; most likely, it is the entrance to the edifice where members of the organization are holding a meeting. In front of it there is a small character, trying to get inside, however, another character standing in the door is stopping him with a hand gesture. This little character is a Czech, stopped by one of the members of the League of Nations. The following dialogue takes place:

*The Czech Pepik – Please let me in
at once, I must see what is happening there,
The League – You cannot, It’s a meeting for adults today:
when it’s a children’s play, Pepik will be invited, too.⁵²*

This example of another use of the theme of the Czech as a child may suggest that the Czechs were viewed as clumsy and immature. The author decided that the Czech should not participate in a serious political conference. Presenting a character in such a manner may also suggest its minor and insignificant position in high politics. Especially his position within the structures of the League of Nations was marginal. In addition to that, once again the name “Pepik” was used, we mentioned its meaning above.

The period of positive relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia was relatively short in the interwar era, and it was related not only to border conflicts, but also to relations with other states. A special determining factor in the relations between Warsaw and Prague was the attitude towards Germany. For a short period of time, both sides were attempting to develop a common policy towards the stronger neighbour, which resulted in tightening the relations in the first half of 1925. An example of that was the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia, Edvard Beneš to Poland, the only visit within the entire interwar period, as well as awarding Tomáš Masaryk with the Order of the White Eagle.⁵³

The period of better relations was, however, recorded also in the satirical press. After Beneš’ arrival in Warsaw, the “Mucha” weekly published a rhyme entitled *Raison d’état* which in French means “reason of state”. It was authored by the editor in chief, Władysław Buchner. It is worth paying attention to the volume of the rhyme and its location within the issue, as it demonstrates its importance. It was published on the second page, as the first text material of the issue. It filled as much as half of the page, 47 lines of text altogether. Following the current political lines of the Polish diplomacy, the author called for Polish – Czechoslovakian reconciliation.

52 Natrętny Pepiczek. *Mucha* 8, 1924, p. 4.

53 Pilarski, Sebastian: *Zarys stosunków polsko-czechosłowackich 1918–1933*. Toruń 2008, p. 157.

*The time of the past quarrel is to be closed,
The devil of wretched discord banished from the hearts,
We are to only play the friendly lute,
What has passed – we put an end to it. (...)*⁵⁴

Buchner expressed the need to end the long – lasting conflict between the nations. He did not deny the discord between the neighbours in the previous years. However, he urges that negative emotions, here represented by the devil, should be eliminated as nourishing them would lead to no good and would only be to the mutual detriment of both states. In the author's opinion, it was necessary to break the cycle of hatred and begin cooperating, as the rhyme put it, to play the friendly melody of concord. In his appeal, most likely a truly sincere one, the author wanted to convince the readers that the cooperation with the Czechs was a necessity of the Polish foreign policy, and despite numerous conflicts, there were more elements and features connecting both nations, rather than separating them:

*Let us then walk along our brother, Czech,
Let our friendship flourish and last,
Let us, Slavs, rejoice
at this wise act called raison d'état*⁵⁵

The discussed rhyme is the only case found in the Polish satirical press of that time, where the author uses the word “brother” to describe the Czech without being ironic. Even though the brotherhood mentioned here referred to the Polish reason of state, however, it does not mean that the author viewed it as purely instrumental – he himself points to numerous common features and the common ground between the Poles and the Czechs, both belonging to the same Slavic family. Following the makes of the Polish foreign policy, Buchner indicated that the actual enemies, who had inflicted wrongs on both the Poles and the Czechs, were Germany and Russia. Somewhat prophetically, he noticed that reconciliation and cooperation were the only possible way to avoid future misfortunes awaiting Poland and Czechoslovakia from them.

Nevertheless, Władysław Buchner's rhyme was an exception to the rule of describing the Czech in the Polish political press of 1918–1926. In the upcoming years, the concepts of foreign policies of Poland and Czechoslovakia drifted apart again, and the pages of satirical magazines were once again filled with negative images of the southern neighbours, dominating – as it was presented above – in the previous

54 Buchner, Władysław: *Raison d'état*. Mucha 17, 1925, p. 2.

55 *Ibidem*.

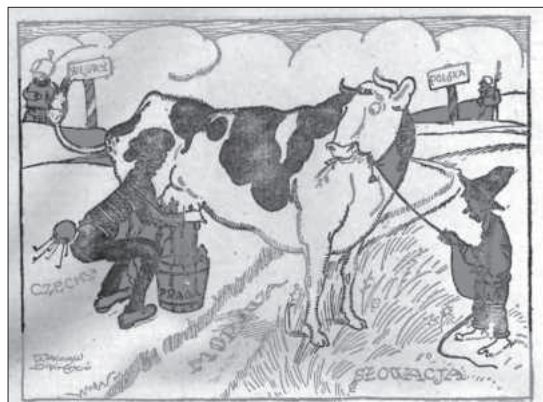
years. The analysis of the source materials allows the conclusion that the Polish satirical press most frequently presented the Czech in two alternative forms. The first one depicted him as a cunning thief, frequently hiding aggressive intentions, waiting to seize land administered by Poland, sympathizing with the Germans and exploiting enslaved Slovaks. The other form presented the Czech as an unimportant character – a comedian, a child or a dwarf. Here, the Czech claimed his rights to more influence than he actually deserved for his efforts and contribution to European politics. This negative image of the Czech on the one hand was a vivid reflection of difficult relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. On the other hand, however, the published satires were an expression of views and opinions of their authors, as well as political environments they sympathized with. In this case the authors were mostly enthusiasts of Józef Piłsudski. It is also important to remember that the satirical press, thanks to its distinctive form combining conveying information, shaping opinions and providing entertainment, was able to create the image of the reality in the readers' minds efficiently, as well as to cause reactions desired by the authors of the satires. As a consequence, stereotypical images might have been created and maintained among the Polish society – in this case images of the Czechs. The satire played the role of a vehicle, transporting the satire authors' opinions on Poland's southern neighbour, which similarly to the words of Marshall Piłsudski, quoted at the beginning of this article, came down to viewing the Czech as a traitor, a thief and a comedian.



Illus. 1. Szczutek 6, 1919, p. 5



Illus. 2. Mucha 2, 1922, p. 6

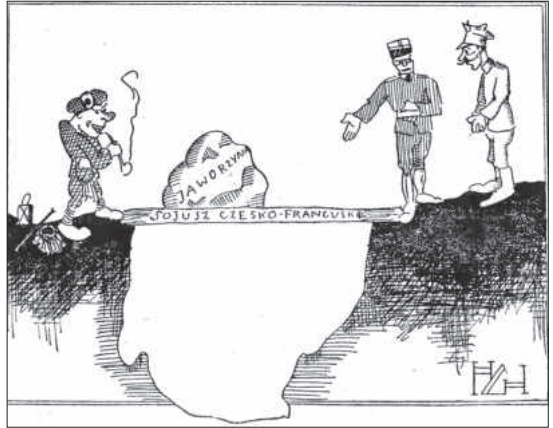


Illus. 4. Mucha 11, 1922, p. 6

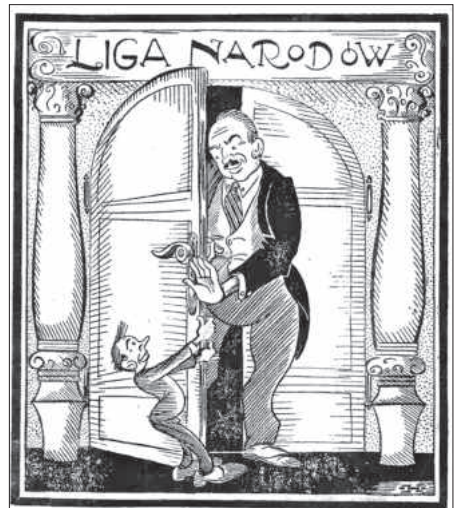


Illus. 3. Szczutek 31, 1921, p. 9

Illus. 5. Mucha 5, 1924, p. 6



Illus. 6. Mucha 27, 1923, p. 4



Illus. 7. Mucha 8, 1924, p. 4