The “Peasant Class” and the “Agricultural Estate”: Comparing Rural Political Cultures in 1930s Poland and Czechoslovakia

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Thesis abstract

This dissertation explores the divergent political trajectories of the Polish Populist and Czechoslovak Agrarian movements during the 1930s, a time of protracted economic crisis and political radicalization in the European countryside. Both agrarian populist movements emerged in the late 19th century to defend the interests of small- and medium-sized farmers, evolving into dominant forces in the rural life and politics of their respective nation-states after 1918. Despite similar origins, ideologies and in part social constituencies, their paths diverged during the 1930s crisis. Where Polish Populism radicalised leftward, increasingly styling itself in class-based and anti-elitist terms and emphasizing systemic transformation, the Czech Agrarians moved rightward, embracing conservative, anti-socialist positions and styles.

By adopting a comparative, sociocultural and partly "bottom-up" approach that integrates national- and local-level analysis, this dissertation sheds light on how rural interests and experiences could shape distinct political agendas and provides clues as to the social determinants of interwar peasant politics in Europe as a whole. Drawing on underused sources such as peasant memoirs, village chronicles, niche rural newspapers and the minute books of various rural associations, I examine the relationship between local subjectivities and contexts and each movement's political culture, with a particular focus on the regions of Central Galicia and South Bohemia, both strongholds of their respective movements.

Amongst various themes, I discuss the linguistic categories with which agrarian populists interpellated their socio-political subjects, and what these revealed about each movement's agendas, constraints and composition; how intra-village conflicts complicated each movement's political project and how successfully these conflicts were overcome; how each movement related to societal Others, most notably landowners and the urban working class, and how these frequently antagonistic relationships informed and were informed by rural life; and how villagers related to the nation-state and how this influence each movement's political trajectory.

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Abbreviations

APPrze	Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu
APRze	Archiwum Państwowe w Rzeszowie
AZHRL	Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego
ČSČH	*Československý časopis historický*
Domovina	*Domovina domkářů a malorolníků*
JPS	*Journal of Peasant Studies*
KPP	Komunistyczna Partia Polski (Communist Party of Poland)
MV	*Mladý Venkov*
NAČR	Národní Archiv České Republiky
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party)
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczone Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)
RDRL	Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego
SDA	State District Archive
SL	Stronnictwo Ludowe (People's Party)
ZD	*Zemědělský Dělník*
ZSL	Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe (United People's Party)

Introduction

For many residents of East-Central Europe, 1936 and 1937 were years abounding with spectacles of peasant power. On 22-24 May 1937, for instance, rural youths associated with Dorost – the youth group of Czechoslovakia's Republican Party of Farming and Small Peasant Folk, or Agrarian party as it was more commonly known – converged on Prague from all corners of the state for a celebratory summit. At its climax a 60-80,000-strong procession of young farmers decked out in regional folk costumes marched through the capital city, parading the rural soul of a by then largely industrialised nation under the full gaze of the metropolitan public, state representatives and foreign dignitaries. Around midday the procession reached Prague's Old Town Square where, following speeches by Agrarian leaders that celebrated the peasants' central role in the nation, Dorost youths pledged allegiance to the republic.[1] By all accounts Prague – despite being a city "dominated by socialists"[2] – was dazzled. Newspapers of all political stripes, whether Czech- or German-language, gushed with enthusiasm for the parade, even as each interpreted it according to its own ideological predilections. One Czech nationalist newspaper hailed Dorost's display of *völkisch* colour and martial nationalism as a triumph of the national spirit over class divisions.[3] A centrist newspaper, in turn, praised Dorost's commitment to democracy and the spirit of cooperating with other "pro-state" parties.[4] Even the Agrarians' adversaries on the left were careful to separate their

[1] My account is based on newspaper reports gathered in Prague, Národní Archiv (hereinafter NAČR), fond Ministerstvo Zahraničních Věcí - výstřižkový archiv I, karton 2404.
[2] Velký den agrární mládeže v Praze", *Lidové Noviny* (24.05.1937).
[3] "Venkov Praze – Praha venkovu", *Národní Listy* (21.05.1937).
[4] "Velký den agrární mládeže v Praze", *Lidové Noviny* (24.05.1937).

criticisms of Agrarian elites from their admiration for the Dorost youth whose vigour and democratic spirit were juxtaposed with the authoritarian, oligarchical designs of their leaders.[5]

A year earlier, in neighbouring Poland, a vastly different spectacle was arranged by the peasantry. The initial impetus behind it was an event of only parochial significance. In June 1936, in the remote Galician village of Nowosielce, a ceremonial mound was erected in honour of Michał Pyrz, a little-known 17th-century mayor who had fought off a Tatar raid. In its planners' eyes, Pyrz was clearly meant to symbolise something larger: the peasantry's centuries-long tradition of defending Poland. In light of this symbolism, the Inspector General of the Polish Armed Forces and Poland's *de facto* leader Edward Rydz-Śmigły was invited to the mound's inauguration. Keen to bolster the legitimacy of Poland's authoritarian regime and his own uncertain leadership, Rydz-Śmigły accepted the offer. What followed was a choreographed humiliation for the government. 150,000 peasants – for the most part affiliated with the oppositional People's Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*, henceforth referred to as the SL or the Populists) – travelled to Nowosielce from neighbouring districts, frequently in military-style marching columns and with the SL's green banners in hand. Once there, a parade was staged to honour Poland's military. As they passed the dignitaries' podium, however, peasants did not salute Rydz-Śmigły but cried out for the return of democracy and of their exiled leader Wincenty Witos. Furious, Rydz-Śmigły left the festivities early.[6]

[5] "Co ukázala manifestace republikánského dorostu?", *Rudé Právo* (25.05.1937); "Jedenáct tisíc národních krojů šlo Prahou", *České Slovo* (25.05.1937).
[6] My account is based on a detailed report by the Czechoslovak ambassador. Warsaw, Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego (hereinafter AZHRL), Stronnictwo Ludowe 59 (hereinafter SL-59), 02.07.1936 cable from Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw.

Ten months later the SL sought governmental permission to celebrate another symbol of peasant patriotism, the anniversary of the 1794 Battle of Racławice where scythe-bearing peasants had defeated the Russian army. This time the state took no chances and banned the celebrations. The SL, nevertheless, remained set on a more muscular showdown with the Polish regime. In August 1937 – on the anniversary of yet another supposedly peasant-dominated military triumph, the 1920 Battle of Warsaw – the SL leadership announced a nationwide "peasant strike" to pressure the government into restoring democratic rule. For ten days somewhere between 1.6 and 3.1 million smallholders in nine out of 17 provinces withheld agricultural deliveries from urban markets, picketing roads and violently punishing those who dared defy the boycott.[7] The state responded with violence of its own, killing 44 strikers in southern Poland, arresting 4000, trying 2000 and ransacking 700 households.[8] Whilst the strike failed in its demands, it still proved to be the largest act of organised rural disobedience in interwar Europe.

Unlike the Dorost parade, the self-styled "peasant strike" took place far from the urban gaze – both literally, for it was a dispersed event unfolding in villages throughout Poland, and figuratively, for all mention of it was censored in the national press for its duration. Further, where the Dorost parade was fêted by elite Czechoslovak opinion, the peasant strike – like many other SL-organised demonstrations – was repressed by the state and, in its aftermath, condemned by large sections of the press.[9] This contrast in state

[7] For estimates see T.P. Adams, "'Rights, Bread and Work For All': The Polish Peasant Strike of 1937" (PhD diss., UC Davis, 1995), 73.
[8] J. Borkowski, "Działalność społeczno-polityczna i postawa chłopów w latach 1918-1939", in S. Inglot (ed.), *Historia chłopów polskich* (3 vols, Warsaw, 1970-1980), iii, 374-375.
[9] Fr. Wilk, "Po chłopskim strajku…Przegląd prasy polskiej", *Wieś i Państwo*, 1/1 (1938), 58-64.

responses was not lost on contemporaries.[10] However, it was not just elite reactions to peasant demonstrations that differed in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Rather, for all that they shared in martial peasant nationalism, the demonstrations themselves diverged in tone and substance. The cycle of protest that began at Nowosielce was subversive, grievance-centred and focused on advancing peasant interests with class-based methods and language – most obviously, the "peasant strike". By comparison, the Dorost parade had been celebratory, unambiguously state-nationalist and expressive of cross-class solidarity as much as of peasant strength.

The contrast between these events was emblematic of the broader divergence between the main peasant movements of Poland and Czechoslovakia during the 1930s. These movements – the Polish Populists and Czech, later Czechoslovak, Agrarians – had emerged under similar circumstances, at the turn of the century, and with a similar purpose: the defence of small and medium-sized farmers against the lingering shadow of feudalism, on the one hand, and the social dislocations caused by capitalism's advance, on the other. During subsequent decades both transformed themselves into the dominant political vehicles for peasant smallholders in their respective states. Whilst their support was regionally and ethnically concentrated, in their traditional heartlands – Bohemia for the Agrarians, West Galicia and parts of Central Poland for the Populists – these parties and their satellite organisations influenced all areas of interwar rural life. In short, interwar politics and society in East-Central Europe cannot be understood without them. Whilst asserting peasant interests, both movements also

[10] After the Dorost congress, one SL-affiliated newspaper wistfully observed how "it did not occur to anyone that this congress should be banned or impeded. Prague not only did not get scared of this peasant invasion but welcomed it with great joy…". "Marsz chłopski na Pragę!", *Piast* (6.06.1937).

fashioned alternative visions of modernity – neither socialist nor liberal – in which small-scale farming would be preserved, cooperativized and modernized and the peasantry thereby maintained as a dominant component of national society.[11] In the process both recognized one another as sister movements.

And yet, during the 1930s, as each movement confronted a new and protracted economic crisis that reduced farmers to penury, their politics would assume a radically different tenor. On the one hand, the Polish Populists radicalised, primarily in a leftward direction. Populists increasingly styled themselves in class-based terms; advanced a cooperativist vision of the future centred on emancipation from the systemic exploitation of labour; and showed a growing willingness to dabble in various, occasionally violent, kinds of direct action. By contrast, the dominant currents in the Agrarian party either cleaved to the political centre, stressing the party's adherence to the nation-state over its class identity, or radicalised to the right. This rightward tendency was reflected in the party's increasingly conservative and anti-socialist self-fashioning as well as its aggressive demands for agricultural protection, demands that were widely perceived as indifferent to the urban, predominantly proletarian consumer.

What drove these divergent trajectories? Were they the product of each movement's path-dependency – of differences that had been present since the beginning? In what ways were they rooted in the social, political and economic contexts of the interwar period? What was the relationship between ideology and village life, between each

[11] In the Polish case, however, the understanding that this peasant-centred order represented a "third way" was not explicitly formulated until the 1920s. R. Holec, "Ideové zdroje medzinárodného agrarizmu a jeho národných špecifík", in J. Harna and B. Rašticová (eds.), *Agrární strana a její zájmové, družstevní a peněžní organizace* (Uherské Hradiště, 2010), 64.

movement's trajectory and the composition, demands and experiences of its base? And in what ways was peasants' relationship with other social groups conditioned by or determinative of their movements' divergence? Finally, what does their divergence reveal about the broader determinants of peasant politics in interwar Europe? These are the questions at the heart of the present dissertation.

i. Pathways of Rural Politics during the 1930s

The changes in the Polish and Czechoslovak peasant movements were part of a broader transformation of rural politics in the 1930s. The Great Depression generated peasant discontent on a global scale. Anger over plummeting crop prices, ruinous tax demands, the loss of labour opportunities and dwindling land security spurred waves of rural unrest and mobilisation in far-flung localities, from El Salvador to Burma, from Saskatchewan to Palestine.[12] In Europe, too, peasant discontent drove a more militant and boisterous form of rural politics across multiple countries. As Juan Pan-Montojo has argued, the spread of mass politics and media to the countryside, combined with improvements in transport networks that facilitated large peasant gatherings in urban centres, helped disseminate a new repertoire of rural collective action in the 1930s.[13] Across the continent peasants could be seen obstructing foreclosures, blocking roads, engineering

[12] T.P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Lincoln NE, 1971); J.C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven CT, 1976); M.S. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Coöperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, a Study in Political Sociology* (Berkeley, 1950); A. Nadan, "Economic Aspects of the Peasant-Led National Palestinian Revolt, 1936-39", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 60/5 (2017), 647-682.
[13] J. Pan-Montojo, "Introduction", in L. Brassart et al. (eds.), *Making Politics in the European Countryside, 1780s-1930s* (Turnhout, 2022), 131.

tax strikes, attending rallies and organising dramatic journeys to protest before the seats of state power.[14]

However, whilst the techniques of rural protest and immediate causes of discontent were similar across many states, the political forces that best mastered such techniques and capitalised on this discontent evinced great ideological variety. In Schleswig-Holstein and north-west France where peasants lacked pre-existing parties of their own, new explicitly peasant-centred movements – the *Landvolkbewegung* and Dorgères' Green Shirts, respectively – emerged on the far right and channelled peasant despair in anti-socialist, anti-Semitic and anti-republican directions.[15] By contrast, in parts of south-west France and the predominantly Belarussian- and Ukrainian-speaking eastern marches of Poland and Czechoslovakia, Communists were the main champions of peasant anger.[16]

In countries where peasants already adhered to specifically agrarian parties before the Depression, these parties frequently splintered into ideological and class-based factions or confronted new, more radical challengers in the 1930s. After 1929 the Finnish Agrarian League, which regularly dominated governments in the 1920s, simultaneously haemorrhaged part of its farming clientele to the far-right Lapua movement and another, poorer part to the left-leaning Small Farmers' Party.[17] After 1932 the farmer-centred

[14] E.g., H. Gollwitzer, "Europäische Bauerndemokratie im 20. Jahrhundert", in Eadem (ed.), *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1977), 30; R.O. Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgères's Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture, 1929-1939* (New York, 1997).
[15] Ibid.; A. Otto-Morris, *Rebellion in the Province: The Landvolkbewegung and the Rise of National Socialism in Schleswig-Holstein* (Frankfurt, 2013).
[16] L. Boswell, *Rural Communism in France, 1920-1939* (Ithaca, 1998); P. Cichoracki, *Komuniści na Polesiu w latach 1921-1939* (Łomianki, 2016).
[17] K. Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien", in Gollwitzer, *Europäische Bauernparteien*, 183-185.

liberal party Venstre which had ruled Denmark in the late 1920s was vitiated by the emergence of a more aggressive right-populist farmers' movement that drew support from poor and wealthy farmers alike.[18] In Estonia the hitherto separate parties of wealthy farmers and poorer land reform beneficiaries formed a single party of agricultural defence in 1932 – only to divorce a year later under the weight of their conflicting economic interests.[19]

Similar fissiparous tendencies could be observed in the Balkans where peasant parties evolved in often contradictory directions, simultaneously mirroring aspects of both the Polish and Czechoslovak movements' trajectories. Chastened by the 1923 coup against Stamboliyski's radical peasant government and by the subsequent White Terror, the Bulgarian agrarian movement largely gravitated to the centre-right during the late 1920s and 1930s, restyling itself – much like the Czechoslovak Agrarians – as a party of the middle classes.[20] Most of Romania's National Peasant Party, which had the misfortune of being elected to office on the eve of the Depression, shifted in the same direction, losing its earlier faith in a specifically agrarian, non-industrial path of modernization.[21] Faced with the increasingly oppressive centralism of the post-1929 Yugoslav dictatorship and an influx of non-peasant members, the Croatian Peasant Party also diluted its peasantism, morphing into a more generic standard-bearer for Croatian nationalism.[22] However, at the same time that dominant currents in the Balkan peasant parties moved towards the centre-right, powerful left-leaning counter-currents that –

[18] C. Bjørn, "Venstre - the Party of the Rural Population in Denmark", in Idem, 165-166.
[19] H. Weiss, "Bauernparteien in Estland", in Idem, 214-215.
[20] R. Daskalov, "Agrarian Ideologies and Peasant Movements in the Balkans", in R. Daskalov and D. Mishkova (eds.) *Entangled Histories of the Balkans* (4 vols, Leiden, 2014), ii, 303.
[21] Idem, 319-320.
[22] Idem, 336-337.

much like the Polish Populists – advanced an emancipatory, cooperativist "third way" also gained prominence in the peasant movements of Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia.[23]

The political trajectories of interwar peasantries were, in short, multiple and conflicting. These divergent trajectories had consequences that reached far beyond the rural realm. In the 1930s around 45% of Europe's population remained dependent on agriculture.[24] Even if peasants lacked the clout of more organized urban pressure groups, their electoral leverage had to be reckoned with, affecting the political course of countries even in the more urbanised West. In Gregory Luebbert's argument, peasants' hostility or indifference to the left was a deciding factor in the success of fascist movements in Italy, Spain and Germany, just as agrarian parties' willingness to enter coalitions with socialists provided the foundation for a new social democratic social contract in 1930s Scandinavia.[25] Across Europe political forces of all ideological stripes recognised peasantries' newfound importance, adapting their programmes to reflect agrarian themes and according peasants unprecedented symbolic centrality.[26]

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[23] Idem, 304-305, 321-322, 343-344.
[24] D. Warriner, *Economics of Peasant Farming*, 2nd ed. (London, 1964), 197.
[25] G.M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (New York, 1991).
[26] Many examples could be listed. Various socialist parties shifted towards more revisionist positions on the agrarian question in the interwar period. Fascist regimes and movements placed peasants at the centre of their own self-mythologies. Intellectuals in East-Central Europe intensified their interest in village life and the peasant question in the 1930s. Such peasantist turns had many causes that went beyond political actors' purely instrumental calculations. Nevertheless, collectively, they were indicative of the peasants' unprecedented importance to political coalition-building and legitimacy. E.g., A. Wojtas, "Agraryzm w środowiskach pozaludowych", *Wieś Współczesna: pismo ruchu ludowego*, 33/1 (1989), 129-130; E. Lynch, "Interwar France and the Rural Exodus: The National Myth in Peril", *Rural History*, 21/2 (2010), 165-176; E. Lynch, "Socialistes et Communistes Dans l'entre-Deux-Guerres", *Études rurales*, 171–172 (2004), 45-59; J.E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: the NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London, 1976); S. Ploumidis, "'Peasantist Nationalism' in Inter-War Greece (1927–41)", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 37/1 (2013), 111-129.

Despite peasants' importance to interwar politics, scarcely any comparative research has sought to explain the variety of peasant allegiances and parties. Most historical work on rural politics has understandably been national in scope. Comparative historiography has, in turn, tended to focus on agrarian thought and intellectuals, skirting the question of how socio-cultural conditions informed peasant parties' development.[27] By way of example, one of the few studies to directly address the ideological diversity of agrarian currents framed it as a by-product of how different intellectuals understood the problem of rural backwardness and which of four remedies they favoured: nation-building, state-building, class-building or technocracy.[28] In this perspective, ideological diversity was more a reflection of what intellectuals offered the countryside – of political "supply" – than of social demand.

In reality, demand was just as important. This was likely especially true of peasant parties in East-Central Europe. In contrast to the intelligentsia-driven *Narodnik* movement in Russia or the Junker-led Agrarian League in Germany, the movements of East-Central Europe were for the most part led and dominated by intellectuals embedded in peasant life or by peasants themselves – political brokers who understood and channelled village concerns as much as they shaped them.[29] Indeed, the ideologies that these movements

[27] E.g. Daskalov, "Agrarian Ideologies"; Holec, "Ideové zdroje"; B. Trencsényi, "Transcending Modernity: Agrarian Populist Visions of Collective Regeneration in Interwar East-Central Europe", in D. Mishkova, B. Trencsényi and M. Jalava (eds.), "*Regimes of Historicity" in Southeastern and Northern Europe. Discourses of Identity and Temporality, 1890-1945* (Basingstoke, 2014), 119-145.

[28] D. Brett, "What Is a Peasant Movement for?", in J. Regan and C. Smith (eds.), *Agrarian Reform and Resistance in an Age of Globalisation: The Euro-American World and Beyond, 1780-1914* (Boca Raton FL, 2018), 155-169.

[29] M. Canovan, *Populism* (London, 1981), 122-123; J.D. Bell, "Populism and Pragmatism: The BANU in Bulgarian Politics", in J. Held, *Populism in Eastern Europe: Racism, Nationalism and Society* (Boulder, 1996), 26; J. Harna and V. Lacina, "Der tschechische und slowakische politische Agrarismus und seine Hauptakteure (1899-1938)", in E. Kubů et al. (eds.), *Agrarismus und Agrareliten in Ostmitteleuropa* (Berlin/Prague, 2013), 391; R. Holec, "Intellektuelle Agrareliten in Ost- und Mitteleuropa im Vergleich", in Kubů et al., *Agrarismus*, 175-193.

developed were notoriously eclectic and flexible, fashioned for the purpose of agrarian defence and unbeholden to doctrinal orthodoxies as in the case of Catholic or socialist parties.[30] In short, to understand why peasant movements assumed specific ideological flavours and why they diverged, it is essential to compare them within their social contexts, to analyse peasants not just as the objects of mobilization by party elites but as diverse political agents who brought their experiences, interests and mentalities to bear on the political realm, who chose between parties and shaped the ideological complexion of their movements. An awareness of this need for a comparative *social* history of rural politics was certainly apparent in Gregory Luebbert's study of interwar Europe and the various political-economic regimes it produced. Indeed, it was precisely in the social realm that Luebbert located his explanation of European peasants' variable attitude to the left, which – in his argument – depended on the degree to which socialists intervened in rural class relations.[31] Luebbert's study, however, was panoramic in scope and thus unable to provide an ethnographically "thick" account of rural life and how it informed different peasantries' political trajectories. It is precisely such an account that this dissertation – a comparative sociocultural history of peasant politics at both the village and national level – seeks to provide.

ii. Historiographical Biases

With its comparative, sociocultural and partly "bottom-up" approach, this dissertation addresses three main historiographical gaps. The first is the absence of studies

[30] Daskalov, "Agrarian Ideologies", 291; U. Müller et al., "Agrarismus und Agrareliten im östlichen Mitteleuropa. Forschungsstand, Kontextualisierung, Thesen" in Kubů et al., *Agrarismus,* 18.
[31] Luebbert, *Liberalism*, ch.8.

explaining why and how interwar peasants could be mobilised either by forces of the left or of the right. The absence of such studies is surprising given that peasants' "awkwardness" as a social class and political subject has been a central axiom of peasant studies since the subdiscipline's emergence in the late 1960s.[32] From the perspective of modern industrial society with its division between capital and labour, smallholding peasants have always appeared slippery, marked by their dual, undifferentiated nature as both managers of the production process and labourers of the land, owners of the means of production and subalterns exploited by more powerful social groups. Further complicating this "awkwardness" were the often-contradictory dynamics to which peasant societies were subject as market forces penetrated the countryside in the 19th-20th centuries: agricultural professionalisation in some regions and pauperisation in others;[33] and socioeconomic polarisation between poor and wealthy peasants alongside the integration of villagers into an emergent civil society, frequently geared towards the defence of agricultural interests as a whole.

Politically, the effect of these contradictions was an enduring ambivalence in peasant political identities. In Karl Kautsky's phrase, "two souls inhabit the breast of the dwarf-holder: a peasant and proletarian". In this perspective, whether smallholders allied with large farmers and landowners or with urban workers depended on which of their two "souls" was more successfully activated.[34] More recently, Eric Hobsbawm observed how little was known about the circumstances under which peasants, who during the early

[32] T. Shanin, *The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society, Russia 1910-1925* (Oxford, 1972).
[33] T. Shanin, "Peasantry as a Political Factor," in Eadem (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (London, 1971), 249.
[34] Cited in J. Banaji, "Illusions about the Peasantry: Karl Kautsky and the Agrarian Question", *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (hereinafter *JPS*), 17/2 (1990), 292.

stages of Europe's transition to mass politics had primarily been mobilised by the political right, later became receptive to the leadership and language of the left.[35] Hobsbawm's call for further research into this question, however, has remained largely unheeded. During the heyday of peasant studies in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars inspired by the peasant-dominated revolutions of the Third World focused on why and when 20th-century peasants rebelled or resisted rather than why their rebellions took the ideological form they did.[36] The political history of European peasants – for the most part written without reference to peasant studies scholarship – has, in turn, directed most of its attention to the 19th, not the 20th, century and the question of how and when peasants became national citizens rather than adherents of this or that political current.[37] Whilst 20th-century peasant unrest has once again drawn the attention of European historians in recent years, the various currents of peasant conservatism that existed alongside rural radicalism are occluded in this scholarship.[38] Due to their focus on individual nations, the historiographies of European peasant movements have also tended to avoid comparative questions about why some movements were drawn leftward and others to the right.[39] By contrast, by viewing left-leaning and right-leaning peasant movements and the social contexts that constrained them together, this dissertation sheds light on how

[35] E.J. Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics", *JPS*, 1/1 (1973), 17.
[36] For a critical overview see T. Skocpol, "What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?", *Comparative Politics*, 14/3 (1982), 351-375.
[37] M. Cabo and F. Molina, "The Long and Winding Road of Nationalization: Eugen Weber's Peasants into Frenchmen in Modern European History (1976-2006)", *European History Quarterly*, 39/2 (2009), 264-286.
[38] J. Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", *Past & Present*, 236/1 (2017), 207-241; R. Forlenza, "Europe's Forgotten Unfinished Revolution: Peasant Power, Social Mobilization, and Communism in the Southern Italian Countryside, 1943–45", *The American Historical Review*, 126/2 (2021), 504-529.
[39] This contrasts with extensive discussions of the class character of farmers' movements and of their ideologies in the scholarship on late 20th-century India. T. Brass, "Introduction: The New Farmers' Movements in India", Eadem (ed.), *The New Farmers' Movements in India* (London/New York, 1995), 9-17.

rural interests and experiences could shape distinct political agendas and provides clues as to the social determinants of interwar peasant politics more broadly.

The other gaps addressed by this thesis are more specific to the historiographies of Poland and Czechoslovakia. One is simply the paucity of literature comparing each of their peasant movements. This lack of comparative perspectives has constrained historians' ability to identify similarities and differences between them, to perceive what is specific to each and to formulate questions and hypotheses on this basis.[40] These are some of the blind spots that my comparativist approach has sought to rectify. The resulting advantages can be illustrated with three sets of examples. Firstly, comparison has allowed me to identify features of each country's peasant movement that, whilst familiar to historians, have either rarely or never been acknowledged as *distinctive* vis-à-vis analogous movements in other states.[41] Amongst these was each movement's class composition and relationship to landowners, urban workers and the nation-state. Secondly, comparison has exposed themes that have been asymmetrically treated by different national historiographies. These include peasants' attitudes to officialdom, a question well-known to Polish scholarship that is barely mentioned by Czech historians,

[40] For a schematic discussion of the advantages of the comparative method see J. Kocka and H-G. Haupt, "Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History", in Eidem (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York/Oxford, 2009), 3-4.

[41] Indeed, precisely because such questions have rarely been considered in a comparative light, historians have at times, more or less explicitly, treated the features of one or several peasant movement(s) as being typical for *all* peasant politics. By way of example, various Czech historians have argued – one suspects primarily based on their own national example – that agrarian movements tended to be conservative and anti-socialist, that they were strongest in industrializing contexts and where peasants faced a foreign landowning class, and that their anti-urbanism mellowed over time. E. Kubů and J. Šouša, "Středoevropský a slovinský agrarismus v komparativní dimenzi (1918-1928). Programy, transfery idejí, možnosti spolupráce", in J. Gašparič et al. (eds.), *Češi a Slovinci v moderní době/Čehi in Slovenci v dobi moderne* (Prague/Ljubljana, 2010), 247, 259; A. Doležalová, "Agrarismus mezi láskou k rodné hroudě a politické moci", *Historický časopis*, 63/3 (2015), 447; E. Kubů and J. Šouša, "Historiografie německého agrarismu v českých zemích 19. a 20. století", *Východočeské Listy Historické*, 32 (2014), 70-71.

and their parties' attitude to trade policy, a prominent theme in literature on the Czechoslovak Agrarians that has been ignored by Polish scholars. By identifying historiographical asymmetries, I was then able to consider how far these corresponded to real historical differences and whether these differences, in turn, were related to the movements' broader divergence. Thirdly, the comparative method helped to "defamiliarize", and thereby uncover the importance of, variables whose very existence had either been ignored or taken for granted by historians of *both* countries. These include the relationship between smallholding peasants and estate labourers in different states and regions; the relationship between demographic trends and rural politics; and the different linguistic categories by which each peasant movement sought to "interpellate" its political addressee.[42]

An additional novelty of this dissertation lies in its application of social and cultural history perspectives to the rural politics of interwar East-Central Europe. The need for such perspectives is particularly apparent in the scholarship on interwar Czechoslovakia where village-level politics has long been neglected. The roots of this neglect go back to 1945 when the Agrarian party was banned and decried as reactionary, condemning it to the historiographical margins for much of the state-socialist period. Excepting sporadic studies of Communist-led unrest, socialist-era historiography failed to research local-level politics in the interwar countryside.[43] Class-based tensions within the Agrarian-dominated village were more often assumed, in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology, than

[42] For more on "interpellation", see A. Finlayson, "Nationalism as Ideological Interpellation: The Case of Ulster Loyalism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19/1 (1996), 88-112.
[43] E.g., T. Pasák, "Hnutí drobných řepařů na Roudnicku v roce 1931", *Přispěvky k dějinám KSČ*, 1 (1961), 514-531; L. Vebr, "Revolučné hnutie maloroľnikov na Slovensku v prvej polovici tridsiatych rokov", *Historický časopis*, 7/3 (1959), 361-389; V. Plevza et al., *KSČ a rolhicka otázka na Slovensku, 1921-1960* (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1961).

empirically demonstrated. After 1989 this historiographical neglect was partially reversed, as an outpouring of new research produced a more thorough portrait of the associational apparatus, political machinery and ideology built up by the Agrarian movement.[44] The focus of this literature, however, has been on party elites and institutions, with little attention paid to everyday political discourse or the mentalities and behaviours of ordinary activists and villagers. Furthermore, whilst discarding the aprioristic assumption of class conflict that characterized socialist historiography, post-socialist historians have chosen to ignore rather than investigate social conflicts. The social and indeed cultural history of the Agrarian movement – and of rural politics more generally – in short remains largely unwritten.

The historiographical fortune of the Polish peasant movement has in many ways been the opposite of its Czechoslovak counterpart. This too was politically dependent. After 1945 Poland's Communists did not dissolve the Populist movement, instead preserving it as a neutered satellite of the Polish United Workers' Party (henceforth PZPR). With the de-Stalinization of the mid-1950s, Populists sought to recover their autonomy. One area where they succeeded was historical research. In 1959 an academic journal specifically devoted to the history of the peasant movement was established, followed a year later by an Institute of Populist Movement History. For the next two decades these institutions fostered an explosion of historical scholarship on most aspects of the interwar peasant movement. Though easily dismissed due to its political biases,[45] this literature remains

[44] E.g., Harna and Rašticová, *Agrární strana*; J. Rychlík et al, (eds.), *Agrarismus ve střední a východní Evropě 19. a 20. století* (Prague, 2015); E. Broklová et al., *Agrárníci, národní demokraté a lidovci ve druhém poločase první Československé republiky* (Prague, 2008).

[45] For more on the complex political agenda governing this historiography and the ways it both reflected and challenged regime ideology, see F. Zalewski, "L'improbable autonomisation d'un 'parti satellite'.

foundational to any study of interwar rural politics, not least because after 1989 the subject was – in contrast to the Czechoslovak Agrarians – largely jettisoned from the historiographical agenda in favour of formerly forbidden topics.[46] Thanks to this legacy, any researcher of the Polish countryside inherits – relative to her Czech or Slovak counterpart – an infinitely superior landscape of social and political, national and regional history studies on peasant parties, associations and unrest. Nevertheless, here too obvious gaps remain. Most notably, cultural-historical perspectives are largely absent from the historiography of interwar peasant politics both before and after 1989.[47]

In its themes and approaches, the present dissertation breaks with the traditional concerns of *both* Polish and Czech historiographies of rural politics. The focus of my comparison is on the relationship between each movement's political culture and its social context, above all on how political discourses and rural mentalities were enmeshed. To this end, the dissertation centres themes typical of cultural history and overlooked by existing historiographies of both countries: the political languages and discursive representations employed by each movement, peasant attitudes and experiences, and the intersection between the two. At the same time, through its emphasis on politics at the village level, the dissertation employs a "bottom-up" perspective that Czech historiography of the Agrarian party particularly lacks. Finally, to gain insight into mentalities and their relationship to political discourse, I rely *inter alia*

Réflexions sur les rapports de pouvoir entre le ZSL e le PZPR dans la Pologne communiste (1949-1989)", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 49/2 (2002), 90-93.

[46] Only in the last decade has the peasantry returned to the foreground of Polish history-writing, though most of this is work is popular-historical and does not focus on the interwar period. Z. Mazur, "Was There Ever a Polish Peasant? Historical Imagination and the People's History of Poland", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 126 (2022), 155-180.

[47] Tellingly, for instance, one of the most interesting historical sources on rural life – the vast body of peasant memoirs written before and after World War II – remains largely untouched by political historians.

on sources that existing historiographies have tended to ignore: peasant memoirs, village chronicles, village ethnographies, niche rural newspapers and the minute books of various rural associations.

iii. Polish and Czechoslovak Peasant Movements: An Overview

But why compare the Polish and Czechoslovak movements in particular? For a contrasting comparison to be useful,[48] a certain degree of likeness between the *comparanda* is essential: only this way can comparison reveal non-trivial specificities of each case as well as pointing to non-trivial causal explanations of their differences. So, what were the similarities between these movements that would justify such a focus on their divergence? Precisely because their histories have never been explicitly compared, an overview of their major points of similarity and difference is needed.

Both movements were formed in the 1890s at the fag-end of the Long Depression in agriculture – a time of widespread agrarian mobilization that saw farmers throughout Europe establish pressure groups, agricultural unions and, in some cases, separate political parties to counteract and constrain market forces.[49] Both movements emerged in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy – in the crownlands of Galicia and Bohemia, respectively – thereby taking advantage of constitutional and civic freedoms that were not afforded to Polish-speaking peasants under Russian or Prussian rule or to Slovak-speaking peasants in Hungary. These freedoms enabled both to establish a

[48] For a typology of comparative history approaches, A.A. van den Braembussche, "Historical Explanation and Comparative Method: Towards a Theory of the History of Society", *History and Theory*, 28/1 (1989), 1-24.
[49] M. Cabo, "Agrarian Parties in Europe prior to 1945 and beyond", in Brassart et al., *Making Politics*, 314-315.

sizeable parliamentary presence in the 1900s, a decade and a half before most peasant parties rose to political prominence in East-Central Europe. As a result, each movement's elite gained an early schooling in the arts of both electioneering and parliamentary strategy, tub-thumping demagogy and political compromise. In the process each developed a contradictory relationship to the traditional landowning nobilities that retained inordinate socioeconomic and political power in both the Czech and Polish Lands: these nobilities were at once rhetorical and social antagonists to be lambasted at rallies and potential partners in parliamentary dealings. This oscillation between radical and pro-systemic impulses was a broader feature of both movements' politics. On the one hand, each embraced an agrarian populist style in which peasantist, anti-aristocratic, anti-urban, anti-Semitic and anti-clerical themes featured with various degrees of prominence. On the other, this more combative peasant-centrism was counterbalanced with regular expressions of loyalty to the national community and the supra-national Habsburg state.

Doubtless, there were also differences between the Galician and Bohemian agrarian movements and their social contexts that inclined each – even at this early stage – towards a divergent political course. Czech agrarianism emerged in Austria's most industrialized crownland where urban demand for foodstuffs had stimulated agricultural intensification and capitalization since the mid-19th century and where excess rural labour was easily absorbed by expanding urban centres. By contrast, Galicia, the birthplace of Polish Populism, was amongst the most backward and rural crownlands, notorious for its mounting agrarian overpopulation and the consequent fragmentation of peasant farms. Accordingly, whilst both movements were initially dominated by village

elites, the early Agrarian leadership was substantially wealthier and more landed and market-oriented than its Galician counterpart. By extension, in the 1900s elitism and anti-socialism played a more pronounced role in Agrarian political culture than in that of the Galician Populists. Another factor encouraging a less anti-systemic trajectory for the Agrarians was their relatively uncomplicated relationship with mainstream Czech nationalism. The plebeian character of Czech national elites and of Czech national mythology removed most obstacles to peasant identification with the nation. By contrast, the nobility's prominent role in Polish national culture produced continual strain in how Populists and the Polish-speaking peasantry related to the national idea.

Nevertheless, during the 1910s and 1920s the political-ideological divergence of Populists and Agrarians did not appear inevitable. Both movements continued to face similar pressures which in certain regards produced parallel or even convergent developments in each. World War I, for instance, was similarly transformative for peasant politics across East-Central Europe. In 1917-1918, as dynastic empires collapsed and Bolshevik winds blew in from the east, social radicalism engulfed the countryside of the region, prompting estate occupations by land-hungry peasants, agricultural strikes by estate labourers and even sporadic experiments in peasant self-rule such as the short-lived Tarnobrzeg Republic in Central Galicia.[50] Calls for redistributive land reform – politically marginal before 1914 – became widespread.[51] Recognising the need to accommodate this radicalism, part of the Agrarian leadership –

[50] Beneš, "Green Cadres".

[51] On the late uptake of the idea of land reform by agrarian populists see K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, "Ludowcy galicyjscy w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 65/1 (1958), 51-52; A. Doležalová, "O ukradených myšlenkách aneb Ideologie agrarismu vs. ekonomicko-politická realita", in B. Rašticová (ed.), *Agrární strany ve vládních a samosprávných strukturách mezi světovými válkami* (Uherské Hradiště, 2008), 127-136.

most notably represented by Antonín Švehla – resolved to expand the Agrarians' appeal with the poorer peasantry, embracing land reform in 1918, establishing Domovina – a new satellite organization for poorer peasants – and marginalising the landowners' wing of the party.[52] In the process the make-up of the Agrarian social coalition was democratised, coming closer to the less landed social base of Galician Populism.

Another stimulus to the movements' convergence was their growing ideological entanglement in the 1920s. 1921 saw the establishment of the International Agrarian Bureau, or Green International, in Prague, a body to oversee cooperation and integration between European peasant parties, especially in the successor states of East-Central Europe. The Czechoslovak Agrarians and the dominant Galician faction of Polish Populism, the "Piast" Polish People's Party (henceforth PSL Piast), were both affiliated with the Green International from the start. Whilst the International's impact proved slim, it nevertheless provided a conduit for the transfer of ideas and practices amongst different peasant movements. The Czechoslovak Agrarians' ability to embed themselves in the state, build up rural cooperatives, promote folk culture and formulate an agrarian ideology made a deep impression on all fractions of the Polish Populist movement, from right to left.[53] Even as it lurched leftward in the 1930s, Polish Populism retained an explicit sense of indebtedness and amity towards the Czechoslovak Agrarians.[54] The Agrarians,

[52] D. Miller, *Forging Political Compromise: Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party, 1918-1933* (Pittsburgh, 1999), 28-32; D. Uhlíř, "Dva směry v československém agrárním hnutí a rozchod Karla Praška s republikánskou stranou", *Sborník historický*, 18 (1971), 113-148.
[53] E.g., Holec, "Ideové zdroje", 64; A. Lech, *Tradycyjna kultura ludowa w programach i działalności polskich związków młodzieży wiejskiej w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej* (Łódź, 1978), 51.
[54] St. W., "Na drodze do agraryzmu", *Wici* (6.01.1935), 1; AZHRL, SL-59, Q3 1935 report sent by the Czechoslovak Consulate in Kraków.

for their part, reciprocated these friendly sentiments but were not discernibly influenced by the Populist model.[55]

Another area where the Polish and Czechoslovak movements initially developed in parallel – only to radically diverge later – was in their relationship to state power. In the early years of national independence both became increasingly embedded in the state. Throughout its 20-year existence the First Czechoslovak Republic was ruled by multi-party coalitions that typically spanned the political spectrum. The Agrarians were an integral part of these governments from the beginning. Following the 1920 split in the Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party between Communist and Socialist factions, the Agrarians became the dominant segment in all subsequent governments and – from 1925 – the largest parliamentary party. From late 1922 until the fall of the Republic the premiership was almost invariably occupied by an Agrarian. The Ministries of Agriculture, Defence and the Interior were in Agrarian possession for 20, 16 and nearly 13 years, respectively. This privileged position in the state gave the Agrarians direct influence over governmental policy as well as control of important levers of patronage – chief amongst them the Land Office, which was charged with executing the 1919 land reform. By the 1930s the Agrarians were seen both by themselves and their rivals as the party of power *par excellence*.[56]

[55] Ties to peasant movements across East-Central Europe – combined with the broader pan-Slavism of Czech political culture – nevertheless informed the Agrarians' understanding of agrarianism as a specifically Slavic alternative to Western industrialism. E.g., *Venkov* (29.06.1922), 1; Holec, "Ideové zdroje", 60.

[56] E.g., J. Harna, "Republikánská strana" in P. Marek and J. Malíř (eds.), *Politické strany: vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861-2004* (2 vols, Brno, 2005), i, 558.

The Polish Populist movement could never aspire to such influence. Post-independence governments in Poland were deeply unstable, preventing parties from claiming ownership of ministries. Just as importantly, the Populist movement itself was divided along ideological and geographical lines into several parties: most importantly, the right-leaning PSL Piast – main heir to the pre-war Galician Populist movement – and the left-leaning "Liberation" Polish People's Party (henceforth PSL Wyzwolenie), which had emerged in former Russian Poland in 1915. Even so, after independence Polish Populism also tended to integrate with the state. All but the most left-leaning Populist factions routinely emphasized their commitment to state-building after 1918. Though never as established a party of power as the Czechoslovak Agrarians, PSL Piast was a regular participant in national governments and provincial governance in the early 1920s. Indeed, like its Czechoslovak counterpart, it too was regularly accused of politicizing the state's administrative apparatus and siphoning off state resources for its own partisan gains.[57]

However, this path towards institutional embedding was abruptly curtailed with Józef Piłsudski's 1926 May Coup in which the right-wing government headed by PSL Piast leader Wincenty Witos was overthrown. After the coup a nominally non-partisan, semi-authoritarian regime of national "sanation" (henceforth *Sanacja*) took power. Whilst the peasant left initially celebrated the coup against the right, ultimately all peasant parties were excluded from office and, as their opposition to *Sanacja* authoritarianism grew at the end of the decade, subjected to increasing governmental persecution. During this

[57] W. Mich, "'Słowo' o chłopach (1922-1939)", in E. Maj et al. (eds.), *Egoistyczna klasa czy odpowiedzialni współobywatele? Problematyka chłopska na łamach prasy w Polsce od końca XIX stulecia do 1939 roku* (Lublin, 2010), 117-118; J. Kulisiewicz, "Dosyć tego Chjeno-Piasta", *Gazeta Chłopska* (8.01.1927), 3-4.

time the *Sanacja* regime launched various efforts to take over or replace Populist-adjacent civil society organizations and win over the peasantry and its political leaders. In the Populists' historic heartlands in Central Poland and Polish-speaking parts of Galicia these efforts largely failed. Peasants not only retained but frequently intensified their allegiance to the Populist movement, whose three main components merged in 1931 to form a single party, the SL. Despite brief periods of rapprochement with governing circles, the SL ultimately remained in staunch opposition to the *Sanacja* regime and its erosion of parliamentary democracy for the rest of the 1930s.

In view of its persecution and exclusion from power, it is hardly surprising that the Populist movement veered in an oppositional, even seditious, direction during the 1930s where the Agrarians did not. What is more puzzling is that this oppositionality was ideologically different from the growing Agrarian radicalism of the same period. Even as their relationships to state power changed, both peasant movements continued to face similar pressures. Chief amongst these was the rural discontent that exploded with the economic crisis of the early 1930s.

For Polish and Czechoslovak peasants alike, the 1920s had been a decade of moderate economic optimism. Inflation in the immediate postwar period freed many agricultural households of their debts.[58] Meanwhile, the second half of the 1920s saw favourable crop prices and burgeoning agricultural investment.[59] Though not necessarily

[58] V. Lacina, "Zadlužení zemědělství v českých zemích v letech 1918-1930", *Československý časopis historický* (hereinafter *ČSČH*), 23 (1975), 826; J. Majewski, "Rozwój gospodarki chłopskiej w okresie międzywojennym", in Inglot, *Historia*, iii, 30.
[59] Majewski, "Rozwój", 33-34; M. Sekanina, *Kdy nám bylo nejhůře?: hospodářská krize 30. let 20. století v Československu a některá její východiska* (Prague, 2004), 14-16.

representative, sporadic peasant voices in both countries reported a sense of progress and faith in the future.[60]

The second interwar decade put paid to even such sporadic feelings. After 1929 peasant households in both countries were subject to a cascade of interconnected blows: plummeting agricultural prices; widening price scissors between industrial and agricultural goods; diminishing opportunities for employment and emigration; and increasingly unpayable debt and tax arrears.[61] In the early 1930s repossessions of livestock, land and agricultural buildings reached calamitous proportions.[62] Whilst Poland and Czechoslovakia responded to the crisis with balanced budgets and deflationary monetary policies (though ultimately Czechoslovakia devalued its currency in 1934 and 1936),[63] both states also sought to relieve farmers' woes with various counter-cyclical measures. These included the distribution of food to the rural poor[64] and debt moratoria to stave off the wave of farm repossessions.[65] Additionally, both states intervened in grain markets to stabilise grain prices at a higher level.[66] In the case of Czechoslovakia such measures were part of a longer-standing Agrarian crusade to

[60] E.g., J. Słomka, *Pamiętniki włościanina: od pańszczyzny do dni dzisiejszych* (Warsaw, 1983), 293-294; O. Havlík, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/9 (1933), 138-139; V. Kozina, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/10 (1933), 158-159.
[61] For an overview see I.T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley, 1998), 255-259.
[62] Between 1930 and 1935 more agricultural homesteads disintegrated in the Czech Lands than during the entire second half of the 19th century. L. Slezák, "Protikrizová opatření v zemědělství českých zemí ve třicátých letech", *Sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století*, 13 (1993), 287.
[63] For an overview Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej, 1918-1939* (4 vols, Warsaw, 1967-1989), iii; A. Teichova, *The Czechoslovak Economy, 1918-1980* (London, 1988), 72-73.
[64] J. Ciepielewski, *Wieś polska w latach wielkiego kryzysu 1929-1935. Materiały i dokumenty* (Warsaw, 1965), 38.
[65] For the social context see T. Pasák, "Protiexekuční hnutí na Slovácku a Valašsku v letech hospodářské krize", *Sborník Matice Moravské*, 81 (1962), 73-99.
[66] Ciepielewski, *Wieś*, 45, 48; V. Lacina, *Krize československého zemědělství, 1928-1934* (Prague,1974), 180.

ensure agricultural profitability, beginning with the fight to impose protectionist tariffs on grain imports in the mid-1920s and culminating in the 1934 creation of a state-appointed Grain Society with monopoly rights to purchase and distribute grain products and thereby shape grain prices on the domestic market.[67] Crucially, however, by privileging the interests of grain producers over livestock producers, such interventions tended to favour larger farmers and cereal-growing estates over the smallholding, more livestock-reliant peasantry.[68] It was, thus, the latter who bore the brunt of an agricultural crisis that was never fully resolved before the outbreak of the war in either country.[69]

Doubtless, there were differences in the economic situations of Polish and Czechoslovak peasants. The subjective and therefore political implications of these differences, however, are hard to gauge. There is little doubt, for instance, that poverty reached far more dire levels in the Populists' Galician heartland than the Bohemian strongholds of the Agrarian party.[70] Nevertheless, *absolute* deprivation is rarely a predictor of unrest.[71] Indeed, in 1930s Poland it was not the poorest but the most politicised subregions that proved the most restive.[72] Meanwhile, one observer of an embittered Bohemian countryside argued that it was precisely the *relative* drop in living standards rather than absolute suffering that counted politically, which explained why the "rural people's mental crisis" of the 1930s was supposedly most acute in Germany

[67] L. Feirabend, *Obilní monopol, jeho stav a dnešní úkoly* (Prague, 1937).
[68] Ciepielewski, *Wieś*, 45; Lacina, *Krize*, 235.
[69] For the crisis' enduring effects in the late 1930s and its disproportionate impact on smaller peasants see Lacina, *Krize*, 185, 190-5; Landau and Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka*, iv, 318-319.
[70] The differences between them were remarked on by many visitors. E.g., V. Cihlář, "15 neděl na zemědělské exkursi v Polsku", *Mladý Venkov* (hereinafter *MV*) (20.04.1934), 5.
[71] E.g., T.D. Mason, *Caught in the Crossfire: Revolutions, Repression, and the Rational Peasant* (Lanham MD, 2004), 32.
[72] Borkowski, "Działalność", 373.

and Bohemia – regions where agriculture had been intensive and advanced before 1929.[73]

Another economic difference between Poland and Czechoslovakia concerned land reform. After 1918 the partial confiscation of landed estates and their parcellation amongst peasants was a near-universal policy in East-Central Europe. By such means, the national successor states sought both to pacify their own vaguely Bolshevized peasantries and weaken landowning nobilities that were often viewed as foreign. Here, Czechoslovakia, whose political elites were keen to dispossess frequently German- and Hungarian-speaking landowners, had a clear edge over Poland, where most large landowners were Poles. Whilst the slow pace of Czechoslovak land reform elicited protest in the early 1920s,[74] it was nevertheless mostly complete by the end of the decade, thereby assuaging peasant tempers. By contrast, in Poland the definitive passage of land reform legislation was held up by political disputes and landowning interests until 1925.[75] Even thereafter, in a reflection of landowners' enduring influence, the execution of land reform proved haphazard and partial, hugely weakening its psychological impact.[76] The land question thus retained and even increased its ability to inspire political indignation during the 1930s crisis.[77] Nevertheless, the significance of this difference for rural subjectivities should not be exaggerated. In Poland rural overpopulation was such that even the most radical land reform could not have staved

[73] V. Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce Radola* (Prague, 1931), 14-15.
[74] Miller, *Forging Compromise*, 130.
[75] M. Błąd, "Land Reform in the Second Polish Republic", *Rural History*, 31/1 (2020), 97-110.
[76] Such was the assessment of Juliusz Poniatowski, the Populist-turned-*Sanacja* Minister of Agriculture (1934-1939). J. Ciepielewski, *Polityka agrarna rządu polskiego w latach 1929-1935* (Warsaw, 1968), 133.
[77] Landau and Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka*, iv, 260-262.

off land hunger, absent rural out-migration.[78] In Czechoslovakia, in turn, it is questionable how far land reform effectively resolved the same problem. Czechoslovak land reform was moderate rather than radical in scale, redistributing around 10% of the land compared to Estonia's, Latvia's and Romania's more than 20% and Poland's and Yugoslavia's 5%.[79] Many estates remained untouched by parcellation; around two fifths of applicants did not receive land grants;[80] land parcels were small, averaging 1.46 ha per recipient, and many recipients were unable to hold onto their new land;[81] and, most importantly, Czechoslovakia's agrarian structure was not drastically changed: numerically, dwarf and small peasant holdings continued to predominate as they did in Poland, even though they possessed only a fraction of total land.[82] Indeed, no sooner had land reform been completed than demands for a new corrective reform emerged on the Czechoslovak left, indicating the persistence of land hunger during the Depression.[83]

Despite economic differences, therefore, the Polish and Czechoslovak countrysides presented many similarities in the 1930s. In both countries large masses of land-poor peasants suffered a protracted blow to their living standards, economic viability and hopes for the future, whilst receiving at best imperfect forms of governmental assistance that were, furthermore, biased towards wealthier rural groups. In Poland the resultant

[78] Błąd, "Land Reform", 98-99.
[79] Doležalová, "Agrarismus", 440.
[80] "O výsledcích pozemkové reformy v Československu", *Národní Listy* (8.11.1929).
[81] "Bilance pozemkové reformy v Československu", *Rudé Právo* (11.06.1930).
[82] In 1930 farms with <5 ha constituted 71.2% of all landholdings but possessed less than a quarter of total farmland. *Statistická příručka Republiky Československé* (4 vols, Prague, 1932), iv, 83; J. Hlaváček, "Pozemková reforma. IV. kritika – Program sociální demokracie", *Právo lidu* (25.07.1930).
[83] E.g., "Vylidňování a ochuzování venkova odvrátí jenom nová pozemková reforma", *Večerník České Slovo* (20.03.1931).

despair contributed to recurrent bouts of rural unrest between 1931 and 1937.[84] In Czechoslovakia similarly explosive episodes were rare and so rural embitterment has often been overlooked by historiography. Nevertheless, countless chroniclers of rural life spoke of "a countryside…gripped by extreme discontent" and the threat of unrest.[85] One observer of South Bohemian radicalism even argued that, if fascist oratory did not give rise to paramilitary formations or marching columns, this was only because peasants were too afraid of appearing ridiculous.[86]

Extensive rural discontent presented both Polish and Czechoslovak agrarian populist movements with a similar challenge: to channel radical feelings in politically useful directions without simultaneously falling victim to them or splitting their base. Doubtless, they approached this challenge from different positions: one as a party of government that was itself largely responsible for crafting the Czechoslovak state's agricultural policies and whose legitimacy as a defender of peasants was therefore threatened; the other as an oppositional party whose very relevance to rural life was challenged by its exclusion from power and inability to channel state resources towards its supporters. Nevertheless, despite their different positions, each movement had a choice between different political-ideological paths out of crisis. It was here that the clearest divergence between them occurred.

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[84] P. Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza buntu społecznego w II Rzeczypospolitej doby Wielkiego Kryzysu (1930-1935): uwarunkowania, skala, konsekwencje* (Kraków, 2019).
[85] State District Archive (hereinafter SDA) České Budějovice, Archiv obce Hlavatce, Kronika obce Hlavatce (1850-1939), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305100 (hereinafter Kronika obce Hlavatce), 57-58; "Radikalisace vesnice", *Brázda*, 12/18 (1931), 289-290.
[86] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 22-23.

Predictably for a persecuted movement, Polish Populism embraced more radical tactics in the 1930s, even flirting with political violence. Crucially, however, this radicalisation of tactics also dovetailed with an ideological shift to the left. As will be argued, during the 1930s Populist discourse increasingly emphasised peasant class consciousness, peasant-worker solidarity, the elitist nature of the state and the need for systemic transformation and emancipation from social inequalities. Meanwhile, the theme of national solidarity was marginalised or subordinated to the language of class. For the most part, Populists did not define this radicalism as "left-wing".[87] Outside the Populist movement, however, it was generally recognised as such, whether by Communists who courted the SL to join a Popular Front or many on the right who denounced emergent Populist "communism". Though it drew on existing strands of Populist thought, leftward radicalisation did not simply reflect the persistence of an earlier left-wing current within the movement. On the contrary, due to its earlier links to the *Sanacja* camp, the historic peasant left was often *less* inclined to radicalism than the historic Populist right in the 1930s.[88] Thus, this radicalisation was at least partly a novel development. At its forefront was the unofficial Populist youth movement, Wici,[89] which played an increasingly frontstage role during the 1930s in setting the tone and agenda for the Populist movement as a whole.[90] Certainly, leftward radicalisation was not a universal or linear trend: splits between moderates and radicals existed at all levels of the movement.[91]

[87] My classification is, therefore, based on an "etic" rather than "emic" conception of an enduring left-right axis grounded in opposing attitudes to equality and hierarchy. N. Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge, 1996).
[88] J. Borkowski, *Postawa polityczna chłopów polskich w latach 1930-35* (Warsaw, 1970), 140-141; J. Borkowski, "Odśrodkowe i dośrodkowe tendencje w Stronnictwie Ludowym 1933-1935", *Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego* (hereinafter *RDRL*), 7 (1965), 117.
[89] Officially, Wici was registered as a non-political youth organization.
[90] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 284.
[91] E.g., idem, 191.

Nevertheless, this was the general direction of travel. By the time of the 1938 SL party congress, a Czechoslovak diplomat would observe with surprise that "perhaps 90% of delegates [at the congress] were of a very young age"; that "a very militant mood" prevailed; and that the old partisan divisions between the SL's constituent parts had been erased through generational turnover and the defection of various party leaders to the *Sanacja* camp.[92]

From the late 1920s the upper echelons of the Czechoslovak Agrarian movement were also gripped by a tug-of-war between moderates and radicals. Here, however, the terms "moderate" and "radical" assumed very different connotations. When confronting the crisis of the 1930s, Agrarian moderates favoured continuing the politics of compromise pursued under Antonín Švehla in the early years of independence. Agricultural interests were to be reconciled with non-agricultural ones by horse-trading with other, especially socialist, parties within a framework of consociational government that incorporated all pro-systemic political players. In this perspective compromises were justified as a necessary cost of democratic state-building and maintaining political equilibrium – both central goals of the Hrad or Castle, the informal power network centred around President Masaryk with which Agrarian moderates were tied.[93] From the mid-1920s and especially after the economic crisis set in, this pro-Hrad, compromise-centred vision of politics was increasingly contested by a radical Agrarian faction. In its place Agrarian radicals clamoured for a more muscular defence of agricultural interests, garlanding their demands with vehement rhetoric about the suffering of farmers. But whilst materially

[92] AZHRL, SL-60/2, 07.03.1938 Czechoslovak Embassy cable to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, 2-3.
[93] D. Uhlíř, "Republikánská strana lidu zemědělského a malorolnického ve vládě panské koalice", *ČSČH*, 18 (1970), 207-208.

driven, injustice-centred and conflict-oriented, theirs was not a radicalism of the left. Rather, Agrarian radicals prosecuted what was widely viewed as a rightward turn, in which Agrarians styled themselves in explicitly conservative and anti-socialist terms, antagonised the left with demands and rhetoric that disadvantaged workers and consumers, sporadically allied with the far right and even dallied with authoritarian solutions to bypass the need for democratic compromise.[94] The boundary between radicals and moderates was frequently porous, leading one historian to conclude that this was less a factional conflict than a functional division between the party's ministerial and parliamentary wings: where moderates managed relations with coalition partners in government, parliamentary radicals gave voice to the maximalism of the rural public.[95] What is certain is that radicals hugely influenced Agrarian political culture. They were for the most part younger[96] and exerted control over key institutions, such as the party press and the youth wing.[97] Throughout the 1930s they retained an ability to unleash governmental crises, successfully deposing the moderate Agrarian premier František Udržal in 1932;[98] launching a botched attempt, alongside the nationalist and Fascist right, to torpedo the election of Masaryk's anointed successor, Edvard Beneš, as president in 1935; and threatening the premiership of Milan Hodža in 1937.[99] Ultimately, parliamentary arithmetic thwarted their ambitions of constituting a new socialist-free governmental coalition.[100] Nevertheless, the Agrarian radicals successfully transformed

[94] E.g., V. Čada, "Politika Republikánské strany na počatku velké hospodářské krize", *ČSČH*, 22 (1974), 350-351.
[95] Idem, 345.
[96] Idem, 349.
[97] E.g., T. Pasák, "K politickému pozadí krize vlády Františka Udržala roku 1932", *ČSČH*, 11/1 (1963), 179.
[98] Idem, 165-192.
[99] "Meze stavovského radikalismu", *Národní Osvobození* (20.07.1937).
[100] E.g., Z. Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky (1918-1938)* (3 vols, Prague, 2000-2003), ii, 567-571.

their party into the main pole of the Czechoslovak right. Writing in 1940, the Polish diplomat Zygmunt Hładki went as far as representing the division between Agrarians and the Agrarian-adjacent right, on one side, and Edvard Beneš' Hrad-centred camp – largely consisting of the left – on the other, as *the* central political fault-line of the First Czechoslovak Republic.[101]

Thus, by the end of the interwar period, two agrarian populist movements in neighbouring states, each determined to protect the interests and maintain the loyalty of small- and medium-sized farmers at a time of economic crisis, had evolved in largely opposite directions: one to the left, the other to the right. Such a divergence had not been inevitable. As has been argued, many aspects of their development prior to the 1930s had been the same. From the beginning each movement had entertained a variety of political currents and impulses – some more radical, others more pro-systemic. Often, it had appeared as if the trends that ultimately lost would prove triumphant. After 1918, for instance, the Agrarians moved leftward, embracing land reform and wooing the poorer peasantry.[102] Equally, in the 1920s it was the right-wing faction of the Populist movement that had appeared dominant, especially in the southern Polish regions that would later become most radical. What occurred in the 1930s was, thus, not just a continuation of prior trends. Explaining how and why these movements diverged in spite of their similarities is the object of what follows.

[101] S. Nowinkowski (ed.), *Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie 1932-1939 w relacjach dyplomatów II Rzeczypospolitej* (Łódź, 2006), 46-48.
[102] Moreover, even in the 1930s a more left-leaning faction organised around the academic youth journal *Brázda* remained in existence. F. Kutnar, *Generace Brázdy* (Prague, 1992).

iv. Methods, Sources, Chapters and Terms

To enable a focus on local- as well as national-level politics, this dissertation concentrates on two regional case studies: South Bohemia and Central Galicia (i.e. the western half of the interwar Lwów province). These formerly Austrian regions occupied analogous positions in their respective national societies. Both were poor, overwhelmingly rural and, prior to 1918, dominated by landowning nobilities. Each also became permanently associated with these qualities in its respective national imaginary, both before and after 1918.[103]

Also recommending these regions for comparison was their history of post-war unrest. In 1919-1920 South Bohemia was one of the main theatres of the strike wave that swept landed estates and, to a lesser extent, large peasant farms in the new republic.[104] Besides labour conflict, the region also witnessed unrest amongst smallholding farmers. Alongside sporadic resistance against state-imposed crop requisitions, several attempts were made by land-hungry peasants to occupy and parcel out the region's estates.[105] In Central Galicia rural unrest began even before the end of the war, with scattered disturbances by peasant-deserters.[106] In November 1918 these paved the way for a short-lived outbreak of anti-Jewish, anti-governmental and anti-manorial violence,

[103] L. Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford, 2010), 275-279; M. Śliwa, "Nędza galicyjska. Mit i rzeczywistość", in J. Buszko and W. Bonusiak (eds.), *Galicja i jej dziedzictwo. T. 1: Historia i polityka* (Rzeszów, 1994), 145-155; O. Kolář, "Myšlenky jihočeského regionalismu jako součást ideologie", in J. Harna and B. Rašticová (eds.), *Regionální zvláštnosti politiky agrární strany v období první Československé republiky* (Uherské Hradiště, 2012), 117-124.
[104] J. César and M. Otáhal (eds.), *Hnutí venkovského lidu v českých zemích v letech 1918-1922* (Prague, 1958), 10-12.
[105] E.g., Idem, 216-217, 350-351, 371, 411.
[106] Beneš, "Green Cadres", 216.

especially in the area occupied by the peasant-led Tarnobrzeg Republic during the winter of 1918-1919.[107]

Over the next two decades both regions were cemented as strongholds of their respective peasant movements. Of the ten most heavily Agrarian-voting judicial districts in Bohemia during the 1929 elections five were located in the south.[108] Likewise, during the 1920s Western and Central Galicia were the national bastion of the right-leaning PSL Piast, though in Central Galicia this preponderance was bitterly contested by the Populist left.

After 1929, in turn, the political history of these regions became emblematic of the broader divergence between their respective peasant movements. In the early 1930s South Bohemia was beset by rightward radicalisation, most visibly embodied in the meteoric rise and fall of its Fascist movement. Notably, Fascist supporters were often drawn from the Agrarian base. Central Galicia, in turn, was a key epicentre of the SL's leftward radicalisation. Over the course of a month in mid-1933 the region saw a series of large-scale, bloody and mainly spontaneous confrontations between police and mostly SL-supporting, partly Communist-inspired peasants. In 1937, in turn, Western and Central Galicia were the regions where the Great Peasant Strike was most widely and zealously observed. Leftward radicalisation was also reflected in the prominence of the region's Wici youth movement: Wici members achieved an unparalleled dominance

[107] W. Stankiewicz, "Wrzenie rewolucyjne na wsi polskiej w końcu 1918 i w 1919 roku", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 62/1 (1955), 110-114.
[108] V. Průcha, "Regionální rozdíly v podpoře agrárních stran v Československu v parlamentních volbách 1925, 1929 a 1935", in Harna and Rašticová, *Regionální zvláštnosti*, 52.

in the SL structures of Lwów province, which from 1935 was also home to Wici's main educational institution, the "folk university" at Gać Przeworska.[109]

Both South Bohemia and Central Galicia were partly frontier regions: just as German speakers predominated in the most southerly districts of South Bohemia, Lwów province was divided between a primarily Polish-speaking west and Ukrainian-speaking east. This dissertation, however, focuses on the relatively monoethnic, Czech- and Polish-speaking districts of each region, thereby limiting itself to the rural politics of the titular nations.

A diverse range of largely overlooked sources was used in this study. They can crudely be divided into three categories: those that primarily shaped rural political cultures; those produced as part of these cultures; and those that documented rural political life. The first category consists mainly of the partisan press. For both movements this was a key instrument of opinion and discourse formation. The Agrarians especially developed a formidable press machine, counting 44 periodicals by 1928, including six dailies.[110] Almost universal rural literacy in the Czech Lands facilitated high readership rates: according to Agrarian writer Václav Dresler, "it would be hard to imagine a rural cottage without a folk daily. The Czech peasant does not economize on newspaper subscriptions…".[111] Even if exaggerated, Dresler's boast presented a striking contrast to the frequent Populist complaints about low press readership rates in the Polish countryside where literacy was lower and cash for subscriptions often lacking.

[109] Borkowski, *Postawa,* 238-239.
[110] J. César and B. Černý, "O ideologii československého agrarismu", *ČSČH*, 7/2 (1959), 279.
[111] V. Dresler, "Rozwój ruchu chłopskiego na ziemiach czesko-morawskich", *Wieś i Państwo*, 1/5 (1938), 414.

Nevertheless, the comparatively small print runs of the Populist press likely underrepresented its social impact. One priest in Central Galicia claimed that "whilst 'radical' Populist papers reach us in small quantities, they are seized and welcomed with great pleasure by the majority" – something he contrasted with the relative unpopularity of the far more abundant Catholic press.[112] Besides relying on the major partisan dailies and weeklies (e.g., *Piast*, *Venkov*), my survey of the press paid particular attention to agrarian populist newspapers targeting specific social groups, especially the young (*Wici*, *Mladý Venkov*, *Brázda*) and the rural poor (*Domovina*). For South Bohemia, I also consulted rival parties' newspapers aimed at the rural poor (*Zemědělský Dělník*, *Obrana Lidu*), as well as following the coverage of agrarian political issues in all major national newspapers – a task greatly facilitated by the Czechoslovak Foreign Office's vast archive of thematically arranged newspaper clippings.

The second category of sources includes, above all, the minute books of rural political associations as well as peasant memoirs. Though fragmentary, variable in quality and barely consulted by historians, the former can offer an excellent insight into the texture of rural political discussions and associational life. Peasant memoirs, in turn, are a highly asymmetrical source, existing in great abundance in Polish archives and paradoxically absent from vastly more literate Czechoslovakia. The original cause of this asymmetry was the huge popularity of memoir competitions amongst interwar Polish sociologists as a method of generating plebeian "ego-documents".[113] Though rural sociologists and ethnologists in Czechoslovakia also promoted memoir-writing, their efforts were never

[112] J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów* (4 vols, Warsaw, 1984 [1938]), iii, 404.
[113] K. Lebow, "Autobiography as Complaint: Polish Social Memoir between the World Wars", *Laboratorium*, 6/3 (2014), 13-26.

systematic and did not bear fruit.[114] In Poland, on the other hand, the tradition of memoir competitions endured after World War II. Thanks to this institutionalized practice as well as the greater legitimacy of the interwar peasant movement in Communist Poland, huge numbers of activist memoirs were churned out (and for the most part never read or published) after 1945. By contrast, the only rural memoirs produced in post-1945 Czechoslovakia were written by pre-war Communists. Inevitably, peasant memoirs are a potentially treacherous window into rural subjectivities. Memoirists were by default unrepresentative peasants. Those who wrote after 1945 were incentivized to exaggerate class struggle. Given the authoritarianism of 1930s Poland, those who wrote their memoirs before 1939 were incentivized to play it down.[115] To compensate for such biases, I have relied on a wide range of memoirs written as part of various competitions as well as in non-competitive contexts, by radical, conservative and relatively apolitical memoirists, both before and after 1945. Where the historiography of rural Poland has relied almost exclusively on *published* memoirs, I have also consulted several archival collections of unpublished memoirs.

The final category of sources – external documentations of rural politics – is the most varied. It includes administrative and police reports on rural politics and subversive activities; village monographs by interwar sociologists and ethnographers; and expert literature on various problems of rural life. In addition, I consulted the municipal chronicles of eight villages in South Bohemia which experienced social conflict after

[114] A. Jiráček, "Místo a uloha lidové kultury v České agrární strany na přikladu vztahu agrární mládeže k lidové kultuře" (PhD diss., Ústav pro etnografii a fokloristiku ČSAV, Prague, 1989), 72.
[115] Radical peasants were likely underrepresented relative to other political currents in some memoir competitions because of the non-political journals that advertised them. Borkowski, *Postawa*, 371.

World War I.[116] Village chronicles were a longstanding tradition in the Czech Lands. From 1920-1921 it was nominally compulsory for every village to keep one. The thoroughness, impartiality and level of attention to politics displayed by such chronicles inevitably varied. The average chronicler was either a village schoolteacher or well-to-do farmer and, as such, a nationalist and Agrarian sympathizer, with all the biases that entailed. Whilst chroniclers were not encouraged to overlook conflicts or embellish social relations,[117] this is often what they did, even erasing post-1918 unrest entirely[118] or privileging the perspective and problems of the propertied over the landless.[119] Nevertheless, when read "against the grain", village chronicles remain a useful source. Alongside them, I also consulted village- and district-level electoral data wherever available. Electoral data for Central Galicia was not consulted, as extensive governmental interference in elections during the 1930s undermined its transparency.

Because of such imbalances in source types, I have opted for a loosely comparative approach, comparing directly where sources allow and admitting as much ethnographic "thickness" to each case study as possible.[120] The structure is thematic and based around five chapters.

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[116] These villages were selected based on known instances of unrest documented in César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*. The chronicles of other restive villages were either unavailable in online district archives or disqualified on other grounds (e.g., insufficient coverage of village politics).
[117] E.g., F. Roubík, "Obecní kroniky a jich vedení", *MV* (22.03.1929), 2.
[118] There was, for instance, no mention of the 1920 Communist strike and attempted estate seizure that took place in Doubrava in its chronicle. SDA České Budějovice, Místní národní výbor Doubrava, Pamětní kniha obce Doubravy ([1922] 1928–1981 [1982]), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305091 (hereinafter Pamětní kniha obce Doubravy).
[119] For example, one chronicle devoted merely one sentence to a strike by rural servants in 1920 but a page and a half to a 1921 incident where propertied peasants resisted grain requisitions. SDA České Budějovice, Archiv obce Plástovice, Kronika obce Plástovice (1933-8), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305180 (hereinafter Kronika obce Plástovice), 17-18.
[120] For a similar model see S.A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008).

Chapter 1 explores the semantic landscapes of rural politics, comparing how agrarian populists constructed the social subjects they claimed to represent, and the broader sociolinguistic contexts which conditioned their efforts. The main difference it seeks to explain is why Polish Populism spoke to and for "the peasants" where the Czech Agrarians represented themselves as a party of a more generic "agricultural estate". I argue against a stadialist understanding which would reduce this divergence in political language to a difference of socioeconomic development. It is argued that peasantist language possessed political and emotional appeal in both countries, notwithstanding Czechoslovakia's more modern agriculture. Instead, I show that the Czech Agrarians' abandonment of peasantist language in favour of more generic categories stemmed from a need to win over social groups outside the wealthy peasantry, especially poorer rural strata which were likely alienated by the propertied connotations of peasantness in the Czech-language context. Thanks to different electoral demographics and the more egalitarian Polish-language connotations of peasantness, Galician Populists did not face similar pressures to dilute their peasantism. On the contrary, pressures from within the village and the growing threat of domination by social elites after the 1926 May Coup pushed the Populists to intensify their peasantist orientation in the 1930s. The result was a more class-centred political language compared to the estate-oriented identity cultivated by the Agrarians.

Chapter 2 considers challenges to the coherence of agrarian populist coalitions at the village level, by examining cleavages between different rural strata and how these developed during the interwar period. It is shown that, after 1918, village life in South Bohemia and Central Galicia was riddled with class-based antagonisms and hierarchies,

which in turn frequently became enmeshed with party-political conflicts. Due to its more differentiated social structure, rural life in South Bohemia witnessed a greater variety of conflicts after national independence. At the same time, in both contexts intra-village antagonisms tended to lose intensity over the interwar period, much to agrarian populists' benefit. Nevertheless, the processes that produced greater village harmony in each context were different, with significant political implications. In South Bohemia social radicalism was defused by land reform and rural depopulation, but intra-village stratification largely remained intact. By contrast, in Central Galicia socio-political cleavages lost salience principally through collective immiseration and estrangement from the *Sanacja* regime during the 1930s. Galician peasants' shared experience of socio-political alienation produced a superior affective basis for political solidarity relative to that which existed in the South Bohemian village.

This is borne out by Chapter 3, which evaluates agrarian populists' efforts to mitigate social conflicts within their base and the effects of these efforts. It is shown that both movements employed a variety of discursive and practical measures to reduce, trivialise and contain social antagonisms. Because their social coalition was broader, the Agrarians had to develop more techniques for accommodating and integrating their various interest groups. However, whilst the Agrarians largely succeeded at incorporating poorer rural strata into their coalition, the loyalty of these strata was never fully secure. In South Bohemian village politics, the class-based language of the left remained a competitive alternative to the hegemony of Agrarian ideals of rural unity throughout the interwar period. By contrast, in Central Galicia there is substantial evidence that during the 1930s many peasants enthusiastically embraced the Populists'

cult of peasantness. This is true also of many poorer peasants whose symbolic and material power in the movement increased during this period and who did not have radical political alternatives to Populism.

In Chapter 4 I examine social conflicts with groups outside the village and how antagonistic relationships with "constitutive Others" served to shore up and define agrarian populist identities. In particular, I consider both movements' relationships towards post-feudal landowning elites and "the city", with a particular focus on the urban working class. Anti-seigneurial, anti-urban and anti-socialist sentiments were to varying degrees present in both Polish and Czech countrysides during this period. Nevertheless, these antagonisms assumed different forms and intensities in Agrarian and Populist politics. Where the Populists played up opposition towards the manor, leveraging anti-seigneurial sentiment to reinforce their own political demands and to bolster peasant group identity, the Agrarians predominantly sought to reconcile with landowners whilst redirecting anti-seigneurial language against their principal interwar antagonist, the urban socialist left. Indeed, anti-socialism became a key component in Agrarian discourse during the interwar period, reflecting both conflicts between socialist and Agrarian visions of state policy and the usefulness of anti-socialism as a political glue for an otherwise weak, cross-class Agrarian coalition. By contrast, the Populist anti-urbanism of the 1930s made an exception for the urban working class, which Galician peasants were increasingly inclined to view as a political ally, both out of shared opposition to the *Sanacja* regime and a growing sense of shared subalternity vis-à-vis social elites. Crucially, I argue that whilst both Populist anti-nobilism and Agrarian anti-socialism tapped into real social animosities, the foregrounding of these antagonisms

over others was primarily determined by the respective political agendas of each movement. Further, each movement's choice of antagonisms was deeply consequential, informing how agrarian populists fashioned themselves and helping determine the ideological direction of social discontent during the 1930s crisis.

Chapter 5 turns to the relationship between agrarian populists and the nation-state. Both Czech and Polish movements were from their inception permeated with the broader nationalism of their respective public spheres. Both also gave their nationalism peasantist characteristics and exploited it to advance their own social agendas. Whilst both movements continued to walk a tightrope between social and national loyalties during the 1930s, the balance between them shifted for each party in largely opposite directions. In Central Galicia the state's persecution of Populists, combined with increasingly widespread experiences of peasant-state conflict, produced social alienation from the state, in some instances diminished enthusiasm for the national project, and a growing tendency to view the state as part of a broader system of class domination. This cemented Populists' tendency towards class-based separatism, whilst also encouraging a seditious repertoire of political action and a nationalism that was increasingly contestatory and subordinate to class. By contrast, in rural South Bohemia alienation from the nation-state and state structures was low amongst Czech speakers. Here, anti-systemic discontent during the 1930s largely took on a right-inflected and anti-political rather than anti-state direction, in a manner that simultaneously reflected Agrarian ideological influence and threatened the Agrarians' legitimacy as a leading political party. In response, the Agrarians used their power within the state to limit and defuse political challenges, whilst also cultivating an increasingly anti-political, non-

partisan self-image that may, in part, have sought to appease anti-political sentiment. As part of this anti-political turn, the Agrarians increasingly represented themselves as a state-nationalist actor – a move that not only eased the acquisition of new, non-rural constituencies but legitimised the Agrarians' increasingly anti-pluralistic tendencies.

Finally, in the Conclusion I evaluate the main causes of the political divergence analysed in preceding chapters. The Conclusion also discusses this dissertation's implications for scholarship on interwar rural politics in Europe as a whole and for our understanding of post-1939 developments in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

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Note on terminology: whilst the Czech Agrarian Party was renamed the Republican Party in 1919, I refer to it as the Agrarian party/movement for the entirety of its existence. Besides reducing confusion, this aligns with historical usage: even after their political rebranding the Republicans were widely referred to – including by themselves – as the Agrarians, just as their proclaimed ideology remained "agrarianism". When referring to the Galician/Polish peasant movement, I frequently use the term "Populist". This is the closest approximation to the Polish epithet *ludowy* (literally "of the common folk"), used in the phrase *ruch ludowy* (i.e. the Populist movement) and the party name *Stronnictwo Ludowe* (the Populist Party or SL). By referring to members of the SL and adjacent organizations as Populists rather than the Peasant Party, I deliberately avoid confusion between the SL and the short-lived left-Populist party of the 1920s, *Stronnictwo Chłopskie* (the Peasant Party). It should also be noted that the term "Central Galicia" is an inaccurate translation of the semi-official regional designation used to describe the

west of Lwów province in the interwar period: *Małopolska środkowa*, i.e. Central Lesser Poland. “Lesser Poland” was the historic name for the Polish south used before the 18th-century Partitions. After 1918 it was revived by the Polish state as a substitute designation for the former Austrian province of Galicia. Informally, “Galicia” continued to be used by many. Due to its greater brevity and familiarity to English speakers, I have chosen to retain “Galicia” when referring to Lesser Poland in the interwar period. Finally, land measurements are occasionally given in *Joch* (Polish: *morgi*), an Austrian measurement still widely used in interwar Galicia and equivalent to 5754.64 square metres.

Chapter 1: Constructing the Social Subjects of Agrarian Populism: Peasants and the Agricultural Estate

Thinking about what words meant in the past is an important part of all history-writing but doubly so for comparative history. Here, the familiar risk of mistranslating across time, by interpreting words according to their current – rather than historical – meaning, is compounded by the additional danger of mistranslating *within* the past, between different historical languages. The comparativist, in short, must be careful not to project meanings from one historical language onto another, remaining alert to seemingly equivalent or cognate terms used in distinct linguistic varieties to designate different things, as well as to seemingly unrelated words used to describe similar referents. Whilst helping to sidestep illusions of similarity/difference, paying attention to historical categories also gives the comparativist important clues as to how social reality was constructed in different contexts.[121]

With this in mind, this dissertation begins by exploring the semantic landscapes in which the Polish Populist and Czech Agrarian movements operated and which they simultaneously sought to mould.[122] My focus is on the categories used by each movement to address, describe and mobilise the social subjects whose interests they

[121] N. L. Green, "Forms of Comparison" in D. Cohen and M. O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York/London, 2004), 51-52; H-G. Haupt, "Comparative History – a Contested Method", *Historisk Tidskrift*, 4 (2007), 702.

[122] Following their merger with the Slovak National and Peasant Party in the early 1920s, the Agrarians – until then limited to the Czech Lands – became a fully Czechoslovak movement, with separate Slovak-language press publications for Slovakia. Because I deal exclusively with political language used in the Czech Lands, I will refer only to Czech, rather than Czechoslovak, agrarianism in this chapter.

claimed to represent. It will be argued that variations in how these subjects were constructed reflected significant differences in each movement's social composition and political goals in the early 20th century. Whilst Polish Populists usually represented themselves as a peasant movement, the Czech Agrarians increasingly claimed to act on behalf of farmers and a more socially capacious "agricultural estate". This was not, I contend, primarily due to different levels of agricultural modernization. Peasantist language was politically ascendant in much of early 20th-century Europe, in advanced and backward contexts alike. In Poland its social appeal was so broad that even non-peasantist political actors sometimes mobilised it for their own ends. For the Czech Agrarians, too, peasantist language was emotionally compelling, leading them to foreground it in a variety of political contexts. That it did not play a more constant role in their 20th-century discourse was due to the broad coalition that the Agrarians sought to build. Whilst peasantism had been central in the Czech agrarian discourse of the 1890s, very soon the Agrarians realised that this language limited their ability to win and speak on behalf of new clienteles, especially non-peasant rural demographics and the poorer peasantry. With the latter group peasantist language likely carried limited appeal because of the connotations of propertied wealth that "peasantness" had acquired in Czech-speaking contexts, reflecting in turn the well-to-do position of the Czech peasant elite. Therefore, to incorporate these more peripheral but numerically significant groups into their coalition, the Agrarians increasingly appealed to more generic categories of social identity based on shared rurality and agricultural unity rather than class.

This contrasts with the parallel movement in Polish Populism towards an ever-greater stress on peasantist categories of identity during the interwar period. Free from electoral

and demographic constraints comparable to those that compelled the Agrarians to dilute their peasantism, Populist categories were shaped to a greater degree by the social pressure for rural representatives to remain close to the village and, simultaneously, by a political desire to shield the Populist movement from domination and infiltration by external elites frequently masquerading under the guise of national and, indeed, agricultural unity. This desire for Populist apartness intensified after Poland's post-1926 authoritarian turn, when Populists faced increasing political attacks and interference in rural life by the *Sanacja* state. As a result, during the 1930s the social categories that Populists appealed to only became more class- and caste-like in nature.

i. Agrarian Populists' Linguistic Options in a European Context

When invoking the non-noble, formerly enserfed, usually property-owning farming groups that constituted their core constituencies, agrarian populists in East-Central Europe had a range of words, varying in historical depth and socio-economic specificity, to choose from. First, there were words anchored in the feudal past. Of these the most generic were terms roughly translatable as "peasant": *chłop* or alternatively *włościanin* in Polish, *sedlák* or (the much newer) *rolník* in Czech. Also of feudal origin were the more specific categories that had once divided the peasant estate by landholding size, thereby determining the nature of different households' obligations to the manor. Whilst regionally variable, the most widespread of these categories included: *kmieć* (Polish)/*sedlák*[123] (Czech) – the most landed peasants, historically reliant on non-

[123] Used both for peasants in general and rich peasants in particular, this was a polysemic word – a fact that would prove important for the Czech Agrarians' linguistic choices.

household labour; *zagrodnik* (Polish)/*chalupník* (Czech) – a middle peasant category; and *chałupnik* (Polish)/ *domkář* (Czech) – cottagers with little to no land. Many of these categories were still widely employed in the early 20th-century countryside to signal differences in farm size and ancestry.

Aside from words of feudal origin, there also existed the modern vocational category of "farmer": *rolnik* (Polish)/*zemědělec* (Czech). This was a socially ambiguous term, revealing little of the referent's class profile if seen out of context or unaccompanied by a qualifier.

Both languages also contained cognate words with which to designate "the common people": *lid* (Czech), *lud* (Polish). In Czech this often appeared in collocations such as *drobný lid* (petty folk), *venkovský lid* (rural folk) and *zemědělský lid* (farming folk). Though specific enough to marginalise those of noble origin, this category was perhaps the most generic, vague as a marker of both profession and class.

The terms enumerated here were not perceived as incompatible or exclusionary. All of them would occasionally make it into the propagandistic output of different agrarian populists. Nevertheless, different movements tended to prefer different categories. Thus, by the 1930s Populist discourse in Poland was dominated by invocations of the "peasant" (*chłop*). Meanwhile, in the Czech Agrarian discourse of the 1930s more socially capacious categories like "farmers" and "the agricultural estate" were prevalent. This tendency towards generic language was paired with class-based subcategories whenever the Agrarians addressed more specific clienteles. Thus, the terms "cottager" and "small peasant" (*malorolník*) were both included in the title of the

Agrarians' satellite organisation for their least landed supporters: *Domovina domkářů a malorolníků* (The Homeland of Cottagers and Small Peasants, established in 1919). The 1929 New Year address to Domovina by Agrarian general secretary Rudolf Beran was typical in how it flitted between generic and specific categories, apostrophising an audience that appeared to change its identity at every turn:

> Cottager friends and all farmers, try to recall what it was like 20 or 30 years ago!…Small peasants and cottagers will face great struggles…Cottagers and farmers, stand together!…My friends, you cottagers, middle peasants (*chalupníci*) and rural tradesmen…[124]

This tolerance for micro-distinctions, coupled with an overall preference for socially imprecise macro-categories, contrasted with Polish Populist discourse where the primacy of the peasant eclipsed both generic options (e.g. "farmers") and divisions internal to the peasantry.

At the time, neither movement explicitly acknowledged this linguistic difference. Polish Populists appeared blithely unaware of it, routinely referring to the "Czech peasant movement" in their literature.[125] Czech speakers, by contrast, displayed more intuitive awareness. For instance, when writing about foreign contexts, Agrarian newspapers typically referred to "peasants" rather than farmers.[126] Similarly, when addressing an international audience of agrarian parties, it was an internationalism of peasants, not farmers, that Agrarian prime minister František Udržal demanded in his proclamation:

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[124] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina domkářů a malorolníků* (hereinafter *Domovina*) (4.01.1929), 1.
[125] E.g. J. Dąbski, "Kraj rządzony przez chłopów. Olbrzymia manifestacja chłopów czeskich", *Gazeta Chłopska* (27.05.1928), 1.
[126] E.g. "Cikáni v Polsku", *Domovina* (15.02.1929), 3.

"The power of peasants is the peace of nations".[127] When the peasant in question was a Pole, Czech writers – Agrarian and non-Agrarian alike – often simply used the Polish original, almost as if something of the *chłop*'s Polishness (or perhaps his backwardness) would be lost through translation.[128] Nevertheless, whilst discerning an incommensurability between their own reality, be it sociological or linguistic, and that of other countrysides, this was not something Czech sources openly recognised.

Nor has later historiography fared much better. Rather, the political languages of agrarian populist movements have predominantly been ignored or taken for granted, typically out of unfamiliarity with the perspectives championed by the linguistic turn.[129] Also contributing to this historiographical neglect is an underlying and usually unstated stadialism in relation to the categories, "peasant" and "farmer". In this perspective, it is simply assumed that – with modernisation – peasant identities are or ought to be shed in favour of new categories, be they national or vocational.[130] Where the linguistic situation appears messy, with references to *both* "peasants" and "farmers" in circulation, this is read as a sign of historical transition between epochs. Thus, one historian of Poland interprets the use of peasantist categories by interwar villagers as a symptom of lingering feudal-era insecurities that agricultural professionalization was in the process of dissipating.[131] Similarly, historian Bruce Garver interpreted the Czech Agrarian

[127] "Agrární internacionala", *Národní Osvobození* (28.05.1929).
[128] E.g. AZHRL, SL-59, 26.06.1933 cable from Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague.
[129] In addition, Populist-sympathizing historiography in state-socialist Poland frequently had a vested interest in naturalizing the peasant movement's categories on account of the symbolic cachet of representing the peasants as a class both "in itself" and "for itself" offered. E. Maj and W. Mich, "Wprowadzenie", in Maj et al., *Egoistyczna klasa*, 10-11.
[130] E.g., G. Wright, *Rural Revolution in France: The Peasantry in the Twentieth Century* (Stanford, 1964), 2.
[131] M. J. Wilczewski, "Broken Land: Everyday Life and the Reconstruction of the Polish Countryside, 1914-1939" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2017), 16-17.

movement's abandonment of peasantist language in favour of vocational categories in the late 1890s as a sign of its reorientation towards scientific and capitalist agriculture.[132] What such stadialist assumptions occlude is the politics of language. Far from simply reflecting a historical context's modernity/backwardness, categories like "peasant" and "farmer" were also cultural constructions whose usage was informed both by the meanings attached to them and the diverse intentions of historical actors.

Indeed, assumptions about the inevitable decline of "peasantness" are contradicted by the boom in *modern*, political invocations of the peasantry in early 20th-century Europe. In France, for instance, the first three decades of the 20th century witnessed a dramatic rehabilitation of the term *paysan*, a once pejorative word meticulously shunned by the more paternalistic rural civil society of the 19th century but by the 1930s in clear ascendancy on both the left and the right, eclipsing the once popular language of *cultivateurs* and *agriculteurs*.[133] Beginning in the 19th century, the German *Bauer* underwent a similar reversal of fortune, culminating in its almost oxymoronic transformation into a quasi-noble, hereditary title under the Nazis' *Reichserbhofgesetz* of 1933.[134] In early 20th-century Spain as well, *labrador* – a category that 19th-century elites had imbued with associations of property and production – gave way to the more emotive, struggle- and labour-oriented idiom of the *campesino*, a word first championed

[132] B.M. Garver, *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901, and the Emergence of Multi-Party System* (New Haven, 1978), 289.
[133] F. Barral, "Note historique sur l'emploi du terme «paysan»", *Études rurales*, 21 (1966), 72-80; also see S.C. Rogers, "Good to Think: The "Peasant" in Contemporary France", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 60/2 (1987), 56-63.
[134] Barral, "Note", 77.

by the left but soon also claimed by the Catholic right.[135] Whilst the question has barely been studied, the arrival of mass politics in the countryside apparently stimulated a search for new vocabularies throughout the continent. As part of this process, the old feudal category of the "peasant" – until then laden with social opprobrium – was repeatedly revalorised, appreciated on the left for the history of oppression and struggle it evoked and, on the right, for its potential echoes of traditionalism and national indigeneity. Indeed, the more relevant question might not be why certain political actors clung to the language of peasantness in the face of modernization but, rather, why others resisted its appeal.

ii. The Appeal of Peasantness

But how far was the language of peasantness appealing in Polish- and Czech-language contexts?

In Poland as elsewhere in Europe, the early 20th century witnessed a rise in political invocations of the peasantry (*chłopi*), both within and beyond the emergent Populist movement. This linguistic shift was deeply entangled with the neo-Romantic intellectual climate of 1900s Poland, which saw resurgent interest in and mythologisation of the peasant. Włodzimierz Tetmajer, a central representative of the artistic-intellectual current known as "Young Poland", was himself a leading Galician Populist. Meanwhile, the phrase "The peasant is a power and *basta*!", first uttered in Stanisław Wyspiański's

[135] J. Izquierdo Martín, "Modernizar con la palabra antigua: usos modernos de viejos conceptos en el cambio agrario de España (ss. XIX - XXI)", in M. Pérez Ledesma (ed.), *Lenguajes de modernidad en la Península Ibérica* (Madrid, 2012), 333-353.

play *The Wedding*, became a kind of political totem endlessly recycled by Populist newspapers to assert the peasantry's right to political primacy.[136]

However, whilst the intellectual climate lent the "peasant" category prestige, its take-up in politics primarily reflected the calculations of actors determined to win in a newly competitive arena. That "peasantness" was considered a broadly appealing language can be gauged from the willingness of actors with no prior ideological commitment to the peasantry to embrace it – and not just when addressing the smallholding population *sensu stricto*. Indeed, even when addressing social groups on the periphery of peasant society and when the objective was, in part, to break this society's unity, peasantist language was often seen as a prudent investment.

A case in point is offered by two 1920s newspapers directed at agricultural labourers by the Polish Socialist Party (hereinafter PPS). Like all Socialist parties, the PPS was torn between an orthodox Marxist line, which considered the peasantry bound to decompose into a capitalist and proletarian class, and revisionist positions which accepted partial or total accommodation of smallholders as political allies.[137] Socialist newspapers addressed to the countryside fully reflected this ambivalence. Though nominally "devoted to the affairs of smallholders [*małorolnych*] and rural labourers", in practice it was labourers' affairs that dominated these newspapers' coverage. In a further sign of the enduring grip of Marxist orthodoxy, both newspapers continued to hold space for positions that were hostile to redistributive land reform and sceptical of the peasantry's

[136] In fact, it was so well-known as to lend itself to pastiche, as when a Socialist newspaper exclaimed: "The poor peasant and the landless peasant must get land in Poland and *basta*!". "Baczność chłopy!", *Chłopska Prawda* (6.09.1925), 2.
[137] M. Śliwa, *Myśl agrarna socjalistów polskich w XIX i XX wieku* (Kraków, 1993), 121-127.

coherence as a social group.[138] Given this ideological hostility toward peasantism, it is remarkable that *stylistically* both newspapers were peasantist through and through. Their respective titles, for instance, were "Peasant Truth" (*Chłopska Prawda*) and "Peasant Plight" (*Niedola Chłopska*). Practically no attempts were made by either newspaper to frame the poorer peasantry as a mere extension of the rural proletariat – the preferred discursive strategy of earlier Socialist appeals to the village.[139] Further, to mobilise the countryside, each newspaper drew on peasant-centred references, memories and values. Thus, the abuses committed by rural employers and their allies in the state apparatus were decried as resurgent serfdom.[140] Political opponents on the right were disparagingly depicted as "horse-thieves", in an explicit appeal to peasants' hatred for this crime.[141] Occasional poems meant to rouse the countryside's fighting spirit spoke almost exclusively of lords and peasants and, excepting the odd reference to the strike as a form of struggle, were largely indistinguishable from what one might encounter in Populist newspapers.[142] Even the newspapers' language pursued rural authenticity: the title "Peasant Plight", for instance, was a well-worn phrase rooted in a culture of peasant lament. [143]

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[138] E.g. "Głosy o wykonaniu reformy rolnej", *Niedola Chłopska* (15.01.1921), 2-3; "Klasowa polityka chłopska", *Chłopska Prawda* (21.02.1926), 1.

[139] E.g., "Sąd idzie!", *Robotnik Wiejski* (28.04.1906), 1. A lone 1 May appeal for the unity of "landless and smallholding labourers" issued in 1925 was the exception that proved the rule. "DO WSZYSTKICH ROBOTNIKÓW BEZROLNYCH I MAŁOROLNYCH!", *Chłopska Prawda* (19.04.1925), 3.

[140] "Pańszczyzna na Kresach", *Chłopska Prawda* (19.04.1925), 4; "Jak za czasów pańszczyzny", *Chłopska Prawda* (12.09.1926), 8.

[141] Zysław, "Koniokrady", *Niedola Chłopska* (1.10.1921), 3.

[142] B. Biczysko, "My również damy panom terminatki", *Niedola Chłopska* (15.01.1921), 4; J. Hutnik, "Ksiądz", *Niedola Chłopska* (15.04.1921), 5; B. Biczysko, "Wara płakać!", *Niedola Chłopska* (15.01.1922), 4.

[143] A near identical phrase (*chłopska dola*), for instance, appears in Galician folksongs from before the serfs' emancipation (1848). See "Kołysanka" and "Pieśń oracza o Jakubie Szeli" in J. Sieradzki and C. Wycech (eds.), *Rok 1846 w Galicji: materiały źródłowe* (Warsaw, 1958), 372-382.

Attempts to tap into the language of peasantness by non-peasantist actors were not limited to the political left. An example from the centre-right was the fortnightly *Kupiec Wiejski* ("The Rural Merchant"), the newspaper of the Warsaw-based Association of Rural Tradesmen [*Zrzeszenie Kupcow Wiejskich*] between 1936-1939. At this time, the intellectual climate in urban Poland was in many ways more propitious to peasantist self-fashioning than in the 1920s. In 1935 the Polish literary public had been gripped by the heartfelt despair of *Pamiętniki Chłopów* ("Peasant Memoirs"), a publication composed entirely of peasant memoirs.[144] The agrarian question had also moved to the centre of public debate: from the mid-1930s left-wing, pro-governmental and Catholic intellectuals alike argued for a revival of redistributive land reform.[145] Nevertheless, whilst peasantism had become more magnetic, a newspaper focused on rural tradesmen could still plausibly sublimate its social calling with various alternative idioms. Chief amongst these were the state-centred discourse of the *Sanacja* government and the nation-centred discourse of the nationalist right whose obsession with the Polonization/de-Judaization of trade made it particularly suitable for a rural traders' newspaper. Also militating against a primarily peasantist style was the fact that the SL itself was ambivalent about private rural commerce, its preferred solution to the peasants' lack of market leverage being the cooperativization of trade.[146] Indeed, the

[144] K. Lebow, "The Conscience of the Skin: Interwar Polish Autobiography and Social Rights", *Humanity*, 3/3 (2012), 299, 302.
[145] Landau and Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka*, iv, 260-262. Agrarian-like, anti-industrialist views regarding Poland's desired trajectory also became increasingly widespread in the nationalist camp. Wojtas, "Agraryzm", 127-31.
[146] Indeed, *Kupiec Wiejski* was forced to reckon with the hostility of the cooperative movement from the very outset. "Konkurencja", *Kupiec Wiejski* (1.01.1937), 1-2.

interests that *Kupiec Wiejski* championed were often seen as antithetical to those of the peasant producer/consumer.[147]

Nevertheless, a peasantist style is precisely what this newspaper tried to pull off. Its very first issue, for instance, depicted the battle for rural trade as the new frontier in peasant emancipation: "The Polish peasant has finally understood what he needs to do…No longer will anyone dare say that the peasant is not suited to commerce…".[148] Indeed, for *Kupiec Wiejski* the rural tradesman would remain a hyphenated "peasant-tradesman" [*chłop-kupiec*] whose struggle continued that of his peasant neighbours, with all its historical baggage still in tow. Thus, the drive to set up shops became a way of fighting the anti-mercantile "superstitions that the old Polish Commonwealth of the nobles left us as its legacy".[149] As in the aforementioned Socialist newspapers, so here the present-day bugbears of the shopkeeper, like the state's and industry's interference with retail prices, were framed as the incarnation of a resurgent serfdom.[150] When Jewish shopkeepers cut prices to drive out their new competitors, this outrage was decried not as a national attack on Catholic Poles but a neo-feudal one on "the right of peasants to engage in trade".[151] And of course, *Kupiec Wiejski* was adamant that its goals and interests were compatible with those of the peasant movement, to which it was organically linked and which it hoped to serve.[152]

[147] J.S., "Zbędni czy potrzebni", *Kupiec Wiejski* (15.05.1937), 1.
[148] "Jesteśmy!", *Kupiec Wiejski* (15.12.1936), 1.
[149] Speech by Aleksy Wnuk, *Kupiec Wiejski* (15.07.1939), 1.
[150] J. Sirota, "Pańszczyzna w handlu", *Kupiec Wiejski* (1.01.1938), 2.
[151] J.S., "Atak na prawo chłopów do handlu", *Kupiec Wiejski* (21.03.1937), 1.
[152] Wie-W., "Ruch chłopów w kierunku handlu…", *Kupiec Wiejski* (15.09.1937), 3.

For all these protestations, *Kupiec Wiejski*'s enthusiasm for peasantism proved fleeting. In late 1937, perhaps tired of pleading with a hostile SL, *Kupiec Wiejski* jettisoned much of its peasantist rhetoric, reformulating its mission along the state-centred and nationalistic lines mentioned earlier.

Though they were fundamentally different newspapers, the examples of *Kupiec Wiejski* and *Niedola Chłopska*/*Chłopska Prawda* are instructive for the same reasons. For both, peasantism offered a style more than an ideology and, hence, in neither case can it be treated as an outgrowth of a pre-existing thought-system. Likewise, in both cases, peasantism represented a superficial commitment – an adaptation on the Socialists' part after failing to convince the countryside using their own Marxist language; an experiment in self-fashioning for the Association of Rural Tradesmen, which would soon tire of this style. This superficiality implies that a desire to please, rather than any serious infatuation with peasantism, was what motivated these stylistic turns. Both *Kupiec Wiejski* and *Niedola Chłopska*/*Chłopska Prawda* simply assumed that peasantist language possessed broad social appeal, even with groups – like estate labourers and rural tradesmen – which were located on the periphery of peasant society and to some degree in a state of structural conflict with it.

The perceptions that political actors have of social preferences are, of course, hardly an infallible guide to social reality. Nevertheless, the keenness with which many actors wrapped themselves in peasantist homespun when addressing a variety of rural groups strongly indicates the social resonance of peasantist language. Judging from how it was deployed in *Kupiec Wiejski* and *Niedola Chłopska*/*Chłopska Prawda*, the core mobilising power of peasantness was seen to reside in its evocation of a shared history of suffering,

a history which stirred the passions and spurred compensatory political action in the present.[153]

Viewed in a comparative perspective, the symbolic capital offered by peasantness raises several questions: why did the Czech Agrarians, whose commitment to smallholders was more sincere and rooted than that of the PPS or the Association of Rural Tradesmen, refuse to harvest this capital? Did similar language simply not speak to Czech passions? Or was the Agrarian temperament ill-suited to such tonalities?

The emotive potential of the Czech word *sedlák* ("peasant") can be divined from how it was used in Agrarian discourse. Whilst the category was mostly avoided, in certain contexts its appearance was likely, even practically guaranteed, in the 1930s. These contexts were not of an everyday nature; rather, they were marked by lyrical and historical depth and, as such, involved a heightened emotional charge.

The first was when referring to the Agrarian leader and prime minister Antonín Švehla, a towering authority even after his political retirement in the late 1920s and death in 1933. Švehla was the owner of a sizeable estate, inherited from his father, in Hostivař on the outskirts of Prague, but this material status did not deter the Agrarian press from crowning him "the Czech peasant" or "peasant from Hostivař" – phrases so commonly affixed to his name, especially after his death, as to constitute de facto titles.

Švehla was not the only figure graced with this description. Rather, the term was frequently employed as a tribute to Agrarian veterans, especially in posthumous

[153] This aligns with a broader theory about the connection between suffering and powerful identities developed by H. Whitehouse, "Dying for the group: Towards a general theory of extreme self-sacrifice", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 41 (2018), 1-62.

eulogies. For both Švehla and these lesser dignitaries, *sedlák* was an honorific that conveyed landed status, social respect and rural authenticity. To illustrate Švehla's unceremonious character, for instance, a note in the minutes book of one Agrarian riding club stated: "just as his life was modest, so his departure from this world was – by his own wishes – modest as well. He was buried in the Hostivař Cemetery as a peasant".[154] The obituary of one Agrarian official's father, meanwhile, praised him as a "typical South Bohemian peasant who managed his estate in Hůry for a long time and was everywhere respected and honoured…".[155]

Invocations of the *sedlák* were also typical whenever Agrarian discourse foregrounded continuities of struggle, oppression and patriotism between the rural present and the rural past. A case in point was the closing speech at the 1936 Agrarian party congress by prime minister Dr Milan Hodža, in which the Agrarians' contemporary campaigns for agricultural profitability and debt relief were inserted into a grandiose historical canvas of rural struggle. In fighting to the improve the "farmer's" lot, the Agrarians of the 1930s were completing the "emancipatory enterprise" begun by the peasant rebels who had fought feudal Habsburg oppression in the 17th century (and been glorified in 19th-century nationalist literature[156]). By the end of Hodža's speech the historical gap between the contemporary "farmer" and his "peasant ancestors" was closed, as both were thrown into a single transcendental peasant category: "the perpetual silence [imposed on the

[154] NAČR, Selské jízdy, f. 392, k. 3, Mirovice: kníha zápisů ze schůzí výboru, členských schůzí a valných hromad (1929-1942), 23.
[155] "Zemřel vzorný sedlák jihočeský", *Pošumavský Kraj* (7.05.1936), 2.
[156] D. Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, 1998), 130-132.

rebels by the Habsburgs] has been interrupted, it is over. The peasant speaks, creates and leads."[157]

This ability to tie the present to the past also favoured the *sedlák* category in certain lyrical contexts. Exemplary in this regard was the poem "Since you are a peasant…" (*Když sedlákem jsi*…), printed by the weekly newspaper of the Agrarian youth movement for the 250th anniversary of the 1680 peasant rebellion. The poem's author, the schoolteacher Josef Bartuška, represented peasantness as a historical ideal that remained fit for the modern farmer. Each of the poem's three stanzas began with the injunction "Since you are a peasant, then a peasant you should be", before listing the moral imperatives that this entailed: autonomous labour, pride in agricultural production, muscular defence of one's honour and crops, culminating with fidelity to one's ancestors, land and homeland.[158]

A rare attempt to openly propagate the peasant identity in the same Dorost newspaper, likewise, mobilised the term's historical depth and associations of rootedness as arguments in its favour. The author, a leading Dorost activist in Slaný district, lamented how rural military recruits often disguised their professions upon recruitment, which he attributed to the shame that hung over terms like *sedlák*. In response, the author sought to redeem this identity, explaining how:

> the word *sedlák* is a certain historical designation for the farmer [*rolník*] vocation. It probably derives from the word *usedlík* [resident], because long ago the *rolník* settled somewhere…ceased migrating from place to place, became settled…So let's everywhere proclaim with pride that we are *rolníky*, we are *sedláky*![159]

[157] "Věčné mlčení je skončeno: sedlák mluví, tvoří, vede", *Venkov* (2.02.1936).
[158] J. Bartuška, "Když sedlákem jsi…", *MV* (29.08.1930), 6.
[159] V. Kasalický, "Sedlák", *MV* (17.05.1929), 7.

As these examples suggest, it was not for want of affective power that the Agrarians refused to tie their political identity more closely to the *sedlák* category. As in Poland, so here peasantness evoked a shared feudal past of suffering and struggle that lent historical grandeur to present-day politics and identities. Given the peasantry's symbolic centrality to the Czech National Revival, it also carried unmistakably patriotic associations.[160] It was certainly no accident that this word, rather than "farmer", became the stuff of eulogies and poems. All of this gave the category a mobilising *potential* that, as Hodža's speech shows, at times prove irresistible for the Agrarians. That they chose to marginalise it in other contexts is, thus, unlikely to have reflected the category's intrinsic lack of appeal.

Equally, this marginality cannot be explained by the category's archaism or by Czech agriculture's relative advancement. In other agriculturally advanced European contexts, the adoption of dry, vocational vocabularies when dealing with economic and technical matters was no obstacle to peasantist language in the political realm well into the 20th century.[161] Indeed, the Agrarians themselves were hardly above romanticizing the rural, regularly proclaiming the intrinsic economic primacy of farming, the special destiny of peasants in Czech history, the moral virtues imparted by the soil and the right to national leadership that these conferred. Nor were they reluctant to beat a more populist drum. Playing on feelings of rural subalternity and cultivating grievances over the exploitation

[160] E.g., M. Filipová, "Peasants on Display: The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895", *Journal of Design History*, 24/1 (2011), 15-36; M. Filipová, *Modernity, History, and Politics in Czech Art* (New York, 2019), 56-89.
[161] E.g., S. Berger*, Peasants against Politics: Rural Organisation in Brittany 1911-1967* (Cambridge MA, 1972), 4.

of the countryside were, in fact, staple elements of Agrarian propaganda. Both these sensibilities – the romantic and the populist – would doubtless have been well-served by peasantist language.

To explain the prevalence of more generic and less emotive social categories in Agrarian discourse, we must instead consider the coalition that they were trying to build and the constraints that peasantist language would have imposed on this task. As the next section shows, Czech agrarianism had not always shied away from peasantist language. Its transition to more generic categories occurred at the turn of the century and coincided with a broader change in political strategy and a turn towards new social constituencies.

iii. The Agrarians' Expansionist Project and the Limits of Peasantness

At its birth, the Czech agrarian movement was oriented towards a narrower clientele than it gradually assumed in the 20th century. This was mirrored in its political language. Amongst the predecessor organisations for the Agrarian Party was the short-lived Peasant Union for the Bohemian Crownland (*Selská jednota pro království české*), established in 1889 and dissolved by the Austrian authorities a year later. With an adjectival form related to the noun *sedlák* in its title,[162] this organisation had no scruples about proclaiming the peasant – or, more concretely, the propertied peasant – as its principal subject. An early issue of its press organ *Selské noviny* [The Peasant

[162] Whilst etymologically related to *sedlák*, the adjective *selský* was not always bound to this nominal form. Rather, it could also acquire vaguer connotations of generic rather than peasant-centred rurality. Thus, Alfons Šťastný rejected the Austrian House of Lords as a defender of Cisleithanian farming interests on the grounds that most of its members were the "owners of large *selské* estates". For this reason, "Peasant Union" is an imperfect translation of *Selská jednota*. J. Harna and V. Lacina (eds.), *Politické programy českého a slovenského agrárního hnutí 1899-1938* (Prague, 2007), 33.

Newspaper] even sought to demarcate and, implicitly, render policeable the boundaries of peasantness:

> The preparatory committee elected the words "Peasant Union" for our union with careful consideration…the *selská* farmstead refers to a village farmstead, one that [was] formerly enserfed and whose owner…farms it himself; the owner of such a village farmstead, we call a *sedlák*.

Next, the article distinguished the *sedlák* from the *rolník*, on the grounds that the latter category encompassed "all who engage in agriculture, regardless of whether they farm on their own land or on that of others…". It was precisely its greater precision that rendered the *sedlák* category more desirable in the eyes of the Peasant Union. The narrower *sedlák* class possessed a unique moral status, for "in the history of the Czech nation the *sedlák* represents a democratic element, an element that is anti-seigneurial, anti-aristocratic [and that] to this day represents the healthy core of the Czech people". This moral status, in turn, explained why "*the core* of [the Peasant Union] is constituted by our *sedlák* [and why] it is above all…his interests that will be defended…" (emphasis mine).[163]

That *Selské noviny* needed to define its categories so explicitly becomes more understandable when we consider the danger it was warding off. Hovering above the Peasant Union was the spectre of domination by mostly noble or clerical landowners. As a formidable force in Austrian politics and a social class grounded in agriculture, landowners were well-positioned to infiltrate the Peasant Union and exploit their status

[163] "Na dorozuměnou", *Selské noviny* (4.10.1889), 17-18.

as "farmers as well" (*"také rolníci"*)[164] in order to dilute its commitment to peasant interests.

Because the threat of dilution came from above, *Selské noviny* was happy to leave the Union's other borders comparatively unguarded. "It [went] without saying", for instance, that non-*sedlák* farmers – be they owners or tenants – could join the Union, as long as they were not landowners or estate leaseholders.[165] Overall, because the *sedlák* was conceptualised as part of the common folk (*lid*), antagonisms amongst commoners were treated as symbolically secondary.[166]

However, if divisions between commoners were not discursively central, they were nevertheless enshrined in the Peasant Union's discursive practices. By elevating the *sedlák* to its socio-moral core, *Selské noviny* established a hierarchy – both symbolic and material – in its attitude to the peasantry. This hierarchy, with its privileging of more propertied peasants, remained a constant of Czech proto-agrarianism throughout the 1890s, amply reflected in various programmatic statements. In 1890, for instance, the agrarian ideologue Alfons Šťastny warned against the threat of "agrarian communism" which peasant immiseration incurred and demanded that "those, who have more than is strictly needed for their subsistence, should be protected by the state, such that they do not grow poor by the state's hand".[167] The Association of Bohemian Agriculturalists (*Sdružení českých zemědělců*) formed in 1896 was even blunter in its bias towards the

[164] Significantly, this phrase was placed in inverted commas, thus making it a deliberate parody of landowner discourse by *Selské noviny*. Idem, 20.
[165] Alongside landowners and estate leaseholders, women, foreigners and agricultural teachers were also excluded. Idem, 18-19, 21.
[166] E.g., "Přatelé! Rolníci!", *Selské noviny* (27.09.1889), 1.
[167] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 35.

richer peasantry.[168] Whilst its programme spoke of *rolníci* rather than *sedláci*, in practice it conflated the two, investing the former with the propertied associations of the latter. Thus, it was *large* peasant holdings – rather than peasant holdings, in general – that demanded particular protection: if not "peasants [*rolníci*] will…die out – only large estate-owners and poor cottagers and middle peasants [*chalupníci*] will remain…".[169] In an even more concrete reflection of its class profile, the Association demanded draconian solutions to the problems that rural servants' insubordination caused for rural employers.[170]

However, such *overt* privileging of wealthy peasants visibly relaxed within a few years of the Agrarian Party's establishment (1899). The gradual expansion of male suffrage and, along with it, mass politics in Cisleithania finally impressed upon part of the Agrarian leadership the need to build broader socio-political coalitions.[171] Thus, in its 1903 programme the Agrarian Party made a virtue out of political necessity, refashioning itself as a party of the entire countryside. The landowning class, which the Peasant Union had barred and whose agriculturalist credentials it had questioned, was now encouragingly offered a role in the Agrarian programme as "the most fervent representative of agriculture, the pioneer of its progress".[172] The agricultural labourer – hitherto ignored or viewed through a disciplinary lens – was similarly exhorted to recognise his sectoral interest in the survival of the "middle agricultural estate" (i.e. the more propertied

[168] The Association was established an affiliate of the Young Czech Party and laid the ground for the independent Agrarian Party.
[169] Idem, 42.
[170] *Idem*, 41.
[171] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 28-31.
[172] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 57.

peasantry) to which he owed his employment.[173] In return, punitive remedies for labour insubordination gave way to paternalism: such problems needed to be resolved "not with draconian servant regulations but rather the considerate behaviour and solidarity of agriculturalist-employers".[174]

Most importantly from our current perspective, with this reorientation of style and policy also came an incipient change in socio-political vocabulary. On the one hand, the wealthy peasantry did not see its position of overt privilege completely shattered. As if to reassure this original clientele, the 1903 Agrarian programme explained that: "since the Czech agrarian party is principally a question of the middle agricultural estate, particular regard must be given to the needs of this class, even if this occurs at the expense of other classes of the agricultural citizenry or other estates in general".[175] Simultaneously, however, as the Agrarians cast their social net wider, new lexical tendencies – particularly those which would prevail in the interwar period – also intensified. More generic categories foregrounding rurality and ties to agriculture over peasantness were deliberately deployed to round more groups into the Agrarian fold. The harmful effects of Prague's overweening role in Czech politics was, for instance, portrayed by the 1903 programme as intuitively understandable to "*our rural folk*...not just to the peasant [*rolník*], but also the tradesman, both in the village and *in our rural towns*" (emphases mine).[176] When the Agrarian Party launched a new daily newspaper in 1906, it was not

[173] Idem, 54.
[174] Idem, 67.
[175] Idem, 54.
[176] Idem, 48.

accidentally called *Venkov* [The Countryside] – a fitting expression for its stated mission of "defending the interests of our countryside".[177]

Besides expanding the Agrarians' social reach, these more generic categories also defused tensions within their desired coalition, foregrounding features that were shared by all rural inhabitants and neutralising conflicts with their vagueness. Agriculture-oriented terms seemed especially well-suited to such euphemistic ends. Thus, when addressing peasant-labourer tensions, the 1903 programme spoke of labourers' "solidarity" with "*agriculturalist*-employers" rather than with peasants; and when asserting the primacy of wealthier peasants' interests, it almost bashfully presented this as the primacy of "the middle *agricultural* estate".

Alongside its intensified use of *generic* social signifiers, Agrarian discourse also became more reliant on *specific* social subcategories. As the Agrarians' desired coalition grew, so did the compulsion to remind its constituent parts that Agrarians were not taking them for granted. Claiming to speak for agriculturalists or villagers was not enough, for the specific social identities that these generic categories concealed also demanded recognition. Accordingly, the practice of frequently listing subcategories took root. The 1903 programme, for instance, declared the Agrarians' objective to be:

> the organisation of all agriculturalists, without divisions based on their social and proprietary position – in other words, large estate-owners, peasants, middle peasants and cottagers of Czech nationality…as well as all middle estates of our Czech countryside, which suffer alongside us, that is, our tradesmen and craftsmen.[178]

[177] "Našemu lidu!", *Venkov* (29.03.1906), 1.
[178] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 53-54.

Likewise, the opening issue of *Venkov* presented itself to the public as the "speaker for all rural layers – that is, peasants as much as middle peasants, cottagers, rural tradesmen and agricultural labourers".[179]

These discursive tendencies, begun in the 1900s, reached fruition after 1918. As a wave of post-war radicalism, combined with long-term urbanisation, threatened the Agrarians' electoral strength, further expanding the party's support base became politically imperative. Thus, to attract the rural poor, in 1919 the party embraced redistributive land reform.[180] During subsequent years, in turn, it built up affiliate organisations for myriad new clienteles, from rural teachers to urban homeowners. [181] In this context of party expansion, wealthy farmers' continued hold over the Agrarian public image became an ever-greater liability. It was, in part, to weaken this hold that in 1919 the Agrarian Party was renamed the Republican Party of the Czechoslovak Countryside. Whilst foregrounding the Agrarians' identification with the new republic, this new name also sidestepped the elitist associations that "Agrarian" had come to acquire.[182] In what the Communists ridiculed as yet another bid to camouflage the Agrarians' real nature as "a party of large peasants and squires",[183] the Republicans again changed their name after their merger with the Slovak National and Peasant Party in 1922. Their new appellation

[179] "Našemu lidu!", *Venkov* (29.03.1906), 2.
[180] V. Lacina, "Představy o řešení agrární otázky v Československu v letech 1918-1919", *ČSČH*, 25/5 (1977), 676.
[181] For more on these satellites see D. Uhlíř, *Republikánská strana venkovského a malorolnického lidu 1918-1938: charakteristika agrárního hnutí v Československu* (Prague, 1988); Harna and Rašticová, *Agrární strana*.
[182] The Agrarian press only acknowledged the patriotic, Czechoslovakist reasons for this name change. By contrast, their left-wing opponents repeatedly claimed that the Agrarians were trying to dissociate themselves from a label that was off-putting to those outside their original base. This was ironic given that adopting the "Agrarian" label in 1899 had itself reflected an attempt to escape the narrow constraints of *sedlák*-oriented peasantism. *Venkov* (29 June 1922), 1; "Slova a skutky", *Zemědělec* (25.03.1923), 1; "Kde jsou agrárníci?", *Právo Lidu* (24.12.1937); Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 34.
[183] *Rudé Právo* (29.06.1922), 6.

was the Republican Party of the Agricultural and Small Peasant Folk. Significantly, both the 1919 and 1922 rebrands foregrounded generic social categories consistent with those that had gained ground in the 1900s. In 1919 this took the form of a reference to the "Czechoslovak countryside" and, in 1922, to "the agricultural folk" (alongside an acknowledgement of the Agrarians' newly acquired "small peasant" clientele). The titular reference to "the agricultural folk" was particularly aligned with broader lexical trends in the interwar period: invocations of agriculture-based, as opposed to peasant-related, social categories ballooned in the post-1918 Agrarian press. For instance, the average annual frequency with which the words "agriculturalist" (*zemědelec*), "agriculturalists" and "agricultural" appeared in the Agrarian daily *Venkov* was, in the time-period 1919-1928, more than triple what it had been between 1906 and 1913. In the time-period 1929-1938 it was, in turn, more than quadruple the 1906-1913 average annual rate. By contrast, average annual references to equivalent cognates of the word *rolník* (i.e. peasant-cum-farmer) approximately halved between the first eight years of *Venkov*'s existence and the last decade of the First Czechoslovak Republic.[184]

As this brief survey suggests, the Agrarians' efforts to expand their social base went hand-in-hand with more generic social categories, at the partial expense of references

[184] These averages are based on a word search in the digitized *Venkov* collection accessible at the National Library of the Czech Republic. The picture of relative word frequencies they offer is crude. Because the *Venkov* collection has not been lemmatized, the averages I cite have been calculated based on the nominative case of each noun/adjective and the masculine form of each adjective, thereby excluding different inflections of each word. At the time of writing, it was not possible to limit one's search to specific multi-word expressions. As a result, the average frequencies for the adjectives *zemědělský* and *rolnický*, both of which were used in fixed social designations such as "agricultural estate" or "peasant people", also incorporate many other irrelevant instances of use (e.g. "agricultural product"). In addition, the cited word frequencies include instances where these words were used in recurring advertisements. By providing average frequencies over longer time-periods, I have tried to counteract the distortion resulting from this kind of noise. For all their crudeness, these averages align with my own close readings of how the Agrarian press deployed social categories at different points in the early 20th century.

to peasants. It was, in other words, the need to appeal to groups other than the propertied peasantry, rather than the professionalization of agriculture or the diminishing appeal of peasantness, which primarily drove the renovation of the Agrarians' socio-political vocabulary. The Agrarians themselves admitted as much during their 1925 party congress when they stated that:

> the old agrarianism, in its time a certain leader of the peasant estate [*selský stav*]…did not suffice for the era that dawned in the new state…It was no longer just the peasant estate but all groups of people working on the land, without distinction, whether *sedlák* or cottager, estate-owner or middle peasant, agricultural labourer or village tradesman, and the agrarian intelligentsia, all of them felt the need for a wider movement…[185]

In this rendering, the peasantist phase of the Agrarian movement, implicitly extended until 1918, stood *explicitly* juxtaposed to its subsequent period of expansion.

Given intensified peasantist trends elsewhere in Europe, the Agrarians' failure to adapt peasantist categories may appear puzzlingly inflexible. Why could peasantist language not be stretched to match the stretching of the Agrarians' electoral coalition? To understand this, it is essential to consider the *social* constraints with which peasantist language was burdened. In interwar Poland, as we have seen, peasantism was considered a language with *broad* social appeal. This, however, was not the case for peasantist categories in the Czech language. Indeed, the *narrowness* of their social appeal likely contributed to their political decline. Even if, as was shown, the *sedlák* exercised an enduring romantic pull, it is doubtful whether all parts of the Agrarian coalition could have identified with this category. The magnetism of peasantness was simultaneously intense and circumscribed.

[185] Cited in Uhlíř, "Dva směry", 135-136.

In part, these limits had to do with the sheer breadth of the Agrarians' desired coalition. By framing the village teacher, the distillery owner and the Agrarian bank employee as peasants, the Agrarians would surely have exposed themselves to ridicule. Replacing peasantness with vaguer social categories, thus, gave the Agrarians greater flexibility to expand. This was especially important in an industrialized and urbanized state like Czechoslovakia. By 1930 only 34.7% of the Czechoslovak population was employed in the agricultural sector. This went down to 25.7% in the Czech Lands. Whilst many peasant movements liked to claim political primacy based on peasants' demographic advantage,[186] this was increasingly implausible for the Agrarian movement. In this regard, more elastic social categories offered political advantages, allowing the Agrarians to preserve their claim to primacy whilst fudging the social subject for whom power was claimed. Thus, in 1929 *Venkov* rejected the "hackneyed" claim according to which Czechoslovakia had become "an industrial state [or], even more mendaciously...an industrial nation" through a rhetorical sleight of hand to which the "agriculturalist" category was central. By including food-processing industries within the agricultural bracket and excluding German co-citizens, *Venkov* could still insist that "...a good 60% of the Czechoslovak nation is agricultural".[187] It is doubtful whether a similar claim could have been made in a peasantist idiom.

Crucially, however, peasantist language would not just have excluded de facto non-agricultural segments of the Agrarian coalition. Rather, in contrast to Poland, its appeal in the countryside was also limited. This was due to the overtones of propertied wealth

[186] Indeed, in the 1890s this tactic was still employed by the early Czech agrarians. "Na dorozuměnou", *Selské noviny* (4.10.1889), 20; Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 32.
[187] "Rok bez Švehly", *Venkov* (4.01.1929).

that the *sedlák* and, increasingly, *rolník* categories had come to possess. Since poorer villagers were a key target demographic, there were good reasons for Agrarians not to centre categories with such connotations. Indirect evidence for these connotations abounds in interwar sources. A governmental report about mounting rural radicalism in 1920, for instance, conveyed the scale of this menace by revealing how the conspiratorial plans to occupy landed estates "involved not just small farmers but even peasants [*rolníků*]".[188] Meanwhile, in 1924, at a joint 1 May meeting of the Republican Party and Domovina, a disgruntled cottager demanded that "land parcels [from the land reform] be distributed to the hands of the petty folk [*drobného lidu*] rather than the hands of the peasants, who already have land and should not be keeping…estates for themselves".[189] Municipal chronicles from South Bohemia similarly reserved the term *rolník* for a more propertied sort of villager who was clearly distinguished from cottagers. As these local voices show, the default association of peasantness with property was entrenched at the vernacular level in the Czech countryside. Whilst the meaning of *rolník* could be modified with qualifying epithets (e.g. small, large, working), it was overtones of wealth, rather than deprivation, that usually followed the word in an *unmarked* and hence dominant fashion.

Besides rendering it more exclusive, such default associations of wealth also made the peasant category more vulnerable to pejorativization than the generic alternatives favoured by interwar Agrarians. This was particularly true of the term *sedlák* which, despite its romantic appeal, also accumulated a string of negative connotations. These

[188] Cesar and Otáhal, *Hnutí,* 371.
[189] State District Archive (hereinafter SDA) Písek, Okresní úřad Písek I (hereinafter OkÚP), Relace o schůzích KSČ 1921-1938 (hereinafter Relace), sign. 382/24, Vráz gendarmerie report (1.05.1924).

were best captured in the common phrase *zazobaný sedlák* ("the loaded peasant"), used throughout the early 20th century to evoke images of peasant greed, miserliness, abuse of servants, and unscrupulous hoarding.[190] Whilst doubtless owing much to the urban imaginary and its resentment of high food prices, this image of the *sedlák* also resonated with and, indeed, was co-created by significant parts of the rural population, most notably, agricultural labourers.

In Czech-language sources hired labour on peasant farms was exceptional in being defined with reference not to the type of labour performed or its place of employment but the social identity of its employer, as seen in the widely used expression, *pracovat u sedláka* (working for a peasant).[191] This was entirely consistent with the personalization of labour relations that characterized face-to-face peasant economies. Whilst such personalization frequently soothed or stifled class tensions, it could also inject them with exceptional personal rancour. Indeed, an animosity towards "peasants" that was both intimate and generalised was the most salient feature of one of the two extant testimonies by rural servants from South Bohemia. The daughter of a rural mason, Anežka Buzková spent her youth working for wealthy peasants in Český Krumlov district, before migrating to Prague in 1924 and becoming involved in the Communist Party. Written after World War II, her testimony was replete with embittered references to the exploitative and dehumanising practices of "peasants" who failed in even the most basic

[190] In a sign of its widespread usage, *Venkov* regularly condemned the injustice of this phrase and others like it. Indeed, the earliest such complaint occurred merely a few months after *Venkov*'s foundation. "Je drahota nebo není?", *Venkov* (1.06.1906), 2.
[191] The same is true of the Polish language where the expression *pracować u chłopa/kmiecia* (working for a peasant/wealthy peasant) was also relatively unique in foregrounding the employer's identity.

paternalistic duties towards their servants. Indeed, Buzková's decision to leave for Prague was explicitly motivated by a desire not to have to "work for a peasant".[192]

A South Bohemian folksong told from the perspective of a farmhand frustrated by poor working conditions echoed Buzková's resentment towards the peasant category. Unlike Buzková's testimony this song, collected by an interwar schoolteacher from a man born in 1850 who died in 1932, was unlikely to have been coloured by Communist ideology. Here too, however, we encounter the same intimate, yet generalised, class animosity – a litany of grievances and insults directed against a peasant figure who was both singular and, through his unnamed identification as "the peasant", a universal representative of his class:

> For a peasant I did do service,
> What a big crook the peasant is,
> He gets up at the crack of dawn
> And off to the stable does he storm,
> Summoning the farmhand, chop chop,
> "Has the chaff been finely chopped?"
>
> "The chaff is as long as a finger,
> Farmhand, you are a malingerer!"
> But the farmhand jumps out,
> Swinging his cap about:
> "The chaff is as fine as gruel,
> Peasant, you are a fool!"
>
> "Oh, little peasant, if as a master you fancy yourself,
> Then chop up your own chaff yourself! [...][193]

[192] *Bojovali – zvítězili: vzpomínky komunistů Jihočeského kraje* (České Budějovice, 1961), 16.

[193] "Sloužil jsem u sedláka,/sedlák je šelma velká:/ráno časně vstane,/běží do maštale,/volá hned na pacholka/je-li drobná řezanka./Řezanka jako palec –/pacholce, tys nedbalec!/Pacholek vyskočí,/kloboučkem zatoči:/řezanka jako kroupy,/sedláce, ty jsi hloupý!/Když jsi ty, sedláčku, pán,/řezej si řezanku sám!/Já se budu dívat,/jak ti bude lítat/řezanka od stolice –/já pudu k svej Nanynce./Řezanku řezat kážeš,/chleba nám jen ukážeš;/polívka jak šlichta,/neche mi do břicha,/kaše ta moukou voní –/našel jsem pabouka v ní." J. Janda, *Prachenský zpěvník: lidové pisně z okoli Paračova na Strakonicku a z okolí Písku* (České Budějovice, 1970), 96.

The pervasively negative image of the *sedlák* is further borne out by the National Socialist monthly for agricultural labourers, *Zemědělský Dělník* [The Agricultural Labourer]. As a centre-left party with a largely middle-class constituency and little desire for class militancy,[194] the National Socialists could hardly have been expected to foment social antagonisms unless these were imposed by the expectations of their base. It is, therefore, telling that the National Socialists' newspaper for agricultural labourers regularly referred to the *sedlák* in a negative fashion, even at the risk of alienating the peasants within their broader electorate. At least twice between 1931 and 1932 *Zemědělský Dělník* deployed the disparaging phrase "loaded peasants" [*zazobané sedláky*], on the second occasion even bracketing this group alongside landowners and capitalists.[195] One article which compared the attitudes of different rural employers to collective wage bargaining concluded that smaller rural employers were tendentially more hostile. In an indication of how typical Anežka Buzková's antipathy to "working for peasants" may have been, the article used this to explain "why workers do not work for peasants gladly, even when they offer them a better wage for some time".[196]

In a further sign of peasantism's limited social appeal, no political actors of the left or centre rushed to occupy the linguistic terrain that the Agrarians abdicated in shifting to a more agriculturally oriented idiom. The Catholic Populist movement, which – in line with social Catholic ideology – shared the Agrarians' ambition of reconciling the full spectrum

[194] J. Harna, "Český národní socialismus", in J. Malíř et al., *Politické strany: vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861-2004*, (2 vols, Brno, 2005), i, 763-780.
[195] There were possibly more such references that I failed to notice. As this newspaper has not been digitised, this is difficult to verify without a more meticulous survey. Fr. Herain, "Kdopak nám to chce navléknout svůj kabát?", *Zemědělský Dělník* (hereinafter *ZD*) (30.07.1931), 1; Fr. Herain, "Chtějí vám vzít sociální pojištění", *ZD* (31.10.1932), 1-2.
[196] "Je možno uzavřiti smlouvu bez boje?", *ZD* (31.01.1931), 2.

of rural (and, indeed, urban) classes, mirrored the Agrarians' terminological preferences, distinguishing itself only by adding the epithet "Christian" to its various constituencies (e.g. "Christian agricultural folk").[197] By contrast, rejecting the possibility of rural unity, parties of the left appealed to the more specific social identities of potential supporters (e.g. cottagers, small peasants, agricultural labourers). In doing so, they too relegated peasantist categories.[198] Unlike Socialist newspapers for agricultural labourers in Poland, leftist newspapers aimed at Czech agricultural labourers were unapologetically workerist in style, making no effort to dress their socialism with a peasantist veneer. The Communists' sporadic calls for "a government of workers and peasants", combined with their appeals to "working peasants", were the exception that proved the rule on the left. Far from reflecting a different evaluation of peasantness' potential, such formulations simply translated categories used by the Comintern. Nor were they even typical of the Czech Communists' overall output: for instance, in *Obrana Lidu*, the Communist newspaper for deeply rural South Bohemia between 1935-1938, appeals to peasantness were conspicuous only by their absence.

Indeed, the only political actors to foreground peasantist categories were to the Agrarians' right. These were ephemeral breakaway organisations, which seceded from the Agrarians out of disgruntlement with their post-1919 expansion. They included the Czechoslovak Peasant Association [*Československá rolnická jednota*] (est. December 1919) along with its newspaper *Role*, both of which were dominated by landowners and

[197] E.g. "Zemědělský den křestánského lidu zemědělského", *Lidove Listy* (6.11.1928).
[198] This is clear even from the names chosen by leftist parties for their rural satellite organisations: the Central Association of Cottagers and Small Peasants (Social Democrat); the Association of Cottagers, Small and Middle Peasants (Communist); the Association of Small Peasants and Cottagers, later turned into the Central Union of Czechoslovak Small Agriculturalists, Cottagers and Tradesmen (National Socialist).

wealthier peasants opposed to redistributive land reform.[199] Another such organisation was the Peasant Union [*Selský svaz*] (est. 1922) which, whilst not opposed to land reform, also sought to outflank the Agrarians from the right.[200] Both of these political experiments pitched their appeals to the Agrarians' traditional constituency of wealthier peasants, confirming that this is where peasantness' magnetism was most strongly felt. Neither, however, garnered long-term support and no new organisations of this kind would emerge after the early 1920s. Indeed, it was not until after Czechoslovakia (and the Agrarian party) fell, under the altered ideological conditions of Nazi rule, that a renewed bid was made to re-centre the old Agrarian categories of "peasantness" [*selství*] and the *sedlák* in the public sphere, this time reinvigorated by the Nazi doctrine of "blood and soil".[201]

To sum up, the Agrarians' abandonment of peasantist categories in the early 20th century was motivated, above all, by the imperatives of social expansion. Unlike in other countries, in the Czech language the strong, at times positive, but nevertheless exclusionary associations of peasantness hobbled its political potential, especially amongst the rural poor whose support the Agrarians increasingly needed. In this context, more generic social categories foregrounding sectoral ties to the agricultural profession possessed greater political allure. It was precisely their sociological vagueness and affective neutrality – in other words, their compatibility with the social balancing act that the Agrarians needed to pull off – that largely determined their success.

[199] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 61.
[200] Idem, 130.
[201] E.g., J. Váha, "Selství noví doby", *Českomoravský Rolník* (13.08.1942), 1.

It bears mentioning that these generic sectoral categories could also assume a more explicit class content. For instance, the generic term "agriculturalist" could sometimes be used in a narrower sense, as a quasi-synonym for the peasant or, even, the wealthier peasant. By way of example, an article in *Mladý Venkov*, the weekly newspaper of the Agrarian youth organisation, listed "agricultural workers" and "landowners" amongst the potential "exploiters" of "the agriculturalist", thereby excluding both groups from the agriculturalist family and implicitly limiting the latter to peasant farmers.[202] When the Agrarian general secretary issued his 1929 New Year *cri de guerre*: "cottagers and agriculturalists, all together!", he too – perhaps unintentionally – revealed his feeling that cottagers, with their dwarf holdings, were not agriculturalists true and proper.[203]

Given that wealthier peasants remained a powerful Agrarian constituency capable of fashioning the movement in their own image, the occasional identification of the prototypical agriculturalist with the peasant proprietor was an unsurprising, if self-defeating, outcome. Even then, however, agricultural social categories remained flexible and vague enough to keep their discursive edge over the old peasant terminology. Thus, even as it pitted agriculturalists against agricultural workers one week, *Mladý Venkov* could, a month later, open its arms to the emerging Agrarian trade union for agricultural labourers, "which is finally getting where it belongs: to the shared front of all agriculturalists!"[204] This was, in short, an idiom that could expand and contract its semantic reach depending on need, without anyone appearing to notice. To the Agrarians it offered a language that could deflect from contradictions that it was hardly in their

[202] J. Prusík, "Vykořisťovaní zemědělství a družstevnictví", *MV* (18.04.1930), 6.
[203] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina* (4.01.1929), 1.
[204] "Řady a pohyby", *MV* (16.05.1930), 1.

interest to resolve. Whatever its affective deficiencies, an ambiguity that this was productive was too useful to forego.

iv. Peasanter-than-Thou Politics in 20th-Century Galicia

Populist language in interwar Poland evolved in the opposite direction from that of the Agrarians. Far from watering down their peasantism, the Populists doubled down on it. Here, I will analyse the dynamics that produced this divergent result. Most obviously, the demographic and electoral constraints that spurred a dilution of peasantism in the Czech Lands were not operative in Galicia. At the same time the Populists confronted their own pressures which tended to push them in the opposite direction, towards greater class-based separatism. Some of these were internal to the interactions between a mistrustful village world and a Populist movement keen to win legitimacy on the peasants' own terms. At the same time, the Populists' preference for more caste-like categories was reinforced by outside political pressures. After the May Coup, the Populists were increasingly marginalised by the *Sanacja* regime whose overtures to the peasantry and attacks on the Populists emphasised *vocational* themes of agriculturalist unity and agricultural modernisation. During the 1930s this external threat made Populists increasingly wary of more generic social categories and encouraged them to seek refuge in class to separate and shield themselves from these rivals.

Just as the Peasant Union for the Bohemian Crownland (1889-1890) had tried to prevent entryism by "fellow farmer" landowners, so the Galician Populists rejected the

"patronage" (*patronat*) of landowning elites right from their movement's birth.[205] The electoral malpractices used by landowners to distort or capture peasant votes were a central target of opprobrium in early Populist programmes.[206] The resultant emphasis on peasants' political self-sufficiency remained a dominant theme in Populist discourse throughout the early 20th century.

Nevertheless, at this early stage, an emphasis on peasant independence did not preclude generic social categories. If anything, the categories favoured by early Populists were more capacious than those of their Czech contemporaries. Thus, the Populist Party (SL) established in 1895 invoked "the people" (*lud*), not the peasant, in its title, whilst defining the "people" catholically in its 1903 programme as "incorporating all [social] layers, both rural and urban, which engage in physical, or intellectual, labour and consider labour as the only entitlement to honours, rights and duties".[207] Occasional claims to represent this amorphous group sat quite comfortably – insofar as no one seemed to mind[208] – alongside a *de facto* focus on the peasantry. Crucially, the happy coexistence of "the people" with the "peasants" rested on the fact this ambiguity was inconsequential. Perceiving no deep conflicts between working folk, early Populists were not interested in policing boundaries between them. In the deeply agrarian conditions of turn-of-the-century Galicia where 80% of the population was employed in agriculture it

[205] K. Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, 2004), chapter 9.
[206] S. Lato and W. Stankiewicz (eds.), *Programy stronnictw ludowych: zbiór dokumentów* (Warsaw, 1969), 53-62, 69-83.
[207] Idem, 69.
[208] The early Populist newspaper *Przyjaciel Ludu*, for instance, used the terms "peasants" and "the people" interchangeably. A. Wójcik, "Chłopi na łamach „Przyjaciela Ludu" (1889-1914)", in Maj et al., *Egoistyczna klasa*, 16.

was from above, from the landowners and their allies, that threats to peasant independence came, not from neighbouring economic sectors.

As already seen, this anti-seigneurial, peasantist-cum-populist orientation was shared by the Bohemian Peasant Union. Nevertheless, in Bohemia the peasantism of the 1890s was quickly overridden by various countervailing pressures. Importantly, none of these pressures was apparent in the Galician/Polish context. As already established, peasantness was a category with broad social appeal in Poland, unburdened by propertied or exclusivist associations, and, as such, the expansion of the franchise did not constrain its political potential. Connectedly, apart from the German partition, Poland lacked the creamy layer of wealthy peasant-farmers that had emerged in the Czech Lands during the 19th century. It was this class whose interests were most served when the Agrarians deemphasized rural class divisions in favour of agricultural unity, by allowing it to preserve its political leverage in rural politics. Thirdly, the demographic tendencies which pressured the Agrarians to expand their electoral coalition were almost non-existent in early 20th-century Poland. Where the rural population of the Czech Lands was in a state of both absolute and relative decline, the Galician/Polish peasant population declined only in relative terms. Even then, peasants constituted over 60% of Poland's population in the 1930s. Thus, even had there been free elections at this time, Populists could have comfortably retained their peasantist categories, as well as the demographic-majoritarian arguments with which they justified their claim to national primacy.[209]

[209] Peasant majoritarianism permeated the Populists' political rhetoric and thought. Even support for seemingly liberal values was at times grounded in it. The 1921 programme of the centre-right PSL Piast

The Populists, in short, did not face pressures to revise their default orientation towards peasantness. Rather, the pressures they encountered tended to favour its entrenchment. In part, these derived from within rural society itself. Underlying the Populists' discursive emphasis on peasant independence, for instance, were the suspicions that many ordinary peasants directed at those in positions of power, including their own peasant representatives.[210] The contact that village leaders enjoyed with external elites rendered them dangerously liminal figures who could just as easily defend or betray the village. One prophylactic was for peasants to elect better-off candidates whose wealth inoculated them to the temptation of corruption and betrayal.[211] At the same time, villagers could also adopt the opposite strategy by favouring those who possessed what Keely Stauter-Halsted has called the virtue of "averageness", in the hope that a candidate who resembled his voters would remain more anchored to their interests.[212] In a mass movement of social emancipation like the SL it was inevitably the latter strategy that was preferred. As a result, Populist politics became strongly oriented towards demonstrating its authentic proximity to the voter, which in turn gave more caste-like categories – like peasantness – an advantage over those – like farmerness – that were blind to ancestry and farm size.

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party, for instance, justified its "strict support for the rule of law" (*praworządność*) not in terms of constraints on political authority, the protection of rights or even equality before the law but by envisaging the law as "the expression of a general will" which had to be defended against possible "dictatorships of the minority". Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 197.

[210] According to PSL Piast politician Maciej Rataj, "the rural voter [in 1919] was guided rather by instinct [as opposed to constitutional issues], [his/her] feel for who could be trusted personally, who would not cheat and 'sell [him/her] to the lords'". M. Rataj, *Pamiętniki, 1918-1927*, ed. J. Dębski (Warsaw, 1965), 30.

[211] J. Bartkowski, *Tradycja i polityka: wpływ tradycji kulturowych polskich regionów na współczesne zachowania społeczne i polityczne* (Warsaw, 2003), 64.

[212] Stauter-Halsted, *Nation*, 228. In one Masovian village peasants even reportedly preferred electing illiterate mayors, trusting that their illiteracy would at least prevent them from signing away any communal property. Bartkowski, *Tradycja i polityka*, 65.

The workings of this incentive structure became especially visible in the first decade of Polish independence. With various peasant parties jostling for support, accusations of class betrayal and *fake* peasantness became the stock-in-trade argument in inter-Populist warfare. At the same time, Populist parties tirelessly hammered their own peasantist credentials – credentials frequently manifested by the incantatory repetition of the word "peasant". This was especially true of new and self-proclaimed radical groups looking to stand out from the two dominant Populist parties, the centre-right PSL Piast and the centre-left PSL Wyzwolenie. The Peasant Radical Party, established in 1919 by the leaders of the short-lived Tarnobrzeg Republic, offers a case in point. Its 1922 programme opened with an emphatically peasantist self-description as a:

> …political organisation, peasant-like through and through and truly peasant-like [*na wskroś chłopska i naprawdę chłopska*], which sets itself the firm task of [uniting] the innumerable peasant mass in all areas of the Polish Republic into one huge, united peasant camp and into one solidary political peasant army, marching towards victory and standing under a purely peasant banner…[213]

Electoral support for the Peasant Radical Party was confined to a small region and by 1928 its flights of peasantist rhetoric had been grounded by electoral annihilation. A similar rhetorical technique, however, was mastered with much greater success by the left-wing Peasant Party (*Stronnictwo Chłopskie*) formed in 1926. In the 1928 legislative elections the Peasant Party garnered 5.1% of the national vote, compared to PSL Wyzwolenie's 7.3% and the 6.7% won by the Catholic coalition that included PSL Piast. In many Central Galician villages, the Peasant Party became a serious challenger to PSL Piast's political ascendancy. Crucially, the main stylistic, and nominally ideological,

[213] Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 208-209.

selling point of this party was its insistence that it was "class-based" and "peasantist" – epithets that were repeated ad nauseam in its newspapers.[214]

This peasanter-than-thou style of politics came in for parody in the 1938 novel "Money" (*Pieniądz*), a satirical panorama of the 1930 parliamentary elections as these had unfolded in the Galician countryside. Its author, the Communist Marian Czuchnowski who hovered around the far-left fringe of the SL, used his novel to deliver a merciless indictment of Populist cant and factionalism. Amongst its many vignettes the novel presented an endless succession of morally bankrupt windbag agitators, forever outdoing one another's tautological tirades ("so we peasants who are oppressed, how oppressed…must scramble out of this misery, as the poverty beats us, for it beats us"[215]) and caught up in the most vacuous symbolic distinctions ("…those from the popular party riled up the ones from the peasant party, who belonged in turn to the popular one, it's hard to understand…"[216]).

Ridiculous though it occasionally appeared, performative peasantness was clearly central to how Populists believed political legitimacy worked in the eyes of peasant electors. However, alongside such pressures "from below", there were also pressures from outside village society that pushed interwar Populism in a more peasantist direction. This was explicitly acknowledged by Jan Dąbski, leader of the Peasant Party (1926-31), when he explained why his party was "peasantist" rather than "populist" in name. The Peasant Party's intention was:

[214] E. Podgajna, *Stronnictwo Chłopskie (1926-1931): studium z dziejów myśli politycznej* (Lublin, 2011).
[215] M. Czuchnowski, *Cynk; Pieniądz ,* ed. J. Krysiak (Warsaw, 1976), 135.
[216] *Idem*, 137.

> ...not to pander to peasants, but to destroy the **fraudulent brand** that the word "popular" today represents. For who is not "popular" in this day and age? **National Democrats** [*Endeki*], the worst Christian-nationalist [*chjeńska*] reaction, after all [call themselves] the Popular-National Union [*Związek Ludowo-Narodowy*]! The traitors from [PSL] Piast – they too are the Polish **People's** Party!...We use the word "peasant", because this is a clear word that unequivocally indicates a relatively defined social **class**...Naturally, this word too can be abused...but in any case the word "peasant" offers a much smaller opportunity for frauds...Lords and priests are still a long way off calling their parties peasant parties, because they are revolted by this word, just as they are revolted by the peasant...[217]

Thus, the Peasant Party's peasantism was more than an appeal to mistrustful rural voters. Underlying it was a conscious attempt to differentiate the party from rival political actors on the right who had, in Dąbski's view, appropriated more generic Populist categories like "the people" and yoked them to anti-peasant agendas. The presence of such malignant actors made it imperative for peasants to swap socially elastic categories for ones with a more definite referent which rivals would struggle to manipulate or hijack.

Of course, despite the Peasant Party's efforts, "the people" was never retired from the Populist lexicon. When Populist parties merged in 1931, they even called their new party the People's Party (SL) in a deliberate throwback to the first SL formed in 1895. Nevertheless, the emphatically peasantist tendency championed by the Peasant Party in the 1920s set the tone for Populist politics in the decade that followed. One measure of its dominance lay in the declining fortunes of the more respectable-sounding synonym for peasant, *włościanin* (roughly translatable as "smallholder"), in Populist discourse.[218] In the late 19th century *włościanin* had been extensively used in Populist parlance and,

[217] J. Dąbski, "Dwie drogi! Chłopska i ludowa", *Gazeta Chłopska* (8.01.1928), p. 1.
[218] This linguistic transition has barely been noticed or discussed by historians. For one brief exception see E. Pietraszek,"Władza i autorytety w społeczności wiejskiej", in M. Biernacka et al. (eds.), *Etnografia Polska. Przemiany kultury ludowej, Tom I* (Wrocław, 1976), 529.

indeed, in the rural vernacular, if the self-ascribed identities given by peasant letter-writers are anything to go by.[219] Whilst its usage had declined by the 1920s, especially on the peasant left, it was still widely employed by PSL Piast during this decade. Crucially, *włościanin* was also the preferred term for peasants on the political right. The National Democrat weekly *Zorza,* for example, almost entirely eschewed the rougher and more rebellious-sounding word *chłop* in favour of *włościanin* throughout the interwar period.[220] Given its popularity on the right, it is unlikely Populists' abandonment of the term was politically unintentional.[221] A 1936 article in the peasant youth weekly *Wici*, for instance, implied that using the term denoted a deferential spirit, imputing its usage to a pro-governmental peasant MP, Stanisław Kielak, who had reportedly complained to the former premier, Walery Sławek, about how:

> He [i.e. Kielak], a *włościanin*, does not feel at home [amongst the] elite but cannot go home to the *chłopi,* because between him and the *chłopi* a tall "fence" had emerged, whereas "the *włościanin* estate" [of yore] is nowhere to be found, and so loneliness consumes him in his old age.[222]

Tellingly, *Wici* did not have to explain its mockery of Kielak, taking for granted that the associations of *chłop* and *włościanin* would be intuitively understood. Whether through its own efforts or otherwise, the peasant left had partially succeeded in disentangling its own categories from those of the right and tarnishing the latter with connotations of peasant subordination.

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[219] M. Krisań, *Chłopi wobec zmian cywilizacyjnych w Królestwie Polskim w drugiej połowie XIX - początku XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2008), 40.
[220] E. Maj, "Lud wiejski: włościanin i narodowiec. Problematyka chłopska na łamach tygodnika „Zorza" w latach 1918-1939", in Maj et al., *Egoistyczna klasa*, 64.
[221] The category also barely features in 1930s peasant memoirs.
[222] "Z Polski i ze świata", *Wici* (3.05.1936), 11.

Another vocabulary from which Populists increasingly distanced themselves in the 1930s was that foregrounding vocational over class-based qualities. Once again, this was a reaction against the linguistic practices of their political adversaries. Ever since independence, there existed, alongside the various peasant parties, an alternative farmer-centred current of agrarian politics in Poland. The principal sponsors of this agrarianism were landowners' organizations bent on limiting the effects and reach of land reform.[223] To strengthen their productivist and progressive credentials, these organisations stressed landowners' status as "farmers",[224] redirected political attention from property relations towards the need for agricultural modernization[225] and even made half-hearted attempts to build an agricultural front with peasants.[226]

Electorally, this agrarianism was no threat for the Populists. However, after the May Coup, landowners' organisations allied with the *Sanacja* government, thereby gaining enormous influence over agricultural policy and civil society. At the same time, the *Sanacja* regime launched its own campaign to depoliticize and subordinate the countryside. In part, this was done by sponsoring new, pro-governmental peasant parties whose discourse frequently aped that of the Populist movement. At the same time, in its antipathy to party politics, the *Sanacja* regime also advanced a more depoliticized, vocational and classless discourse aimed at unifying the countryside in a "single agricultural front".[227] Formerly apolitical or even Populist-affiliated branches of

[223] W. Mich, "Agraryzm – ideologia ziemiańska?", in J. Jachymek et al. (eds.), *Chłopi–Naród–Kultura* (2 vols., Rzeszów, 1996), i, 219-231.
[224] T. Kargol, *Od kółek ziemian do Związku Ziemian w Krakowie: ruch organizacyjny ziemiaństwa w zachodniej Galicji i Małopolsce 1906-1939* (Kraków, 2010), 102.
[225] A. Wojtas, *Problematyka agrarna w polskiej myśli politycznej 1918-1948* (Warsaw, 1983), 26-27, 31-36.
[226] E.g., Mich, "Agraryzm", 225.
[227] Wojtas, *Problematyka*, 183-184.

economic civil society, such as the agricultural self-help societies known as "agrarian circles" that existed throughout rural Poland, were increasingly subjugated by the regime. Professional-sounding, agricultural organisations thereby became bridgeheads in the government's assault on the Populist movement.

Faced with the increasingly authoritarian and elitist tenor of agricultural civil society, the Populist movement distanced itself from these organisations. Whilst extolling the modernization of agriculture, in 1927 the Peasant Party newspaper denounced the Central Agricultural Society that oversaw many agrarian circles in formerly Russian Poland as a "landowners' organisation through and through" and a "snare for peasants", recommending that peasants join their own "Peasant-led Agricultural Organisation" instead.[228] Five years later, the PSL Piast newspaper declared that it no longer made sense for peasants to join agrarian circles, for their leaderships were composed only of "landowners who are uninterested in peasant affairs".[229] At a 1938 SL meeting in Dynów, one speaker bitterly remarked that "someone who isn't in the know might assume that [the Lwów Chamber of Agriculture] was a peasant organisation, for in Poland it is peasants who are farmers", when in reality the Chamber was run by state officials and landowners.[230]

[228] A. Waleron, "Chłopska Organizacja Rolnicza", *Gazeta Chłopska* (30.01.1927), 1-2.
[229] Cited in M. Wichmanowski, "Niezapomniane krzywdy, zawieszone nadzieje. Problematyka ziemiaństwa na łamach tygodnika "Piast" w latach 1918-1939", in E. Maj and W. Mich (eds.), *Anachroniczna kasta czy nowocześni obywatele? Problematyka ziemiańska na łamach prasy w Polsce od końca XIX stulecia do 1939 roku* (Lublin, 2009), 135-136.
[230] Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu (hereinafter APPrze), Starostwo Powiatowe w Brzozowie (hereinafter St.P. Brzozów), sygn. 7, Sprawozdania starosty z działalności SL, 11.03.1938 security report from Dynów, sheet 5.

In this context, vocational, agriculture-centred language was also increasingly viewed with scepticism. This cynical attitude is attested in various peasant activists' memoirs from the 1930s. Vituperating against state officials' decadent lifestyle at a time of economic despair for the peasants, the one-time Peasant Party activist Władysław Kluż sardonically observed how:

> many such [officials] are also farmers, for they own several tens of thousands of hectares of land that they themselves never work [for] they have no idea about farming! And for the most part these farmers are Jewish leaseholders…[231]

Meanwhile, in a diatribe against the landowning elite's glib willingness to sacrifice the lower classes in war, the radical Wici activist Alojzy Dziaduś conjured up the image of a "squire who goes about teaching the principles of patriotism [and] heads some *agricultural educational* organisation or another" (emphasis mine).[232] Finally, one memoirist categorically averred that rural organisations "set up to damage or fight the Populist movement should disappear, even if these are agricultural organisations".[233]

Such cynical remarks about the vacuousness of the agriculturalist label and the elitism of agricultural improvement initiatives were, of course, far from a wholesale rejection of vocational identities and ideals. All the activists in question remained committed to agricultural uplift. What they reflected, however, was the estrangement many peasants felt from an agricultural civil society whose "agricultural" facade apparently provided a cover for domination by state and landowning elites. In short, the very elasticity that had recommended the "agriculturalist" category to the Agrarians by enabling their political

[231] L.George (ed.), "Pamiętnik chłopa", *Niepodległość i Pamięć*, 77/1 (2022), 243.
[232] Warsaw, Archiwum Szkoły Głównej Handlowej (hereinafter ASGH), Archiwum Instytutu Gospodarstwa Społecznego (hereinafter Archiwum IGS), box 445, A. Dziaduś, "W ogniu pragnień" (Dębina, Łańcut district, 1936), 15.
[233] Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie,* iv, 128.

expansion was precisely what rendered it problematic for a besieged Populist movement. Thus, the political marginalisation of the SL by the *Sanacja* establishment reinforced Populists' tendency towards class-based separatism and, with it, towards more caste-like categories in the 1930s.

The divergence between the political languages of the SL and the Agrarians from a shared peasantist point of origin in the 1890s reflected differences in the agendas and class compositions of and political pressures facing each movement. The Agrarians were essentially a movement of wealthy peasants looking to expand their political coalition with the use of increasingly generic social categories, as urbanisation and democratisation made exclusive social and rhetorical reliance on the landed peasantry a politically unviable strategy. By contrast, whilst the Populists were also a peasant movement, they operated in a more agrarian context where the conquest of new social constituencies was unnecessary. Though wealthy peasants were also a core Populist constituency, their economic power was lesser and their own social identity as peasants was one seemingly shared by poorer and more peripheral rural groups, making the search for more generic categories redundant. Finally, in the 1930s Populists faced growing threats from social elites, which further entrenched their preference for specifically class-based categories.

At the same time, these differences should not obscure what agrarian populists in both countries had in common. Both were mass political movements that built coalitions of partially conflicting, rural interests and invoked shared social identities, whether as agriculturalists or peasants, in order to transform these coalitions into unitary political subjects. The social challenges they faced in doing so are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Agrarian Populist Ideals and Social Conflicts in the Village

The identities promoted by agrarian populist movements presupposed a unity of interests amongst those they encompassed. When "peasants" or "agriculturalists" displayed a lack of solidarity, it was their political maturity that was open to question, not their status as an interest group "in itself". Thus, after disappointing election results in 1928, Populist parties ran front-page articles blaming Polish peasants' cognitive and moral shortcomings for their failure to vote according to their interests.[234] Though they shunned the language of "class" in favour of the superficially less materialistic language of "estates", Czech Agrarians also adopted an essentially class-like understanding of "agriculturalists": "class consciousness" simply became "agricultural estate consciousness", "class betrayal" became "estate betrayal" etc.[235]

It is, of course, another question whether this much-proclaimed unity of interests translated into real socio-political solidarity. The potential gap between the two and its implications for rural politics is the principal concern of the next two chapters. Their purpose is to explore how agrarian populists' desire for rural solidarity was challenged by intra-village hierarchies and conflicts. These hierarchical and conflictual tendencies took various forms. One lay in the rivalries between different villages or village neighbourhoods – rivalries that are well-attested in Polish sources.[236] Another derived

[234] J. Dąbski, "Nieudały Sejm. Ale nasz czas idzie!", *Gazeta Chłopska* (18.03.1928), 1; "Po wyborach", *Piast* (18.03.1928), 1.
[235] "Z vesnic a krajů", *Domovina* (11.02.1938), 7; "Socialisté žadají, aby domkáři slevili ze své mzdy ve prospěch velkoprumyslu", *Domovina* (11.01.1929), 1.
[236] There is, by contrast, almost no evidence of similar conflicts in Bohemia, perhaps due to a paucity of village monographs/ethnographies and rural ego-documents.

from the "civilisational" hierarchies that were both imported by modernising elites[237] and partially "indigenous" to the countryside.[238]

My focus, however, will be on conflicts and hierarchies grounded in class. There was certainly much overlap between these conflicts/hierarchies and topographical and civilisational ones: just as the shibboleths of civilisational superiority often signalled material status,[239] so inter-neighbourhood rivalries in Galicia frequently reflected the spatial distribution of different peasant strata. Nevertheless, for agrarian populists, conflicts rooted in economic inequalities presented a unique challenge. Perhaps due to their localised nature, topographically based conflicts could be ignored in political discourse, even as they hobbled peasant unity at the local level. Though problematic, civilisational rankings could at least be manipulated, as when agrarian populists conflated their own desiderata (e.g., class/estate consciousness) with civilisational values (e.g., enlightenment, progress). By contrast, whilst the tensions associated with economic inequalities could be soothed or denied, they could not be reworked to agrarian populists' favour. As a direct challenge to the presumed unity of interests on which each movement was based, such tensions fundamentally threatened agrarian populists' credibility and presented easy lines of attack for opponents.

To what extent, then, did socioeconomic conflicts discredit agrarian populists? Was unity or conflict the more dominant motif of village life in the interwar period? And how successful were agrarian populists in persuading their rural constituencies to think of

[237] K. Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (Oxford, 2020).
[238] O. Linkiewicz, *Lokalność i nacjonalizm: społeczności wiejskie w Galicji wschodniej w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (Kraków, 2018), 87-104. Again, I have found no evidence of equivalent tendencies in rural Bohemia.
[239] Idem, 98-103.

themselves primarily as peasants/agriculturalists and to change their conduct accordingly?

This chapter's argument proceeds in two parts. First, I will show how in the years after independence everyday life contradicted the ideal of peasant/agriculturalist unity, outlining the main socioeconomic cleavages in the Bohemian and Galician village as well as their political effects. Next, I will consider how various political, socioeconomic, and demographic trends worked to defuse socioeconomic tensions during the interwar period to the benefit of agrarian populists. It will be argued that, whilst both countrysides were riddled with class antagonisms, greater stratification in rural South Bohemia produced a greater variety of conflicts. Furthermore, whilst overt tensions subsided in both countries over the interwar period, the underlying pacificatory processes were radically different in each. In South Bohemia the class-based radicalism of poorer strata was blunted by land reform and rural depopulation during the 1920s, but different village strata did not become more socially integrated. Furthermore, the Agrarians' continued association with wealthy farmers and increasingly non-rural elites never ceased to threaten their credibility. In Galicia, by contrast, the impoverishing effects of intractable rural overpopulation – combined with the immiseration caused by the post-1929 crisis – produced a degree of socioeconomic convergence between different peasant strata that, in turn, strengthened the political unification of the Populist movement during the 1930s. Whilst intra-village stratification was not eliminated, the SL was spared the charges of favouritism towards rural elites that continually threatened the Agrarians.

Because of their focus on village life, this chapter and the next are particularly reliant on local sources: village chronicles and peasant memoirs. For the Galician case study,

much attention is paid to the village of Wola Dalsza (Łańcut district) whose political life and internal conflicts are uniquely well-documented thanks to two Stalinist-era sources: a village monograph by the Wola Dalsza native, sociologist and socialist-era politician, Mieczysław Grad, and a memoir by Grad's fellow villager and self-taught SL activist, Jan Stryczek.[240] Due in part to the political context in which they wrote, both authors were particularly sensitive to class conflict in the village. This, however, does not void their works of documentary value. Both authors had an excellent eye for social detail and Stryczek, in particular, was well-positioned to make his observations about class tensions, as the son of a wealthy peasant family who moved and married into the paupers' end of the village.[241] Most importantly, however, many of their observations about village conflicts are consistent with pre-1939 sources, which are also extensively used in this chapter.

i. Village Conflicts in South Bohemia

A central cleavage in the South Bohemian village was that separating the landless from the propertied. Agricultural labourers made up a significant and growing proportion of the Czech agricultural population in the late Habsburg period, rising to 40.94% of those working in agriculture in Bohemia by 1921 (even as their absolute number declined).[242] Labourers were simultaneously part of and excluded from the village. Their level of integration varied depending on their contract type, living arrangements and employer's

[240] M. Grad, *Dzieje chłopskiej walki: drogi przemian społecznych w Woli Dalszej* (Warsaw, 1955); J. Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (Warsaw, 1957).
[241] M. Grad, *Szkice i notatki* (Warsaw, 1964), 93.
[242] O. Kodedová (ed.), *Zemědělské delnictvo v moderní české společnosti: Sociálně ekonomické postavení zemědělského dělnictva 1848-1950* (Prague, 1971), 94.

identity. In some cases, the boundary between labourers and smallholding peasants was porous. Before 1918 it was not uncommon for smaller peasants to seek seasonal employment on larger farms to supplement incomes and pay off debts.[243] The peasant/labourer boundary, however, was less porous when it came to the "full-time" agricultural proletariat, the *deputatníci*, employed on a multi-year basis – typically along with their families – and provided with accommodation by their employers, who were usually estate-owners rather than large peasant farmers.

A 1980s ethnographic study of former *deputatníci* in Pelhřimov district was instructive in revealing this group's more marginal status vis-à-vis the village. Their accommodation was usually situated by the landed estate and, thus, at some distance from the smallholders' community.[244] Out of 30 *deputatníci* surveyed, 15 inherited their status as landless labourers from their parents whilst ten came from cottager families and five were of artisanal stock. They themselves all married various kinds of domestic and returnee factory workers, typically meeting their brides at village dances and gatherings.[245] Thus, in their family backgrounds and marital choices, the *deputatníci* were largely separated from the village: occasionally descended from the peasants but for the most part born into landlessness; dependent on the social opportunities afforded by the village yet sealed off from the smallholders' marital market.

Three main sources of tension pitted labourers against property-owning peasants in the interwar period: the price of agricultural commodities, terms and conditions of

[243] Idem, 97.
[244] Jaromír Tausch, "Deputátníci na Pelhřimovsku. Přispěvek ke způsobu životá a kultury deputátníků v letach 1918-1938" (PhD diss., Ústav pro etnografii a fokloristiku ČSAV, 1989), 24-25.
[245] Idem, 45.

employment, and land reform. The first of these was principally decided at the national level, through the socialist-Agrarian tug-of-war over protectionist tariffs.

The second source of tension – the terms and conditions of employment – set labourers against larger peasants, the primary employers of agricultural labour aside from landed estates. The scale of this antagonism is difficult to determine.[246] Low labourer to employer ratios on peasant farms and low unionisation rates amongst peasant-employed labourers discouraged open conflict, even as they facilitated abuses by employers. Nevertheless, even if largely submerged, labourer-peasant tensions still left a sizeable archival footprint. Negative coverage of peasant-labourer relations by the left-wing press, discussed in this previous chapter, offers one kind of evidence.[247] The only two extant labourer testimonies from South Bohemia – both written by longstanding Communists after 1945 – also underscored the multiple injustices faced by labourers at the hands of peasants. "After a poor boy finished primary school," wrote the former *deputatník* Josef Štědronský in his Stalinist-era memoir, "he would go to work for a peasant for a meagre wage, bad food and lodging with the cows. He would build up the peasant's wealth, so that when the peasant married off his daughters he could give them a healthy dowry."[248] The same injustices recurred in the aforementioned testimony of Anežka Buzková, who spent her youth working for wealthy peasants in Český Krumlov

[246] For attempts to grapple with this problem in other contexts see K. Snell, "Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and Wales", in M. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe: Studies in Social Stratification*, (London/New York, 1992), 158-184; A. Howkins, "Structural Conflict and the Farmworker: Norfolk, 1900-1920", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4/3 (1977), 217-229.
[247] E.g., "Je možno uzavřiti smlouvu bez boje?", *ZD* (31.01.1931), 2; Fr. Herain, "Kdopak nám to chce navléknout svůj kabát?", *ZD* (30.07.1931), 1; Fr. Herain, "Chtějí vám vzít sociální pojištění", *ZD* (1.10.1932), 1-2.
[248] Prague, Archiv Národního Technického Muzea (hereinafter ANTM), sign. 1370, J. Štědronský, "Právo na život (Život zeměd. dělníka za burž. republiky)", 1.

district.[249] Like Štědronský she too constructed a dowry-oriented "theory" of exploitation, according to which "the peasants skinned us as much as they could [so that] they would give their daughters huge dowries to marry them well", suggesting this was a particularly resented injustice.[250]

Arguably of even greater moral significance were the complaints Štědronský and Buzková directed at intimate inequalities around food and housing. The sharing of space and food was integral to European ideals of well-functioning patriarchy, as embodied by recurring images of the farmer seated at the dinner table with his family and servants.[251] Unfairness in these domains likely possessed particular cultural resonance. Tellingly, Buzková's account stressed that food given to servants was not only "improper" but that it was different and served separately from that of their masters.[252] A South Bohemian folksong in which a farmhand addressed his exploitative peasant master also devoted one of its four stanzas to the peasant's betrayal of his commensal obligations, pointing out how "You lecture us about cutting the chaff,/ but you only show us the bread", before detailing the disgusting fare that was actually offered to servants.[253]

Whilst relations between labourers and their peasant employers were inherently antagonistic, the same did not hold for relations between labourers and poorer peasants. Here, there was far greater potential for solidarity. Whilst classing larger

[249] *Bojovali*, 16.
[250] Idem, 15.
[251] E.g., Snell, *Deferential bitterness*, 166; G. Wilke, "The Sins of the Fathers: Village Society and Social Control in the Weimar Republic", in R. Evans and W.R. Lee (eds.), *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Abingdon/New York, 2015), 187.
[252] *Bojovali*, 15.
[253] Janda, *Práchenský zpěvník*, 96.

peasants alongside estate administrators as "lords", *deputatníci* in Pelhřimov district tended to view smaller peasants simply as "neighbours", from whom various favours (e.g., replacing an incapacitated labourer at work, help with childbirth or plucking geese) could be solicited.[254] This greater solidarity did not, however, eliminate the cleavage between the two. In some instances, neighbourly help offered by peasants to *deputatníci* assumed an "openly [...] charitable" dimension, implying a hierarchy – however benign – between them.[255] Less benign forms of hierarchy were also visible, particularly in villages with a more stratified social structure. In contrast to those villages that were dominated by small farmers, in villages where wealthier peasants had a stronger presence *deputatníci* were barred from joining volunteer fire brigades and theatre groups and even from sitting at the cottagers' and poorer peasants' tables during village dances.[256]

Relations between *deputatníci* and poorer peasants became particularly inflamed during the early years of Czechoslovak independence. In 1918-1919 land reform was a key issue on the political agenda, pitting the interests of smallholders and labourers against each other. On the one hand, smallholders demanded the parcellation of large estates, at times even flirting with illegal estate occupations to obtain this result.[257] On the other, many *deputatníci* favoured the preservation of estates (even if in nationalised/cooperativised form) on whose continued existence their livelihoods depended. Far from demanding changes to the landholding structure, most *deputatník* strikes between 1918-1921 focused on wages, workers' rights and the cost of living.[258]

[254] Tausch, "Deputátníci", 69, 66.
[255] Idem, 66.
[256] Idem, 114, 121, 123.
[257] E.g., César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 350-351, 371.
[258] E.g., Idem, 50-51, 99, 103, 109, 115-116, 128.

The resultant fissures between labourers and smallholders were a major challenge for political parties seeking to encompass both groups. The Social Democrats' rural base of workers and poor peasants was, for instance, split on the issue, driving many of the latter into Agrarian arms.[259]

At the local level, too, the opposition between estate labour and village-dwelling smallholders gained prominence. In December 1919, the Blatná district authorities reported a mood of violent anxiety amongst workers on the Lnáře estate after 290 villagers converged on Lnáře to demand its parcellation. According to the estate administrator, "some workers said that if yet another [cottager] delegation…comes to Lnáře…they will drive them out… with truncheons".[260] In January 1920, the Tábor district authorities also wrote of worsening "divisions" between Social Democrat-affiliated "agricultural workers" and the Agrarian- and Domovina-affiliated "citizenry" of Brandlín village. By demanding that the estate only employ members of their own trade union, the Social Democrat workers condemned many of Brandlín's poorer peasants to unemployment. "The peasant folk's [*selského lidu*] resentment" towards the Social Democrat trade union was further exacerbated by the blustering words of the estate forester, who loudly proclaimed in the village tavern that "Czech peasants [*sedláci*] are oxen propped up by the Jew and deserve nothing better than to be shot".[261]

Whilst in Brandlín estate labourers denied the village poor their solidarity, in other places it was the village that sabotaged estate labourers' struggles. In December 1920, at the

[259] Lacina, "Představy", 673.
[260] César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 350-351.
[261] Idem, 66-67. This conflation of peasant and Jewish Others likely related to both groups' negative image as speculators and hoarders profiting from urban consumers' misery during World War I.

height of the Communist general strike, around 120 agricultural workers in Štěkeň (Strakonice district) called a strike with the aim of taking over their estate. Under-resourced and fearing uncontrollable unrest, the district authorities were delighted to discover that the local Agrarian secretary had "deftly organised the peasantry and cottagers from surrounding villages, around 100 of whom set out, well-equipped…to Štěkeň to bring us help and protection". In a sign of how bitter the smallholder-labourer divide became, later that day – once labourers had agreed to disperse and their inn had been ordered to shut – the local Communist leader made one last demand on the local authorities, namely, that the peasants' and cottagers' inn also be closed.[262]

Whilst land reform frequently polarised smallholders and labourers, this was far from the only village-based conflict aggravated by post-1918 political debates. Rather, in many villages the main conflict after 1918 pitted small against medium-sized property – cottagers against peasant farmers. Its main driving force were divergent visions of land reform, particularly disagreements over the sale price of estate land and the intended beneficiaries of parcellation (a higher sale price would favour wealthier peasants).[263] An additional driver was the Social Democrat initiative, passed into law in July 1919, to grant control over communal land and property to all inhabitants of a given municipality, thereby abolishing the caste-like privileges of the so-called *starousedlíci* ("old settlers") who had been resident in a village for longer.[264]

[262] César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 238-239.
[263] E.g., SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 382/24, Vráz gendarmerie report (1.05.1924).
[264] Lacina, "Představy", 674-675.

Before 1919, it was not uncommon for class divisions between poor and wealthy villagers to map onto these hierarchies of residential precedence. The chronicler of Hlavatce (Prachatice district), for instance, conflated the categories of "old settlers" and wealthy peasants, juxtaposing them with "the later cottagers, the new settlers".[265] Before 1919, the *starousedlíci* collectively controlled the municipal land, woodland and fishponds in Hlavatce as well as possessing a range of exclusive rights and obligations. These prerogatives included exclusive access to a municipal blacksmith and shepherd, both of whose contracts were annually renewed in a ceremony that gave visual expression to the paternalistic hierarchy between old and new residents:

> [The blacksmith and the shepherd] had to present themselves with humility before the assembled municipality and mayor and beseech the glorious municipality for a continued grant of municipal bread. In addition, they were subjected to a whole series of accusations and complaints, more of a customary than genuine nature.

This ceremonial confrontation was followed by a conciliatory ritual in which both municipal servants presented the village with a loaf of bread and a pail of beer.[266]

Ultimately, such performative paternalism failed to secure ideological hegemony for Hlavatce's social hierarchy. After 1918, the fight over rights to municipal property became the main structuring element of political contestation in the "once so quiet and peaceful" village. The 1919 municipal election was, for instance, contested by two electoral lists: one belonging to the *starousedlíci* (88 votes), another to the Social Democrats (44 votes). Clearly unpersuaded by the magnanimous "grant of municipal bread", the municipal shepherd was amongst the four elected Social Democrat

[265] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 7.
[266] Idem, 7-8.

councillors. The other three were a cottager, a worker and a carpenter.[267] Whilst the "old settlers'" two-thirds vote share was outsized relative to their weight in the village (49% households), the Social Democrat vote corresponded almost perfectly to the percentage of Hlavatce households with between 1 and 5 hectares of land (35.7% in 1930) – namely, the percentage of cottager and small peasant households.[268] The main political division in Hlavatce, thus, was one pitting the relatively landed against the relatively landless – large and middle peasants against a coalition of small peasants, cottagers, artisans and workers – rather than all property-owners against all labourers.[269] This was a pattern that repeated itself in the municipal elections of many other South Bohemian villages after 1918.

To sum up, the post-1918 South Bohemian countryside was the site of various overlapping conflicts. Within the village world three main axes of opposition can be identified: peasant employers vs labourers; smallholding peasants vs estate labour; and the village poor vs the village rich. If the first of the three antedated independence, the latter two were significantly exacerbated, indeed partly constituted, by the political battles over land reform and communal property unleashed after 1918. In contrast to the employer vs labourer antagonism, which rarely produced open conflict, the struggle over land reform and communal property resulted in public confrontations – whether in the

[267] Idem, 9.
[268] The 1930 agricultural census did not count landless rural households in its statistics. It is, therefore, possible that the Social Democrat vote was not exclusively composed of smaller peasants but also included landless villagers who were not registered in the household survey. Idem, 54-55.
[269] It was perhaps as a result of this broader lower-class solidarity that servants in Hlavatce and three neighbouring villages felt empowered to go on strike against their peasant employers in August 1920. César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 143.

form of direct action or electoral contestation – that left an unambiguous archival trace, especially in the immediate aftermath of 1918.

ii. Village Conflicts in Central Galicia

The different demographic and landholdings structures of rural Galicia and Bohemia could lead us to expect less polarisation in the Galician village. Galicia's elite of land-rich peasant farmers was much smaller than its Bohemian counterpart,[270] thus diminishing opportunities for employer-labourer conflict.[271] Full-time estate labourers also represented an insignificant share of the population compared to Bohemia or, indeed, other Polish regions. An absence of employment opportunities in industry, combined with large numbers of semi-proletarianized peasants, meant that Galicia's landed estates could usually rely on a vast seasonal workforce instead.[272] The resulting overlap between labourers and peasants prevented the crystallisation of an independent agricultural labourers' movement in post-1918 Galicia.[273] Opposition amongst agricultural labourers to peasant demands for redistributive land reform was

[270] In 1930, 13.14% of individually owned Bohemian farms under 50 ha were between 10-30 ha (i.e., large peasant farms) and a further 1.43% had over 30 ha. By contrast, 10-50 ha households accounted for only 3.83% of farms under 50 ha in Galicia (excluding Kraków voivodeship) in 1931. *Sčítaní zemědělských závodů v Republice Československé podle stavu dne 27. května 1930*, (Prague, 1936), iii, 4, 67; M. Mieszczankowski, *Struktura agrarna Polski międzywojennej* (Warsaw, 1960), 140 and chapter 4, passim.
[271] 13.41% of farming units in Bohemia relied on hired labour in 1930 compared with 9.07% of individually run farming units in Lwów voivodeship in 1931. *Sčítaní zemědělských závodů*, 67; *Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 9.XII.1931 r.: Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe. Ludność. Stosunki zawodowe: Województwo lwowskie bez miasta Lwowa* (Warsaw, 1938), 118.
[272] Full-time agricultural labourers and their dependents constituted 12.8% of Galicia's agricultural population in 1921 (compared to 17.2% in Poland as a whole and 40.94% in Bohemia). R. Jabłonowski, "Ludność bezrolna", in E. Strzelecki et al., *Struktura społeczna wsi polskiej* (Warsaw, 1937), 172.
[273] A. Ajnenkiel, *Położenie prawne robotników rolnych w Polsce (1918-1939)* (Warsaw, 1962), 124-128.

unimaginable in this context, sparing Galicia the conflict between smallholders and labourers that flared up in post-1918 Bohemia.[274]

The relative weakness of certain Bohemian-style conflicts did not, however, make the Galician village an egalitarian setting. Here, too, village life was dominated by hierarchies primarily based on landownership. Hierarchy's everyday pervasiveness was captured in an embittered 1935 article by the radical Wici activist Mieczysław Flejszar (1901-1945). Despite living in Markowa (Przeworsk district), one of the national bastions of the deeply egalitarian Wici movement, the image he evoked of rural life was one characterised:

> …Above all [by] this completely…unjustified division into rich peasants, middle peasants, cottagers, landless tenants [*komorników*, *komornych*], the pedigreed [*rodowych*], aliens [*przywłóków*] etc.
>
> Each community practically lives a separate life, for the simple reason that the rich have their own group that will not stoop down to the poor.
>
> A farmer with over 10 *Joch*, who keeps a couple of horses or more, thinks himself…a whole world better than a four-*Joch* scrag, which doesn't prevent both from seizing every opportunity they get to walk over the cottagers and other paupers…[275]

Multiple parallels can be traced between the village hierarchies and associated antagonisms of rural Galicia and South Bohemia. Whilst no corporate equivalent to the *starousedlík* group existed in Galicia, here too residential precedence – the length of a family's association with a specific village and plot(s) of land – was a key determinant of social status.[276] As in the *starousedlík* villages of Bohemia, so in Galicia communal governance was often treated as a prerogative of the wealthier peasants.[277] The

[274] At a higher political level, however, similar tensions between redistributive and collectivist visions of land reform did arise. E.g., W. Stankiewicz, *Konflikty społeczne na wsi polskiej, 1918-1920* (Warsaw, 1963), 93.
[275] M. Flejszar, "O demokracji słów parę", *Chłopskie Życie Gospodarcze* (1.10.1935).
[276] W. Bronikowski, *Drogi postępu chłopa polskiego* (Warsaw, 1934), 179;, J. Burszta, *Wieś małopolska: studium struktury i organizacji społeczno-przestrzennej wsi Grodzisko w powiecie łańcuckim,* ed. W.J. Burszta (Poznań, 1997), 96, 99-100, 114-119.
[277] E.g., Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie*, iii, 226.

exploitation of farmhands by peasant employers also bore strong similarities across both contexts. Mieczysław Grad's representation of the farmhand's lot in pre-1914 Wola Dalsza echoed the themes of overwork, variable food quality and poor sleeping conditions that we encountered in Štědronský and Buzková.[278]

Moreover, as in Bohemia, so in Galicia material differences between different village groups were enmeshed with reciprocal moral judgements. In his analysis of social attitudes amongst Catholic peasant youth, based on a 1935 survey amongst principally Galician members of the Catholic Youth Association, the Catholic author Jur Leżeński concluded that agricultural estate labourers were widely associated by young peasants with both moral vices ("recklessness, drunkenness, debauchery") and anti-social behaviour ("hostility to organisational life, to education, hatred of the propertied etc."). [279] The supposed value differences between the landless and the propertied were also documented in a largely interview-based study conducted in 1937 in the village of Grodzisko by sociologist and Grodzisko native Józef Burszta (1914-1987). The Grodzisko poor were mostly uninterested in the increasingly unattainable ideal of acquiring land, instead adopting "a stance of resignation, of hostility to competition". Bereft of patrimonial and dynastic concerns, they were also free to spend their paltry earnings on unproductive goods (e.g., clothing), to engage in sexual promiscuity and steal without concern for reputational damage.[280] In all this, they differed and invited censure from the wealthier peasants whose value system, in Burszta's implicitly Weberian reading, was increasingly oriented towards the preservation and accumulation of property and the

[278] Grad, *Dzieje*, 26-28, 30.
[279] J. Leżeński, *Wieś o sobie. Dziś i jutro wsi polskiej w pryzmacie ankiet KSMŻ i KSMM* (Poznań, 1938), 57.
[280] Burszta, *Wieś*, 135-138.

attendant virtues of thrift and prudence.[281] The landless poor, for their part, reciprocated these feelings of moral disapprobation, not only resenting the larger peasants' indifference to their misery but disdaining the self-abnegation to which the property- and reputation-obsessed peasants condemned themselves.[282]

In the first decade after independence, class differences within the peasantry became a key driver of conflict in the Populist movement, both at the village and national level. The splintering of the Populist movement into several parties partly reflected these social antagonisms. If the class profile of regional party leaderships and local party officials is anything to go by, Populist parties tended to recruit their strongest supporters and activists from different peasant strata.[283] These class divisions were partly linked to programmatic differences between the parties, especially with regards to land reform. Though – in contrast to the various factions of the Czechoslovak Agrarians – all peasant parties supported estate parcellation by 1918, they nonetheless disagreed on issues relating to landlord compensation, the socioeconomic profile of land reform beneficiaries and the upper size limit of farms that would be exempt from parcellation. It is questionable, however, whether such programmatic differences were sufficiently known at the village level to be a primary catalyst of political polarisation;[284] rather, local antagonisms between different strata were likely its more proximate cause.

[281] Idem, 152-153.
[282] Idem, 135-138.
[283] Nevertheless, the absence of systematic membership records or electoral demographic data precludes firm conclusions. A. Więzikowa, *Stronnictwo Chłopskie, 1926-1931* (Warsaw, 1963), 124-138; J.R. Szaflik, *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe Piast, 1926-1931* (Warsaw, 1970), 46-51.
[284] E.g., Rataj, *Pamiętniki*, 30.

This is attested in a number of sympathetic accounts describing the spread of the Peasant Party, a party dominated by small and middle peasants which, after its formation in January 1926, increasingly challenged the political dominion of PSL Piast – a party especially popular with wealthier peasants – in Central Galicia.[285] In one 1935 peasant memoir from Sąsiadowice (Sambor district), the roots of the Peasant Party's ascendancy were traced to a 1923 youth rebellion against the PSL Piast-affiliated "familial clique" that had long been mismanaging the village's agricultural society and dairy cooperative. Thus, partisan polarisation appeared as a secondary outcome of an existing intra-village conflict.[286]

Whilst Grad's and Stryczek's post-war accounts, unsurprisingly, put greater emphasis on the class-based, rather than generational, dimensions of a similar anti-PSL Piast rebellion in Wola Dalsza, they too treated the political polarisation of their village primarily as an outcome of local antagonisms. Frustration with the wealthier peasants' stranglehold over Wola Dalsza's communal affairs, their alleged mismanagement of communal property and monopolisation of the benefits of land reform was instrumental to the community's separation into two socio-political blocs,[287] "the rich peasants and their confidants" in PSL Piast against the "the village majority [of] middle and small peasants" who would eventually coalesce around the Peasant Party. [288] Though popular disillusionment with the iconic PSL Piast leader Wincenty Witos was, according to

[285] Unsympathetic accounts by PSL Piast supporters tended to erase class antagonisms, blaming the rise of new peasantist challengers on demagoguery and moral decrepitude. E.g., AZHRL, Opracowania 480 (hereinafter O-480), K. Radomski, "Kronika założenia i rozwoju ruchu ludowego w Kamieniu, pow. Nisko, woj. rzeszowskie (1973)", 43-44.
[286] George, "Pamiętnik", 264-265.
[287] Grad, *Dzieje*, 60-65; Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1955), 239-242, 251-252.
[288] Idem, 251.

Stryczek, the result of developments in high politics, namely Witos' "compromise with the landowners and the clergy",[289] he also pointed out how this disillusionment was mediated through local experience: after paupers from Wola Dalsza made it to Witos' native village in search of work, they reported back that Witos was "a kulak through and through [*kmieć całą gębą*]", surmising "that maybe he disdains paupers as much as the rich peasants do in our village".[290] Even socio-political divisions ostensibly unrelated to class conflict turned out to be structured by local class antagonisms in Wola Dalsza. Thus, whilst at the national level the 1928 secession of Wici from the main peasant youth movement (CZMW) was motivated by a desire for independence from growing government control, in Wola Dalsza the split came about largely due to poorer and more radical youths' resentment of wealthy peasants' domination of the local peasant youth chapter.[291]

A broader gauge of intra-village tensions comes from the many contemporary voices that presented inter-peasant differences after 1918 as next to unbridgeable. Such voices were far from limited to the Marxist left, the only political current with an ideological commitment to predicting the peasantry's decomposition. Indeed, virtually right until the foundation of the SL (1931), conservative parties and intellectuals denied the possibility of a united peasant movement precisely because of the excessive social and consequently ideological differences between the various peasant parties.[292] In a 1922

[289] Ibid. This likely referred to the Lanckorona Pact (17 May 1923) between PSL Piast and two parties of the Catholic and nationalist right.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Grad, *Dzieje*, 74.
[292] W. Mich, "Między wrogością a dążeniem do współpracy. Konserwatyści i ludowcy w latach 1918-1939", in J. Jachymek (ed.), *Sojusznicy i przeciwnicy ruchu ludowego, 1895-1995* (Lublin, 1996), 73. Such predictions, however, may have owed as much to conservatives' hopes for a political alliance with wealthier peasants as to their genuine assessment of the situation.

essay based on observations of his native Kombornia (Krosno district), the peasant-born and Populist-sympathising literary historian Stanisław Pigoń (1885-1968) also predicted that "before our eyes the huge peasant mass is dividing into two estates…a plutocracy and a rural proletariat".[293] Having profited from the war, Kombornia's wealthy peasants "already stick together [and] feel a kind of 'dynastic' kinship, [communicating] amongst themselves to decide on their conduct towards the lower 'estate'".[294] No finer example existed, in Pigoń's view, of the mounting chasm between each group's "socio-political yearnings" than the fact that land reform only excited the richer peasants, who "feel stifled with their current wealth [and] want to own more".[295]

Though he assessed the aspirations of rich and poor peasants rather differently, the PSL Piast politician Maciej Rataj (1884-1940) also observed worsening polarisation in his account of the Galician countryside's response to the 1926 May Coup. Where small peasants projected hopes of land reform onto the coup, "the more serious and wealthier farmers whom the rural proletariat threatened…with 'land reform' so that 'everything will be equal' were entirely on the side of order and the rule of law".[296] In Witos' native village, tensions reached such a pitch that:

> Witos' daughter preferred to leave, fearing an attack on their house by the local sans-culottes and worker emissaries from [the local city] Tarnów. Meanwhile, the neighbours, serious farmers and friends of Witos, waited in petrified silence.[297]

[293] S. Pigoń, *Na drogach i manowcach kultury ludowej: szkice* (Lwów, 1939), 298.
[294] Idem, 300.
[295] Idem, 302.
[296] The phrase "serious farmers" [*poważni gospodarze*] recurs in many interwar sources. It had connotations similar to the Czech *sedlák*, indicating landed status, economic productivity, political moderation and social prestige.
[297] AZHRL, Zbiór Macieja Rataja 10, "Jak reagowały różne dzielnice Polski na zamach majowy".

In sum, even though the social structure of the Galician village was less polarized than its Bohemian analogue, with fewer landless labourers and wealthy peasants, here too class tensions between different peasant strata were plentiful after 1918, hugely contributing to political polarization. As for the Agrarians so for a fragmented Populist movement, therefore, cleavages within the peasantry were a major political headache in this period.

iii. Pacificatory Tendencies in Interwar South Bohemia

Though forced to navigate a conflict-ridden countryside, the Agrarians were significantly aided by three interconnected processes during the interwar period. These were the redistribution of estate land unleashed by the 1919 land reform; the dissipation of post-war radicalism combined with the institutional weakening of the left; and, finally, the unrelenting decline of Bohemia's rural population. Excepting rural depopulation, these processes were to a significant extent deliberately engineered by the Agrarians themselves. In different ways each one helped to defuse or disguise social conflicts, both between the village and other social groups (most obviously landowners) and within the village itself.

By helping to neutralise the most pressing demands of cottagers and small peasants, the first process – land reform – was central to defusing the combustible atmosphere of the post-1918 village. Smug proclamations of land reform's counter-revolutionary consequences were a commonplace of interwar public life. Champions of the new republic celebrated the transformation of the rural poor into a bulwark of the propertied

order.[298] Conversely, Communists acknowledged land reform as a major obstacle to their revolutionary ambitions.[299] In its impact on intra-village relations, the land reform's most notable effect was to strengthen all strata of property-owning peasants whilst diminishing the number of dwarf holdings (<2 ha). Inequalities in landownership were not eliminated, but the worst forms of land poverty were reduced over the course of the 1920s.[300]

Whilst alleviating tensions between rich and poor villagers, land reform also accelerated the second of the three mollifying processes: the decline of the rural left. In the febrile atmosphere of the post-1918 countryside the Social Democrats had made significant inroads amongst radicalised cottagers and agricultural labourers, causing panic in the Agrarian leadership.[301] Socialist gains, however, were to prove transient. Hamstrung between orthodox and revisionist positions on the agrarian question, the Social Democrats failed to offer full-throated support to a complete parcellation of landed estates, thereby alienating many land-hungry peasants.[302] This was an opportunity the Agrarians readily exploited. Agrarian visions of land reform were less radical than socialist ones, envisaging compensation for landowners and a considerably higher hectarage threshold for estates. Nevertheless, by endorsing the symbolically important principle of estate *parcellation* and full peasant ownership rights over parcelled lots, the Agrarians were able to claim credit for the 1919 land reform, boosting their popularity

[298] E.g., F. Peroutka, *Budování státu* (4 vols, Prague, 1991), ii, 570.
[299] E.g., G.D. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe, 1919-1930* (New York/London, 1966), 289.
[300] H. Szeliski, *Stosunki ekonomiczno-agrarne Czechosłowacji* (Warsaw, 1938), 66; A. Boháč, *Sčitání obyvatelstva s hlediska zemědělského* (Prague, 1933), 17-18.
[301] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 60.
[302] Lacina, "Představy", 668-674.

with the poorer peasants.[303] Their control over the Land Office charged with the reform's execution provided an additional incentive for poorer peasants to switch their loyalties to the Agrarian camp.[304] As a result, the left-wing vote in rural Bohemia plummeted during the early 1920s. This was particularly acute in the region's south. In the České Budějovice electoral district – largely co-extensive with South Bohemia – of all votes cast for majority-Czech parties in municipalities with fewer than 5000 inhabitants 48.8% went to parties of the left (the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, the Czechoslovak Socialists, as well as two smaller parties) in 1920. In 1925, however, the left-wing vote in these municipalities crashed to 36.9%, recovering slightly to 40% in 1929 and dipping once again to 35.1% in 1935.[305]

Though the Agrarians' offer of estate parcellation was central to the decline of the left, another important factor lay in demoralisation amongst left-wing supporters. This was most acute amongst estate labourers: following the strike wave of 1919-1920, estate managers went on a counter-offensive that saw many of the most restive workers sacked and the momentum of earlier militancy extinguished.[306] A similar waning of radical morale could also be observed in the conflict between cottagers and *starousedlíci*. In the aforementioned village of Hlavatce, where the cottager-backed Social Democrats won a third of the vote in 1919's municipal election, the Social Democrats were routinely

[303] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 55-57.
[304] "Jak jsou skromní pojednou!", *Právo Lidu* (28.01.1928).
[305] For elections after 1925 the figures given represent the combined Communist, Czechoslovak Social Democrat and National Socialist vote. Given the Communists' multi-ethnic support base, these figures likely underrepresent the collapse in left-wing support amongst rural Czech speakers. *Volby do Národního shromáždění v dubnu roku 1920 a všeobecné volby do obecních zastupitelstev v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku v červnu roku 1919* (Prague, 1922); *Volby do poslanecké sněmovny v listopadu 1925* (Prague, 1925); *Volby do poslanecké sněmovny v říjnu 1929* (Prague, 1930); *Volby do poslanecké sněmovny v květnu 1935* (Prague, 1936).
[306] César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 9-12.

outvoted in every council meeting by the *starousedlíci* bloc.[307] Meanwhile, by the autumn of 1922 all applicants to the Land Office had received their land grants, eliminating the most acute land hunger amongst the Hlavatce poor.[308] In the subsequent municipal election of 1923 the former *starousedlíci* list – now running on an Agrarian ticket – increased its score from 88 to 109 votes (even as the Social Democrat vote remained stable). "The reason…" concluded the pro-Agrarian chronicler with obvious jubilation, "was that the Social Democrats did not fulfil and indeed could not fulfil what they had promised in 1919, especially as regards the [communal] forests and fields".[309]

The weakening of the left – especially after the Communist-Social Democrat split (1921) – blunted the greatest ideological and organisational threat to the Agrarians' ideal of agricultural unity. At the local level, the recession of the left-wing threat was reflected in Agrarian tactics. In the early 1920s, Agrarians in Písek district had felt compelled to organise rallies and public meetings on 1 May – a holiday with which they had no historic affiliation – to compete with the celebrations of various left-wing parties. Domovina members were granted a frontstage role at rallies to bolster the Agrarians' credentials as a party of the rural poor.[310] By the mid-1920s the leftist threat had faded sufficiently that the Agrarians no longer needed to compete on this terrain: from 1925 until the end of the First Republic not a single Agrarian rally was recorded on 1 May in Písek district. By 1929 the *Domovina* newspaper even felt confident enough to run an article lampooning 1 May as a feast day of leftist drunkenness.[311]

[307] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 10.
[308] Idem, 22.
[309] Idem, 29.
[310] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 343/21, 203/22, 320/23 and 382/24.
[311] "Byl první maj…", *Domovina* (3.05.1929), 1.

The last of the three emollient processes – the so-called "rural flight" – was one that set the Bohemian countryside apart from East-Central Europe as a whole, most of which was blighted by rural overpopulation in the interwar period. By contrast, during the 1920s industrial and urban development in the Czech Lands was sufficiently robust to absorb the many labourers and peasants disenchanted with rural life and its comparatively low living standards and wages.[312] As a result, the agricultural population of the Czech Lands declined at an unprecedented rate in the 1920s.[313] Of all the Czech regions South Bohemia, lacking its own major industrial centres, was the worst-afflicted by this depopulation, losing over 10% of its population between 1921-1930.[314] The large social-scientific literature that sprouted around this issue unanimously treated it as a problem.[315] Rural depopulation, however, also had the obvious, if unstated, effect of draining the countryside of its radical potential. Though it extended to all village strata, the rural exodus was most acute amongst the countryside's most combustible elements: the young and the proletarianized.[316] Spurred by agricultural mechanization and land reform, both of which diminished employment opportunities on agricultural estates, Bohemian agricultural labourers abandoned agriculture *en masse*, going from 40.94% of Bohemia's agriculturally employed population in 1921 to 28.1% in 1930.[317] Given such possibilities for "exit", it is likely the attractiveness of "voice" diminished for

[312] Z. Deyl, *Sociální vývoj Československa 1918-1938* (Prague, 1985), 65-66. Additional drivers of the rural exodus included labour opportunities abroad and the introduction of unemployment benefits for industrial workers. Szeliski, *Stosunki*, 49-51.
[313] Deyl, *Sociální vývoj*, 64.
[314] "Nedopusťme, aby strom života republika změnil se v urnu!", *Venkov* (15.04.1937).
[315] E.g., J. Korčák, *Vylidňování jižních Čech* (Prague, 1929); J. Doberský, *Vylidňování venkova v Čechách v období 1850-1930* (Prague, 1932); V. Mácha, *Útěk z venkova v českých zemích* (Prague, 1939).
[316] Mácha, *Útěk*, 4-5.
[317] A. Boháč, *Změny v hospodářském a sociálním rozvrstvení obyvatelstva českých zemí* (Prague, 1933), 15-16; Kodedová, *Zemědělské delnictvo*, 106-107.

many of 1918's radicals.[318] In the village of Albrechtice (Písek district), for example, where in 1918 "the fists and threats of the proletariat were raised against the more propertied", it is probably no coincidence that "political passions to a significant extent retreated" in the 1920s – a decade in which Albrechtice's population declined by over 10%. In 1931, in turn, political passions flared up once again, as unemployment forced many migrant workers to return home.[319]

Even amongst those who remained employed in agriculture, militancy vastly declined. Psychologically, the mere *possibility* of migrating to the city may have been enough to dampen the temptation of protest. In a sign of how quiescent the Czech countryside had become, in 1933 it was "exit" – not "voice" – that the agricultural labourers' newspaper *Zemědělský Dělník* used to threaten abusive rural employers, warning them that "unemployment will not last forever" and, as such, "[employers] should [not] count on the idea that today's employees will remain bound to agriculture".[320] Labour militancy was further undermined as Bohemian farmers – faced with the outmigration of local labourers – became increasingly reliant on seasonal workers from Slovakia.[321] This had a predictably disruptive effect on worker solidarity. At a 1934 Social Democrat rally in Mirotice (Písek district) one Slovak estate labourer even felt compelled to "appeal to local workers not to look at workers from Slovakia as their pests but as their comrades who hope to learn something from [the more] conscious Czech workers…".[322] Finally,

[318] A. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge MA, 1970).
[319] SDA Písek, Archiv obce Albrechtice nad Vltavou, Pamětní kniha obce Albrechtice (1922-1945), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/311601/30/1239/482/50/0 (henceforth Pamětní kniha obce Albrechtice), 54, 88, 110, 114-116.
[320] Fr. Herain, "Útrapám není konce", *ZD* (30.12.1933), 1.
[321] Boháč, *Změny*, 17.
[322] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 584/34, Mirotice gendarmerie report (1.05.1934).

declining militancy was in part a reflection of the reduced opportunities for farmer-labourer conflict during the interwar period. As labour costs increased during the 1920s and economic crisis engulfed agriculture after 1929, many farmers simply reduced their reliance on hired workers in favour of family labour.[323]

Thus, over the course of the interwar period, three interlocking processes – land reform, rural depopulation and the decline of the rural left – helped assuage social tensions in rural South Bohemia. Each did so in its own way. First, land reform diminished rural inequalities and land hunger – two of the major drivers of rural radicalism – whilst enabling the Agrarians to expand their influence amongst poorer rural strata. In so doing, land reform dealt a blow to the rural left, thereby weakening the primary institutional vector for class-based antagonisms. Finally, rural out-migration provided a safety valve for residual discontent and discouraged agricultural labourers from engaging in open conflict.

iv. The Political Critique of the Agrarian "Family"

The return of rural harmony after 1918-1920 helped expand the Agrarian coalition but did not make it invulnerable. The prominence of wealthy farmers (and, increasingly, non-farmers) in the Agrarian leadership at both national and local levels continued to generate suspicion that elite constituencies would be privileged over newer and poorer clienteles. The Agrarians' credibility as a party capable of defending the rural poor was, thus, under perpetual threat. Indeed, as this section will show, questioning whether

[323] Boháč, *Změny*, 16.

village life and Agrarian praxis lived up to claims of rural solidarity became a favourite sport for actors from across the political spectrum.

At the local level, injustices by large Agrarian farmers against the village poor were meticulously documented by the South Bohemian Communist newspaper *Obrana Lidu* (1935-1938). Ironic references to the Agrarian slogan "the countryside is one family" were a standard accompaniment to such articles, hammering home the vacuousness of Agrarian ideals.[324]

Similar criticisms were also directed at the Agrarians by political actors without the Communists' desire for class war. For instance, in its fight for rural votes, the Czechoslovak People's Party (hereinafter the Catholic Populists) – a Catholic party committed to social solidarism and, thus, an unlikely instigator of class strife – also frequently berated the Agrarians' bias towards the rich. In an attack on the Agrarian youth wing Dorost, Populist deputy Václav Knotek emphasised the snobbery of Agrarian youths who would "have to think twice about dabbling too much with…paupers". This elitist attitude, Knotek claimed, was driving cottagers and middle peasants into the arms of socialist parties.[325]

Moving beyond local class relations, parties of the left and Catholic right were also keen to uncover class biases in Agrarian public policy. During the late 1920s the Agrarians were routinely accused of abusing their dominance in the Land Office, the organ charged with executing land reform, in order to enrich their own elites at the smallholders'

[324] E.g., "Křepice u Vodňan", *Obrana Lidu* (hereinafter *OL*) (21.03.1936); "Temešvár", *OL* (18.09.1936); "'Venkov jedna rodina'", *OL* (9.04.1937).
[325] V. Knotek, "Kde platí a kde neplatí koaliční šraňky", *Lidové Listy* (19.02.1929).

expense.[326] In the eyes of their opponents, the takeover of many so-called "residual estates" by Agrarian elites transformed the party into a de facto oligarchy, a party "no longer led by peasants [*sedláci*] or even cottagers but [rather] by a caste of village and urban plutocrats". [327]

In the 1930s, in turn, imputations of class bias frequently accompanied attacks on the Agrarians' efforts at agricultural rationalisation – efforts that, notwithstanding their various benefits, often limited the autonomy of, and even increased the fiscal burden for, peasant households.[328] In 1929, for instance, the Agrarians were forced to defend themselves against claims, advanced by both left-wing and Catholic actors, according to which their compulsory livestock insurance scheme benefited estate-owners at the cost of small farmers.[329] Similar criticisms were levelled after the institution of the Agrarians' flagship grain monopoly (1934), whereby a state-appointed Grain Society was granted the exclusive right to fix grain prices and purchase grain from agricultural producers. Besides fanning fears that price-fixing would lead to a spike in consumer prices, the left once again framed Agrarian-led rationalisation as skewed in estate-owners' favour. Given that – unlike estates – smallholders tended to rely more on livestock than grain production, the Agrarians' decision to institute a *grain* monopoly ahead of a livestock monopoly was itself a telling indicator of their social priorities, argued the main National Socialist newspaper.[330] In a similar spirit, at a 1935 rally in

[326] E. Kubů and J. Šouša, "Zbytkový statek: od ekonomického produktu pozemkové reformy k symbolu jejího neřádu", in Milan Hlavačka and Jakub Raška (eds.), *Symboly doby: historické eseje* (Prague, 2019), 367-393.
[327] "Koaliční 'beseda'. A zase agrárníci a lidovci", *České Slovo* (22.01.1929).
[328] Though its scale is difficult to determine, there is certainly evidence of rural opposition to agricultural rationalisation, even amongst the Agrarian grassroots. E.g., "Netolicko", *MV* (20.04.1934), 12.
[329] "Drtivá čisla: Komu slouží republikanská strana?", *Venkov* (29.01.1929).
[330] "Stopy zla", *České Slovo* (2.10.1935).

Písek, the Communist deputy Josef Nepomucký claimed that paying the same price for grain to small and large farmers constituted a de facto subsidy for the latter, given their production costs were 40% lower than the fixed price.[331]

These imputations of narrow class favouritism occurred amidst a broader discursive tendency lamenting the decline of rural solidarities and paternalistic bonds. Such laments could be heard in a wide variety of sources, from the technocratic to the vernacular. Thus, in response to an international survey question about the moral state of the countryside, the rural expert Dr Antonín Prokeš observed that:

> the old custom whereby the master would sup at the same table with his servants has already disappeared in the wealthy regions, to the undoubted detriment of the mutual relationship between both parties.[332]

Meanwhile, one peasant reader of the Agrarian journal *Brázda* bemoaned the decline of "heartfelt…family-like" village solidarity during and after World War I, when "wartime conditions caused…base materialism to spread from the towns into our countryside".[333] These visions of ascendant individualism easily merged with claims about the Agrarians' lack of solidarity with their poorer clientele. One Populist newspaper, for instance, reinforced its critique of Agrarian estate egotism by depicting a dystopian countryside in which "the more propertied agriculturalist [no longer considers] it his human and neighbourly duty to help poorer agriculturalists in need" and where "instead of 'fatherly peasants' [*pantáty*] we now have 'lords' [*pány*]".[334] This image of the increasingly aloof, individualist peasant found even more concrete expression in a *Zemědělský Dělník*

[331] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sygn. 855/1935, Písek gendarmerie report (31.08.1935).
[332] A. Prokeš, *L'embellissement de la vie rurale en Tchécoslovaquie* (Prague, 1930), 8.
[333] "O sousedském poměru na vsi", *Brázda* (31.12.1934), 271.
[334] "Musilo by na vesnici zase vice platiti staročeské: 'Posilni tě Pán Bůh!'", *Pražský Večerník* (18.05.1929).

cartoon depicting an Agrarian farmer, portrayed with the same distinctive hunting hat that would be a standard trope of post-war anti-kulak iconography, jealously chasing God off his grass after the Creation (see fig. 1).

The Agrarians' credibility as a party of the entire agricultural estate continued to face political challenges throughout the interwar period. Land reform did not end rural social stratification, just as wealthy farmers did not cease to be a powerful Agrarian constituency. Though partially democratised after 1918, the Agrarian "family" could still plausibly be represented by its opponents as a fig-leaf for the dominance of wealthy farmers and, increasingly, non-rural elites. The resultant vulnerability was a constant worry for the Agrarians, compelling them – as the next chapter will show – to counteract such suspicions in various creative ways.

Fig. 1: *Zemědělský Dělník* (31.12.1936), 4. Caption: "THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CREATION OF MAN. It is not true that the first man…was Adam. The first man whom God created was an Agrarian. As soon as he saw God and his divine light, he waved his stick and bellowed like an ox: 'Get off my grass, you!'"

v. The Causes and Limits of Peasant Political Unity in 1930s Galicia

In 1931 the three largest Polish peasant parties merged to form the SL. Four years later two attempts were launched to split the party, with governmental backing, by leading

Populist politicians from the movement's historic left. The organisers of the first split even sought legitimacy in militant, class-based language, framing their secession as the revival of a radical movement devoted exclusively to the poorer peasantry.[335] Despite the backing of various party grandees and a willingness to foment class divisions, both secessions flopped as exercises in mass politics: far from draining the SL of activists and supporters, they instead galvanised SL activism in the second half of 1935.[336]

The 1930s was, in short, a decade of unprecedented unity and ascendancy for the peasant movement. Nowhere was this more visible than in the ethnically Polish parts of Galicia where, by 1938, roughly one in every five peasant households counted an SL member.[337] What relation did this political consolidation bear to socioeconomic cleavages within the village? How far did it occur because of their decline or in spite of their persistence?

The *desire* for a unified peasant movement was in no way the product of the 1930s: calls for unification had been a standard refrain amongst Populists since 1918.[338] It was only after 1929, however, that such calls acquired new momentum amongst both the movement's rank and file and its leaders.[339] Spurring this intensified interest was the mounting authoritarianism of the post-1926 *Sanacja* state and the constraints it placed on peasant parties' capacity for action. A change in political conjuncture rather than social or ideological change was, thus, the dominant factor behind the SL's formation.[340]

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[335] Borkowski, "Odśrodkowe i dośrodkowe tendencje", 151.
[336] Idem, 166.
[337] J. Borkowski, "Rozwój organizacyjny Stronnictwa Ludowego w latach 1931-1939", *RDRL*, 10 (1968), 241.
[338] Stankiewicz, *Konflikty*, 223-226.
[339] E.g., Więzikowa, *Stronnictwo*, 188.
[340] It is unlikely grassroots pressure was a decisive factor. Borkowski, *Postawa*, 50-51.

It was precisely the prevalence of tactical over deeper intellectual motives amongst Populist leaders that led Józef Niećko, the national head of Wici, to doubt the new party's durability.[341]

However, if Niećko's predictions failed, it was not that he had overestimated the centrality of short-term political tactics but underestimated how a range of factors, both structural and conjunctural, would compensate the fissiparous effects of intra-party factionalism. As in the Czech Lands where changes in landownership and rural demographics favoured Agrarian-led political harmony, so in Galicia the convergence of the Populist movement occurred against a favourable backdrop of economic and demographic trends. These trends were, however, fundamentally different from those unfolding in Bohemia. There, political harmony was restored amidst a simultaneous decrease in intra-village inequalities and in demographic pressure on the land: where land reform diminished the number of dwarf farms and boosted all other categories of landholding, rural outmigration prevented land hunger from resurging to pre-1918 levels in the 1930s. In Galicia the landholding structure also became less polarised in the early 20th century. Here, however, it was only the proportion of smallholdings with 2-10 ha of land that increased. Unlike in Bohemia, the proportion of large peasant households over 10 ha diminished. Whilst diminishing in relative terms, dwarf holdings increased in number, going up by around 22.6% between 1902 and 1931 in Central and Eastern Galicia.[342] The Galician landholding structure continued, in short, to be characterised by extremely high levels of fragmentation and a weak stratum of larger peasants that, in

[341] E. Gołębiowski and S. Jarecka-Kimlowska (eds.), *Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP "Wici" w walce o postęp i sprawiedliwość społeczną : wybór dokumentów 1928-1948* (Warsaw, 1978), 68.
[342] Mieszczankowski, *Struktura*, 140.

relative terms, grew even weaker during the interwar period. This reflected the dire demographic situation of the Galician countryside. Sluggish industrial development and a decline in migration opportunities – with the tightening of immigration restrictions in the United States in 1921 and, after 1929, in various European states – aggravated rural overpopulation to the point where it became universally recognised as one of rural Poland's – and especially Galicia's – main obstacles to development.[343] Overpopulation was so bad that even sizeable transfers of estate land into peasant ownership during the early 20th century could not prevent an overall tendency towards fragmentation.[344] Medium- and large-sized farms' capacity to expand was also severely limited in the interwar period by a drop in remittances and the persistently high cost of land and credit.[345] As a result, the average farm size tended to decrease in interwar Galicia at the same time that overpopulation and diminishing opportunities for non-agricultural income put pressure on all peasant strata.

This downward levelling was reflected in a range of cultural changes during the early 20th century. In the village of Grodzisko many of the clientelistic ties that bound poor villagers to their wealthy counterparts – the economic basis for social hierarchies – had dissolved by the 1930s, as demand for services traditionally offered by the poor, from threshing to bloodletting, from carpentry to curses, plummeted. Whilst demand partly fell because of technological change, another driving force was the decline in large peasant households and the dissolution of caste-like taboos that went with it: in Burszta's words,

[343] For an example of this consensus see K. Kos, "Trzy programy dla wsi", *Wieś i Państwo*, 1/6 (1938), 541-546.
[344] Kargol, *Od kółek ziemian*, 16; M. Mieszczankowski, *Rolnictwo II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 1983), 85.
[345] Mieszczankowski, *Struktura*, 143.

"the middle peasant's son is [nowadays] even capable of making his own carts, barrels, tables, cupboards, boots and hoes without feeling 'the slightest shame'".[346] The blurring of social distinctions also had an impact on how different peasant groups viewed each other. According to Jur Leżeński, the analyst of the aforementioned survey amongst Catholic peasant youth, smallholders' attitudes to manorial servants had, by the 1930s, become considerably less contemptuous. For Leżeński, this was a direct result of smallholders' deteriorating economic situation, the relative improvement in the living conditions of manorial servants and the growing dependency of many smallholding families on employment offered by landed estates.[347]

In the early 1930s these structural trends towards convergence were flanked by new, more conjunctural factors: first, the devastating effects of the economic crisis and, second, the related antagonism between peasants and the state. Crucially, the discontent they induced was experienced, even if in different ways and with different intensities, across all peasant strata. In some symbolic respects, wealthier peasants were even dealt a greater blow than their poorer counterparts. For instance, according to Mieczysław Grad, as the villagers most likely to dream of social ascent, wealthy peasants in Wola Dalsza were the ones most frustrated when, first, the Depression and, then, the 1932 Jędrzejewicz school reform made it harder for peasant children to move beyond primary education.[348] Crisis-induced *déclassement* could even be experienced by entire villages when their communal identities were enmeshed with ideas of progress. Such

[346] Burszta, *Wieś*, 127-130.
[347] Leżeński, *Wieś,* 142.
[348] Grad, *Dzieje*, 71; see also W. Mędrzecki, *Młodzież wiejska na ziemiach Polski Centralnej 1864-1939. Procesy socjalizacji* (Warsaw, 2002), 167-168.

was the case in Kamień (Nisko district), which according to one memoirist "had been famous for decades for its many high and middle school graduates [but that] as of 1930 was not able to educate so much as a single one of its village sons".[349]

The pervasive discontent of the 1930s, combined with longer-term convergence tendencies, made it easier for inter-peasant class differences to lose political salience. This process was observed by various actors both within and outside the Populist movement.[350] In a polemic with a "*communisant* Varsovian worker" who questioned the possibility of a peasant-worker alliance on account of wealth differences within the peasantry, the Wici activist Stefan Ignar argued that these divisions

> apply exclusively to the older generation. Many children of the richer peasants are shedding their conservatism along with their land, seeing that they will not enjoy the wellbeing that was their fathers' share.[351]

At a Wici meeting in Siedleczka (Przeworsk district), a lower-level activist formulated a similar argument positing that: "in cultural terms there has been a huge change between the village of yore and that of today. Nowadays, we are interested in the liberation of man, not [getting] land or driving someone with a whip wherever we please."[352]

The declining political importance of inter-peasant class divisions can also be inferred independently of such contemporary observers. One measure is offered by the frequency of peasant strikes and protests in the 1930s – events which often involved the majority of a village's population. Another is the aforementioned expansion of both the

[349] AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 57.
[350] For an external observer see A. Kołodziejczyk, *Ruch ludowy a Kościół rzymskokatolicki w latach II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2002), 363, 365.
[351] S. Ignar, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (2.02.1936), 3.
[352] AZHRL, Ruch Młodzieży I-60 (hereinafter RM/I-60), Protokoły posiedzeń Koła Młodzieży Wiejskiej w Siedleczce, pow. Przeworsk (hereinafter Siedleczka), 16.01.1936 entry.

SL and Wici. Neither organisation ever achieved a monopoly of rural loyalties in Central Galicia. Wici, in particular, faced aggressive competition from Catholic and pro-governmental youth organisations, both of which had far greater resources at their disposal. Given this resource imbalance, it was surely a sign of the peasant movement's *ideological* appeal that it still managed to expand its membership and, even more tellingly, to influence and colonise its rivals. This influence was especially visible in the case of pro-governmental youth groups, some of which already shared elements of Wici's peasantist and anti-clerical ideological orientation. A survey of 17 circles belonging to the pro-governmental Lesser Polish Union of Popular Youth [*Małopolski Związek Młodzieży Ludowej*] – more commonly referred to as "Green Shirts" [*zielone koszule*] – in Ropczyce district revealed an average 14% rise in SL-sympathising members between 1931 and 1933. In any given year between 1930 and 1935, the percentage of pro-SL members in the average Ropczyce district Green Shirts circle hovered between 35-45%.[353] Turning to Siew – the pro-governmental youth group from which Wici seceded in 1928 – pro-SL sentiments became so widespread amongst its rank and file during the 1930s as to compel the organisation's national director, Stanisław Gierat, to censor his own speech, stripping it of anti-Populist themes, at the Siew national congress in 1939.[354]

Another indication that class differences were losing importance was the reduced visibility of class-based cleavages within the Populist movement itself. In the 1920s the most striking ideological disputes between different peasant parties had focused on

[353] APPrze, Starostwo Powiatowe w Ropczycach (hereinafter St.P. Ropczyce), sygn. 5.4 (10), Stowarzyszenia – Koła Młodzieży Ludowej przy MTR, Ref. Bezp. B.I.6/34 and B.II.2/36.
[354] "Z ruchu młodzieżowego", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/5 (1939), 389-390.

attitudes to the Church, to Slavic ethnic minorities and to the terms of land reform.[355] Only the third of these could be construed as a strictly class-related issue. By the mid-1930s, however, the terms of land reform had largely ceased to be a source of controversy; in late 1935 the compulsory, uncompensated expropriation of landed estates – formerly a demand limited to the peasant left – became official policy for the entire SL. This was not symptomatic of convergence on all issues, suggesting that class-related disagreements lost importance more than cultural ones.[356] The 1930s also saw the emergence of new tensions that defied easy class-based categorisation. Most important amongst these was the generational conflict between Wici and parts of the SL. In the eyes of the Lwów voivodeship authorities the divide between radical Wici activists and the conservative, older, formerly PSL Piast-affiliated generation had become the most important line of antagonism in the voivodeship's rural politics by April 1936[357] – a view echoed by various Wici activists.[358] Given its relationship to landownership, the prestige and power gap between adult smallholders and their unpropertied children was not just age-related but also economic. Nevertheless, what drove the intensification of generational conflict in the 1930s was, above all, attitudinal differences rather than divergent material interests.[359]

[355] For evidence of their salience see e.g., AZHRL, PSL „Piast" 6, "PSL „Piast" w sprawie połączenia stronnictw ludowych", 6-7.
[356] Divergent attitudes to the Church, for instance, remained a frequent source of tension in the SL throughout the 1930s. Kołodziejczyk, *Ruch*, 321-324.
[357] Archiwum Akt Nowych (hereinafter AAN), Urząd Wojewódzki Lwów (henceforth UWL) 974/23, April 1936 security report [*sprawozdanie bezpieczeństwa*], 69.
[358] J. Dec and F. Mleczko (eds.), *Młodociani na wsi* (Warszawa, 1937), 22-23.
[359] Indeed, in villages where the attitudes of the young and old were more closely aligned, conflict could be avoided entirely. E.g., APPrze, St.P. Ropczyce, sygn. 4, B.I.6-/34, letter to governor of Ropczyce district (5.12.1933), sheet 17a.

The SL's project of peasant unity was additionally favoured by a relative absence of political contestation. Compared to its Czechoslovak counterpart, the SL was seldom accused of favouring elites, whether in the village or outside it, or of trying to marry incompatible social interests. The relative paucity of such claims reflected both the greater uniformity of the SL's base and the particularities of Polish political dynamics in the 1930s. For obvious reasons, the mutual accusations of inauthenticity and class betrayal that had characterised inter-Populist competition in the 1920s were completely silenced after the formation of the SL. A similar tendency, however, could also be observed in other political traditions. On the Socialist left challenges to the coherence of the peasant movement declined for both tactical and ideological reasons, as the SL became an essential ally against *Sanacja* authoritarianism and as revisionist attitudes towards the peasant question became more established.[360] Polish Communists took longer to accept the idea of an all-peasant party but, with the turn to Popular Front tactics in 1935, also began pursuing a rapprochement, cajoling the SL as a potential ally and opposing splits within the peasant movement.[361] Here, there was a telling contrast between the Polish Communists' stance and that of their Czechoslovak counterparts vis-à-vis the Agrarians. The power of Agrarian landowning and capitalist elites precluded any possibility of allying with the Agrarians for the KSČ even after the Popular-Frontist

[360] S. Michałkowski and K. Trembicka, "Ludowcy w opinii działaczy socjalistycznych i komunistycznych", in W. Paruch and A. Wójcik (eds.), *Pokolenia i portrety: wzór osobowy ludowca w XX wieku* (Lublin, 2000), 327-328; Śliwa, *Myśl agrarna*, 152-153.
[361] Michałkowski and Trembicka, "Ludowcy", 332-333; H. Cimek, *Sojusz robotniczo-chłopski w Polsce 1918-1939* (Warsaw, 1989).

turn: instead, in the late 1930s Czechoslovak Communists continued trying to turn smaller peasants against Agrarian elites.[362]

On the Polish right, the SL's credibility as a voice of the peasantry continued to be challenged in the 1930s, but this was more a critique of its tone and message than a suggestion that the party had been hijacked by non-agricultural or non-peasant interests. Rather, for many on the ultranationalist and conservative right, the SL's social radicalism was what made it temperamentally unsuitable for an instinctively conservative peasantry.[363] Demagoguery and class egotism, rather than inauthenticity and hypocrisy, were also the main charges levelled against the SL by the pro-*Sanacja* press.[364]

As this brief survey has shown, charges of social incoherence or of favouring special interests played a marginal role in criticisms of the SL. By and large, its political rivals either did not consider class-based frictions within the SL base as a weakness worth exploiting or, for strategic reasons, deemed them secondary to the benefits of a united peasantry. Besides benefiting from a more uniform social constituency compared to the Agrarians, the SL thus had the added advantage of rarely being forced to prove its association with the peasants or to defend the coherence of the peasant category.

However, whilst inter-peasant tensions lost political salience in the 1930s, as in Bohemia so in Galicia they did not disappear entirely. Even if less striking than before, class differences remained a feature of village life and, thus, retained their capacity to

[362] E.g., J. Nepomucký, "Jak proti agrárně-reakčnímu křidlu? O nové cesty v zemědělské politice", *Rudé Právo* (28.10.1936).
[363] E. Maj and W. Mich, "Ludowcy w opinii polskiej prawicy (1918-1939)", in Paruch and Wójcik, *Pokolenia*, 320.
[364] Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza*, 389.

undermine ideals of peasant unity. In what remains of this section, I will detail how class-related tensions continued to complicate social relations for the Populists.

Whilst the 1930s were a time of universal rural suffering, the obstacles to understanding it as a solidary experience should not be underestimated. For many, immiseration had primarily atomising rather than solidarity-building effects. Władysław Kluż, a social activist and memoirist from Sąsiadowice (Sambor district), was not unusual in foregrounding how the crisis had dissolved a previously buoyant rural civil society and transformed theft into an everyday crime.[365] Pre-existing class identities also limited solidarity between different village groups: as one labourer from Grodzisko bitterly observed in the late 1930s, "the large peasant does not see the pauper's misery [and] only talks about his own".[366] Even when class barriers were not an obstacle, villagers did not automatically perceive one another's suffering as equally ill-deserved and thus deserving of solidarity. Much depended on the values informing a given individual's or group's perspective. One memoirist – a 28-year-old rural activist from Brzesko district – voiced his resentment of how progressive hierarchies of prestige had been inverted during the crisis to the benefit of backward farmers. "Productive" debts – an index of enterprising farm management in the 1920s – became increasingly unpayable in the 1930s, turning them into a source of stigma; by contrast, "those [farmers] who stew in their manure-ridden homes just as they did in the past…those who never thought about any of that progress business and who [consequently] cannot feel the crisis or indebtedness" were unjustly recast by public opinion as paragons of economic virtue.[367]

[365] George, "Pamiętnik", 271.
[366] Burszta, *Wieś*, 140-148.
[367] *Wiejscy działacze społeczni* (2 vols., Warsaw, 1937), i, 167.

The progressive hierarchy of suffering espoused by this memoirist contrasted with an alternative, partly traditional view equating debt with vice and, consequently, denying sympathy for the indebted. This perspective was articulated by Adam Marzec (1862-1943), a PSL Piast-sympathising peasant writer also from Brzesko district. Though his poem "Peasant Plight" (*Chłopska dola*) bewailed "a world deaf to [peasant suffering]", Marzec refused to lend a compassionate ear to the suffering of those peasants who were over their head in debt.[368] In a satirical poem entitled "Debt Relief for Farmers" (*Oddłużenie rolników*) – a salient issue during the debt crisis of the 1930s – Marzec scathingly rejected the "movement" to help the likes of "frivolous Maciek…who piled his farm high with debts". Such debt relief would only distort economic justice, ensuring that "[Maciek's] creditors will shoulder the pain,/The thrifty will lose, dumb Maciek will gain!"[369]

An empathy deficit between different village groups was only one of the obstacles to peasant solidarity. Another lay in the cultural resilience of intra-village stratification. Even as different village groups converged, new ways could be found to maintain social distinctions. For instance, during the crisis years, as the price scissors between industrial and agricultural commodities made many staples increasingly unaffordable for the peasantry, in Wola Dalsza "whenever a wealthier housewife bought a kilo of sugar at once she would carry it up high, in her arms, so that everyone would know".[370]

[368] S. Pigoń (ed.), *Wybór pisarzy ludowych* (2 vols, Wrocław, 1948), ii, 146.
[369] N.d. Idem, 145.
[370] J. Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (Warsaw, 1984), 237.

Besides failing to iron out existing distinctions, economic convergence also generated new conflicts. As large peasant farms were subdivided, richer peasants lost their clientelistic leverage over the village poor but, at the same time, shed their traditional obligations towards them and increasingly turned into their competitors.[371] In this context, the economic advantages retained by these wealthier peasants risked becoming an even greater irritant for their former clients. One recurring complaint, for instance, concerned wealthier peasants' ability to bribe labour contractors and thereby siphon off labour opportunities desired by the poor for themselves.[372]

Socioeconomic tensions such as these were no longer the main determinant of political cleavages in the 1930s but continued to shape rural politics at the local level. The way they did so was, however, inconsistent compared to the 1920s: following the establishment of the SL, formal organisational divisions no longer predictably corresponded to those based on class. In some villages class divisions mapped onto the boundaries between the Populist movement and its rivals. In Wola Dalsza, for instance, a Wici circle commanding the loyalty of the village majority had to compete with a Green Shirts circle supposedly dominated by youths from middle and large peasant households, many of whom had been forced out of education by the crisis and styled themselves as a local intelligentsia.[373] Class divisions, however, could also run *across* the Populist movement, finding expression *inter alia* in the rivalry between the SL and Wici. According to the Stalinist-era recollections of Leon Bielec, a one-time Wici member and, later, PZPR secretary, "those who sat in the SL [in his native village of Ulanica

[371] E.g., Burszta, *Wieś*, 127-130.
[372] Idem, 134-135; Grad, *Dzieje*, 122.
[373] Grad, *Dzieje*, 86.

(Brzozów district)] were the better-off – they were in cahoots with the priests and pointed their fingers at…those 'communists', the Wici youth".[374] By contrast, there were also villages where the SL was a radical organisation dominated by poorer strata or, indeed, possessing a community-wide monopoly. On the landed estate of Pustynia (Ropczyce district), for instance, the SL chapter was established, alongside a chapter of the agricultural labourers' trade union, by Piotr Bielałowicz, a Communist estate labourer who had been charged with this task by his Communist superiors.[375] In Nockowa (Ropczyce district), a village inhabited "mainly by small and landless peasants"[376] and the site of a bloody confrontation with the police in 1933, the SL was likewise – according to the pre-war Communist Alojzy Nawój – dominated by Communists and representative in its social make-up of the village as a whole.[377]

Recollections such as those by Nawój, Bielałowicz and Bielec were all produced in the 1950s expressly for the PZPR; their authors – all of them former left-wing activists – were at least partially motivated by the desire to win official recognition for past political activity. Given their purpose and audience, there was a clear incentive for authors to exaggerate the role of class conflict and Communist influence in their native villages. In the light of such ideological pressures, it is instructive that their accounts still offered a varied picture of the relationship between formal politics and intra-village class conflict. This absence of schematisation points to the inconsistency of political class dynamics in the 1930s: quite simply, the same organisations that were dominated by one class in

[374] Archiwum Państwowe w Rzeszowie (hereinafter APRze), KW PZPR w Rzeszowie (hereinafter KW PZPR), sygn. 13483, Leon Bielec (Ulanica, Brzozów district, 1952).
[375] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13469, Piotr Bielałowicz (Kandzierz, Dębica district, 1956).
[376] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13974, Alojzy Nawój (Nockowa, Ropczyce district, 1958), 2.
[377] Idem, 16.

one village could also be the stronghold of another elsewhere. At the same time, their accounts indicate that intra-village class tensions continued to matter for political allegiances, even if they no longer provided a consistent basis for organisational divisions.

Besides continuing to lurk beneath the Populist movement's apparent organisational unity, class divisions could also be discovered behind displays of village solidarity, such as peasant strikes and protests. During a confrontation with the Łańcut district authorities in 1933, larger peasants in the delegation sent to negotiate with the district governor insisted on asking that "the government decree according to which horses would have to be yoked on the right side of the cart drawbar" be lifted. As Mieczysław Grad recalled, "this type of 'demand'…caused spontaneous indignation amongst the many thousands of paupers in the crowd, none of whom possessed a horse".[378] If wealthier peasants were occasionally accused of hijacking collective action,[379] a more frequent complaint concerned their reluctance to partake in collective action *tout court*. The economic, reputational and potentially legal costs of participating in village unrest were a major disincentive for wealthier farmers.[380] Unsurprisingly, it was often only as a result of extreme social pressure, if not coercion, that they were mobilised.[381] A case in point were the coercive measures against wealthy peasants in the Nowy Żmigród area of Jasło district where an SL-coordinated timber carters' strike was held in late 1935. According to one former SL activist's post-war account, the first to break the strike were

[378] Grad, *Dzieje walki*, 79.
[379] For another example see S. Czerpak, "Ruch chłopski w powiecie tarnobrzeskim w latach 1918-1921", *RDRL*, 3 (1961), 96.
[380] E.g., Burszta, *Wieś*, 135-136.
[381] E.g., T. Spiss, *Ze wspomnień c. k. urzędnika politycznego* (Rzeszów, 1936), 169; Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1984), 281.

"the richer farmers who start[ed] saying that [their] horses were standing around for free and what do they care about the strike…". In response, all twenty strike-breaking households had their windows broken during the evening mass on Christmas Eve whilst local Jewish glaziers were forbidden from replacing these windows until after Christmas.[382] For every strike-breaking peasant who was punished this way, there were likely many more cowed into conformity by the fear of similar sanctions.

In sum, the 1930s were a decade of unprecedented political consolidation for the Populists. Though primarily rooted in opposition to *Sanacja* rule, this newfound unity was considerably smoothed by both long-term and short-term tendencies towards downward economic convergence. The ever-growing fragmentation of landholdings, combined with the shared economic and political hardships of the 1930s, eroded the salience of class differences and related political conflicts between different peasant strata. Relative to the Agrarians, the Populists of the 1930s were only rarely accused by political enemies of trying to unite incompatible rural interests or of favouring village elites. This did not mean that class tensions disappeared from the Galician village: empathy gaps, persistent cultural distinctions and economic conflicts between different village groups all ensured that class divisions continued to affect political allegiances at the local level. Community-wide shows of unity were only achieved with the aid of fear and coercion. Even if Galician Populists had a less polarised social base in the 1930s than in earlier decades, they still had to confront social tensions. Nevertheless, the economic and psychological grounds for peasant political solidarity were much greater in Central Galicia than in South Bohemia. There, social harmony and partial political

[382] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13997, Florian Paja (Mytarz, Jasło district), 20.

unity had been produced in the 1920s by processes that defused village conflicts but did not integrate different classes: economic and cultural stratification visibly persisted. By contrast, in 1930s Galicia political unity emerged to a much greater degree from a shared experience of immiseration. As the next chapter will show, this difference would greatly affect the relative success of each movement in creating a solidary political clientele.

Chapter 3: Integrating the Stratified Village

Having previously discussed how interwar social conflicts evolved, in this chapter I consider how agrarian populists dealt with them, first analysing their techniques for reducing conflict and then asking how successful they were at politically and socially integrating the countryside. It will be shown how the Agrarians' more heterogeneous base demanded a broader range of conflict-mitigating methods when compared to the Populists. These methods largely succeeded at transforming poorer rural strata into Agrarian clienteles. Nevertheless, it will be argued that Agrarian attempts to assert ideological hegemony over the rural poor delivered questionable results. This argument flies against the dominant tendency in post-1989 historiography to view the Agrarians as a formidable political machine that, under the far-sighted leadership of Antonín Švehla, won over poorer peasants with land reform, estranged its intransigent landowners' wing and expanded its clienteles with an extensive associational apparatus.[383] By focusing on village chronicles and other more local sources that existing historiography ignores, however, I demonstrate that in South Bohemia the integration of the rural poor into the "Agrarian family" remained only partial and that the socialist left continued to represent an alternative pole of attraction for many in these strata. This contrasts with Central Galicia where in the 1930s many rural inhabitants, usually under Populist influence, passionately embraced peasant group identity and sought to instantiate ideals of peasant solidarity in everyday life and politics. Whilst the poorest members of Galician

[383] For a powerful statement of this view see J. Harna, "Agrární strana v první Československé republice. Role organizační struktury jako nástroje vlivu ve státě a společnosti", in Harna and Rašticová, *Agrární strana*, 7-19.

village society sometimes remained sceptical of peasant unity, their marginality made their opposition politically inconsequential. Furthermore, in contrast to Bohemia, in rural Central Galicia no viable socialist alternative to Populism existed. As a result, the radicalism of poor peasants tended to be channelled into the Populist movement, where it increasingly played a frontstage role.

i. Promoting Rural Unity

Intra-village inequalities remained a problem – even if to unequal degrees – for agrarian populists in both Poland and Czechoslovakia throughout the interwar period. To facilitate rural unity in spite of them, both movements sought to mitigate the effects of inequalities whilst simultaneously reconciling villagers with their persistence. This section will discuss the various discursive, practical and organisational measures adopted to this end, as well as the socio-cultural dynamics that, independently of agrarian populists' conscious efforts, helped make inequalities more tolerable for those they disadvantaged.

In political discourse there were various techniques to render inequalities more palatable. Undoubtedly the most common was to condemn them to silence. Stories about *starousedlík*-cottager tensions or abusive labour relations on farms and landed estates – though frequently reported in the left-wing press – were largely omitted from Agrarian newspapers. Even *Domovina*, which primarily dealt with cottagers' affairs and whose readership included agricultural labourers, virtually never mentioned them.[384]

[384] In late 1921 20% of Domovina's members were agricultural and forest labourers. J. Růžička, "Úloha Domovin v agrárním hnutí na počatku jejich existence", *Sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století*, 13 (1993), 241.

Equivalent taboos – especially that surrounding estates' mistreatment of agricultural labourers, which for the SL did not exist at all – were much weaker for the Polish Populists, but in their newspapers too references to peasant unity dramatically overshadowed discussions of its deficiencies.

On the occasions inequalities were addressed in political discourse, they tended to be trivialised. Social tensions were represented as an unfortunate but manageable family squabble, secondary compared to what agriculturalists had in common. The radical Wici activist Józef Grudziński, for instance, cast doubt on the scale and significance of social antagonisms between different peasant strata, claiming they were "smaller in essence than in books and the newspapers of Marxist doctrinaires [and that] the village will level them itself, without the help of self-imposed patrons."[385] In a similar vein, in his aforementioned New Year address to Domovina, the Agrarian general secretary Rudolf Beran implored its members to "set aside petty, trivial divisions in [our] villages and [to] look for what unites", warning against the alien "demagogue[s]" intent on "set[ting] the cottager against the peasant, the peasant against the tradesman and the intellectual".[386]

On the other hand, there were also times when agrarian populists applied discursive pressure not to trivialise conflict but to solve it, exhorting more privileged farmers to show their subordinates greater humanity. When agricultural labourers' wages were lowered in 1929, for instance, the Agrarian youth weekly *Mladý Venkov* issued a timid appeal for this "we don't want to say possibly unjustified but decidedly tactless and rash and therefore unsocial" decision to be reconsidered in the name of solidaristic Agrarian

[385] J. Grudziński, "Garść uwag o radykalizmie", *Wici* (7.04.1935), 1-2.
[386] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina* (4.01.1929), 1.

values. Whilst careful not to invalidate farmers' concerns with their bottom line, the newspaper gently reminded farmers that a wage cut would add grist to the "socialist mill", thereby hurting their political interests – even if not their economic ones.[387]

When addressing the mistreatment of rural servants, the Polish Populists were similarly cautious not to condemn peasant employers too harshly. An article by the radical deputy Andrzej Pluta, for instance, railed against the "veritable slavery" to which rural servants were condemned whilst exculpating their employers on the grounds that their own dire economic situation left them no choice but to underpay servants.[388] Another article in the Wici newspaper for peasant women detailed the terrible treatment of rural servants, before gently asking its readers to enact the "justice on which they want life in Poland to be based…in their families and their hearts".[389] Such exhortations were, of course, of dubious effectiveness. In Wola Dalsza, for instance, where wealthier peasants often bribed estate officials to outcompete their poorer counterparts in their attempts to secure work peeling beet leaves, "the rich peasants' avarice was in no way reined in by the [frequent] appeals of SL leaders".[390]

Beyond the discursive plane, more practical strategies of conflict mitigation were also employed. These were primarily pursued by the Czechoslovak Agrarians, both because the social cleavages that they sought to bridge were greater and because – as a permanent member of Czechoslovak governments – they had more resources at their disposal. One such strategy was the promotion of folk culture and its attendant

[387] *MV* (10.01.1930), 2.
[388] A. Pluta, "Niewolnictwo na wsi", *Gazeta Chłopska* (30.01.1927), 3-4.
[389] Z. Lipina, "Jątrząca rana", *Kobieta Wiejska* (July 1939), 5-6.
[390] Grad, *Dzieje*, 122.

sociability. Folklorism's value as a social lubricant was explicitly recognised by the Agrarians. In 1929-1930 Agrarian intellectual Jan Petr expressed his hope that rural festivities could be successfully transformed into "initiatives where our folk will [learn] that there are no divisions between us village people [*mezi námi na vsích*]".[391] In the same spirit, *Mladý Venkov* actively encouraged its readers to prove their understanding of "agrarian democracy" at Agrarian-sponsored Carnival dances by banishing wealth-based "casteism" from the dancefloor and dancing with all girls, not just "the most gaudily dressed or the richest" – an approach that would help win "favour and participants amongst the smaller farmers".[392]

The Agrarians' instrumentalization of folklorism did not pass unnoticed amongst their opponents. In South Bohemia Communists warned the village poor against the "Agrarians' new tactic" of using seemingly apolitical festivities, especially harvest festivals, to divert attention from worsening economic conditions and to win over unwitting supporters.[393] *Zemědělský Dělník*, meanwhile, ridiculed the self-congratulatory articles, written by the "sons of rich peasants or peasants themselves", about the rural unity between employers and their workers on display at Agrarian harvest parties. To puncture this mythical unity, *Zemědělský Dělník* sardonically pointed out how "many of these 'festivities' ended with proper brawls".[394]

Like its Czechoslovak counterpart, Wici also prioritised the cultivation of folk culture.[395] Further, it too paid considerable attention to the moral norms at village festivities as well

[391] Cited in Jiráček, "Místo", 21-22.
[392] Borek, "Slovo k našim ágrárním plesům", *MV* (4.01.1929), 4.
[393] "Nová taktika agrárníků", *OL*, (14.08.1936).
[394] "Odtancovali to", *ZD* (30.09.1932), 4.
[395] Lech, *Tradycyjna kultura*.

as their micropolitical effects. Crucially, however, the healing of class divides did not figure amongst Wici's goals in this domain. Most likely, this reflected the Populists' narrower social base and the consequently lesser importance attached to class tensions relative to other sources of social antagonism. A much greater priority for Wici, for instance, was to prevent inter-village youth violence – a common occurrence at weddings and other festivities – from colonising its dances.[396] Another conflict Wici's folklorism served to allay was the generational rift between Wici members and their parents. This was clearest in the case of Wici-sponsored harvest ceremonies. Though not explicitly conceived as such, these ceremonies de facto provided a compensatory mechanism whereby the authority of elders, whose conservatism and passivity Wici spent the rest of the year reproaching, was symbolically restored.[397]

Besides integrating the village with voluntaristic appeals and folklorism, the Czechoslovak Agrarians also adopted the opposite strategy, to wit, separating – rather than integrating – potentially conflicting interest groups into different organisations. This had no analogue in the SL's political practice, once again reflecting the greater socioeconomic homogeneity of the Populist base. The Communist *Rudé Právo* characterised the Agrarians' strategy as that of building "a pyramid made up of the most varied compartments…so that various contradictory interests will not rub against each other". Each of the Agrarians' 35 compartments was de facto run by "cunning hustlers [representing] the agrarian bourgeoisie".[398] *Rudé Právo* was undoubtedly right to observe

[396] E.g., AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 16.01.1936 and 23.01.1936 entries.
[397] J. Niećko, "Plon niesiemy – plon!", *Wici* (9.08.1936), 2-3. See also A. Lech, "Dożynki młodowiejskie. Z dziejów folkloryzmu obrzędowego w II Rzeczpospolitej" in Pastuszka and Sztejnbis-Zdyb, *Państwo*, 456-457.
[398] "Rozhodující slovo na agrárnim sjezdu má agrární buržoasie", *Rudé Právo* (9.05.1929).

the constraints on the autonomy of Agrarian satellites. Despite its limits, however, this autonomy remained crucial to their success. Through such organisations different Agrarian clienteles secured recognition of their particular interests as well as lobbying channels whereby these interests could be defended. The satellites' apartness from the Agrarian party and often non-partisan names helped exonerate them of any immediate association with the somewhat tarnished Agrarian label. This was most visible in the case of the Agrarians' largest satellite, the cottagers' and small peasants' organisation Domovina. Established in 1919 to draw cottagers and agricultural workers away from the Social Democrats (and, in some regions, the Catholic Populists), in its nomenclature Domovina deliberately avoided any explicit reference to its mother party. Initially at least, party membership was not even a prerequisite for joining Domovina and taking advantage of its benefits.[399] Further, the slippage between "Domovina", which in Czech signifies "homeland", and the Czech word for "cottagers", *domkáře*, was likely not accidental. Whilst conferring national grandeur on the cottagers' status as homeowners, the name "Domovina" had the additional virtue of fusing an Agrarian institution with the class it was supposed to represent. Indeed, it was not uncommon even for official sources to use the terms *Domovina members* and *cottagers* interchangeably.[400] All of this gave Domovina the aura of an autonomous, cottager-dominated organisation – a useful cachet in winning over a mistrustful semi-proletariat to an Agrarian party associated with landed farmers. In the 1920 parliamentary elections when the Agrarians

[399] Růžička, "Úloha", 231.
[400] E.g., César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 66-67; SDA Strakonice, Archív obce Mladějovice, 1, Válečná kronika (1916-1927), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305409 (hereinafter Válečná kronika obce Mladějovice), images 17 and 19.

still faced a united and powerful Social Democrat rival, Domovina was, in fact, considered the Agrarians' "most important" tool by the party leadership.[401]

Accommodating a plurality of clienteles within the Agrarian institutional infrastructure was, of course, insufficient to secure their loyalty. Interest groups had also to be persuaded that a socially diverse Agrarian party that encompassed rather than resolving conflicts could effectively represent their interests. The material benefits that organisations like Domovina provided were undoubtedly the strongest argument in this regard.[402] At the same time, considerable discursive efforts were made to persuade clienteles that these material benefits were real and that disadvantaged groups were well-protected under Agrarian auspices. Claims that the Agrarians neglected their poorer voters were, for instance, repeatedly dismissed by the Agrarian press. After the introduction of the grain monopoly, *Domovina* reassured its readers that they were, in fact, the measure's primary beneficiaries.[403] Likewise, to debunk suspicions that Domovina was a fig-leaf for Agrarian plutocracy, *Domovina*'s frontpage report on the 1929 party congress emphasised in bold the numerous presence of Domovina delegates as well as their power and equal status within the party's decision-making structures.[404]

Alongside their various tactics to mollify social tensions, there were also socio-cultural factors that helped agrarian populists to reconcile ideals of rural unity with an unequal social reality. The first of these factors – easiest to uncover in Polish sources – were the various beliefs legitimising inequalities of wealth and property. Such beliefs did not just

[401] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 66.
[402] E.g., Růžička, "Úloha Domovin", 229.
[403] "Výkup obilí u tří jihočeských družstev", *Domovina* (28.09.1934), 1.
[404] "Celostátní sjezd naší strany – nové posílení zemědělské demokracie", *Domovina* (10.05.1929), 1.

derive from traditional fatalism or the Church's exhortations to accept an unequal social order – both frequent objects of peasant memoirists' grumblings. Rather, for many, intra-village inequalities represented, more than the workings of fate, a legitimate reflection of vice and virtue. Such attitudes were likely deeply rooted in the Galician village. According to Burszta, prior to the spread of partible inheritance in the final decades of the 19th century, the selective bequeathment of land to some children over others in the village of Grodzisko had served as a disciplinary sanction against various kinds of non-conformity, thereby establishing a cultural connection between vice and landlessness.[405] This connection would be reinforced by more "modern" social dynamics that emerged, in the early 20th century, in the context of mass migration, industrialisation and agricultural improvement. According to sociologist Stefan Czarnowski, aspirations to social mobility and, with them, a more accepting view of class inequalities had become increasingly established amongst the smaller peasantry in the boom years before World War I, a time when abundant migration opportunities and high agricultural prices gave even the poorest peasants a chance to buy up land with remittances and savings.[406] In this context, landlessness and pauperisation were less likely to appear as mere accidents of fate. Writing in the late 1920s, the agriculturally progressive, politically conservative and reasonably well-to-do former mayor of Dzików (Tarnów district) Jan Słomka (1842-1932) argued that alcohol had been the main cause of rural *déclassement* whilst abstinence the principal precondition of social ascent in the course of his lifetime.[407] Such a perspective on the wealth-virtue nexus was not exclusive

[405] Burszta, *Wieś*, 104.
[406] S. Czarnowski, "Podłoże ruchu chłopskiego", in Eadem, *Dzieła* (2 vols., Warsaw, 1956), ii, 173.
[407] Słomka, *Pamiętniki*, 302.

to the village rich or the politically conservative. During one radical Wici circle's discussion of land reform in 1936, for instance, two participants argued against expropriation on the grounds that "taking away people's property is immoral" and that "people, those who have large properties, they deserve it because they fought for them…".[408]

The obverse of such a forgiving view of rural wealth – namely, a partially unforgiving perspective on the poor – can also be encountered in unexpected quarters. Even a memoirist as sympathetic to the village poor as Jan Stryczek, writing in a broader context of agricultural collectivisation, distinguished between the more and less deserving poor. On the one hand, Stryczek acknowledged the discouragingly austere costs of social ascent for the poor, citing the example of a pauper forced to pay off his fellow villagers with 500 days of free labour for their assistance in preparing a plot of land, purchased with a view to moving out of the paupers' squalid neighbourhood. Though hardly recommendable, such self-abnegation was nevertheless contrasted by Stryczek with the behaviour of "those who could not be bothered to work, even though they sometimes went hungry". Though usually scathing towards the self-serving behaviour of wealthy peasants, in this instance Stryczek impassively recounted how many villagers were reluctant to pay alms to those paupers who "during the harvest…whilst everyone laboured, lay in the shade of the trees and scoffed at those who ran about with their sheaves for fear of a storm".[409]

[408] AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 30.01.1936 entry.
[409] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1984), 233.

Thus, at the level of folk ideology, resentments arising from village inequalities were partially averted or even delegitimised by a belief in the property-virtue nexus. As well as being delegitimised, however, these resentments could also simply be overridden by impulses towards cross-class, even community-wide, unity. It is easy to be cynical about the authenticity of such impulses, considering their principal beneficiaries were existing village elites. Nevertheless, there were powerful relational, emotional and material incentives for others to subscribe to them – at least some of the time – as well.

One situation generative of unity was that of inter-village rivalries. For instance, according to Grad, whenever youths from different villages came to blows – a common occurrence in the immediate aftermath of World War I – the rich peasants' sons who "in other instances stayed away from the paupers" accepted poor villagers as their comrades-in-arms and occasionally even as battle leaders.[410] The ever-present risk of random misfortunes also necessitated some level of community-wide moral unity. Recalling the Galician countryside of his youth, the Populist leader Wincenty Witos depicted an archipelago of isolated and warring peasant households occasionally seized by fits of "immediate and genuine cooperation" in the face of "misfortunes like disease, fire, hailstorms, [or] the death of a horse or calf".[411]

A more constant unifying force than inter-village conflicts and the threat of disasters was the economic interdependence of different village strata. Economic ties between rich and poor villagers were critically important for both, discouraging open expressions – and possibly even perceptions – of conflict. Even after almost three decades of state

[410] Grad, *Dzieje*, 55.
[411] W. Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (Warsaw, 1981), 41-43.

socialism, the former PSL Piast supporter and memoirist Konstanty Radomski framed labour relations in his native Kamień (Nisko district) in decidedly non-exploitative terms, remarking that during the crisis of the 1930s "many youths from large families were sent to serve peasants who needed help, as cowherds and farmhands, in exchange for some clothes and a few quarters of grain and potatoes to feed the rest of the family – an arrangement that was known as reciprocal neighbourly aid".[412] Such economic ties at times overlapped with bonds of ritual kinship, as in Wola Dalsza where wealthy peasants were – in Mieczysław Grad's more cynical, Marxist interpretation – keen to act as godparents for the poor, "seeing future cowherds and farmhands in their godchildren".[413] Even Grad, however, had to accept the ideological power of such ritualised clientelism, acknowledging how it "effectively stunted the rise of class consciousness amongst the small peasants and village proletariat".[414] Though I have found no equivalent testimonies from Bohemia, similar forms of kin-like economic interdependence were likely what gave the Agrarian slogan "the countryside is one family" much of its force.[415]

Amongst the effects of these pressures towards communal harmony was a tendency to trivialise intra-village conflicts whilst representing unity as the deeper, more fundamental aspect of rural life. This tendency was already apparent in the agrarian populist communications discussed earlier. Tellingly, however, it also appears in non-propagandistic sources. Following the publication of a sociological monograph about the Galician village of Babica which detailed the conflicts between its various

[412] AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 40, 57.
[413] Grad, *Dzieje walki*, 32.
[414] Ibid.
[415] E.g., Kodedová, *Zemědělské delnictvo*, 78-79.

neighbourhoods, one Babica native was motivated to write a stinging review, criticising the author for her blinkered focus on periodic electoral squabbles and for losing sight of such collective achievements as "the village monument to the Battle of Grunwald or its Cross of Independence, for [which] she would have had to notice the harmonious cooperation of village residents in national and various more general matters."[416]

Like the reviewer, South Bohemian village chronicles frequently framed the social antagonisms that erupted at election-time as politically manufactured aberrations, out of character with the rest of village life. The village of Chrášťany (Týn n. Vltavou district), for instance, had apparently been free of social conflict before "[1919's] municipal elections poisoned all political life and brought divisions and hatred between cottagers and peasants [*sedláky*] into the village".[417] Meanwhile, following 1935's fierce electoral contest in the polarised village of Albrechtice, the village chronicler happily reported how: "after the elections the surface of coexistence became calm and those who before the elections hated one another afterwards linked arms in pursuit of their arduous vocation…".[418] Formulations such as these are, of course, of questionable objectivity. Wishful or naïve though they may appear, they are nevertheless significant as evidence of the narratives about village unity that were operative within rural society – narratives that both expressed a desire for social harmony and that, through their circulation, may have contributed to its enactment.

[416] A. Kuś, "Wieś małopolska (Babice) w krzywym zwierciadle", *Wieś i Państwo*, 1/8 (1938), 699-701.
[417] SDA České Budějovice, Místní národní výbor Chrášťany, Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany (1922-1987), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305111 (hereinafter Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany), 63.
[418] Pamětní kniha obce Albrechtice, 135.

In conclusion, agrarian populists had a variety of emollient techniques for dealing with intra-village inequalities. In the discursive realm each movement fell back on a mix of taboos, denials and appeals for rural unity. At the more practical level, the Agrarians pioneered the use of folklorism as a social lubricant as well as the institutionalised separation of potentially conflicting groups. Whilst the Agrarians' repertoire of emollients was richer, this reflected their greater need for such measures as much as their creativity. Both movements were also aided by certain aspects of village culture, namely beliefs about the property-virtue nexus and impulses towards communitarian unity and cooperation.

ii. Fragile Unity and the Limits of Agrarian Hegemony in South Bohemia

This section challenges the established view of Agrarian success in conquering the poorer peasantry after 1918. No doubt, the Agrarians' efforts to win new clienteles and overcome intra-village conflicts were superficially successful. Nevertheless, by considering evidence from village chronicles and other neglected sources, it becomes possible to see how their achievements remained brittle and open to reversals. Facts that are usually read as signs of Agrarian strength can just as easily be reinterpreted as emblematic of their weakness.

The last point applies most clearly to the Agrarians' tactic of multiplying associations for different interest groups. Whilst generally considered symbolic of Agrarian ingenuity, Domovina's success in shepherding cottagers into the Agrarian coalition whilst keeping them at arm's length also reflected the Agrarians' failure to produce a single solidary political subject or a social identity capable of eclipsing the identities of its parts.

Likewise, the propagandistic insistence on Domovina's power within the Agrarian movement signalled anxieties around cottagers' potential for separatism. The same also holds for the tactical ambiguity around Domovina's status. Even when discussing electoral politics in which Domovina – as an Agrarian satellite – did not take part, *Domovina* would sometimes feed this illusion of apartness. For instance, after complaining of the many cottagers who still voted for socialist parties in the Rakovnik region, one 1929 article exhorted cottagers to stay loyal to "the strong, disciplined organisation of Domovina" without any mention of the larger Agrarian movement.[419]

The conditionality of cottagers' support for the Agrarians can further be gauged from the manoeuvring of local Domovina chapters in municipal elections. As various village chronicles attest, Domovina exercised much greater autonomy in municipal contests relative to national- and provincial-level elections, where it never put up its own candidate lists. This autonomy was visible even in a village like Mladějovice, where the Agrarians won overwhelming majorities in the 1920 and 1925 parliamentary elections. Such was the Agrarians' dominance that in the municipal elections of 1923 and 1927 theirs was the only list presented. A close reading of the Mladějovice chronicle nevertheless suggests this dominance was less the result of outright loyalty to the Agrarians than of careful negotiation between the party and Domovina. In the lead-up to 1923's municipal election "the village mayor called a general assembly of [the municipality's] citizens, during which – in an agreement between the Republican Party and the small cottagers – a single list of Republican Party candidates was agreed…"; meanwhile, in 1927 "the [municipality's] citizens agreed on a joint electoral list for the

[419] R. Vostatek, "Spolehejme sami na sebe!", *Domovina* (18.01.1929), 3.

Republican Party and Domovina".[420] Though terse, these passages makes clear that Domovina was an active, perhaps equal, partner in building a united Agrarian front whose loyalty to the party could not simply be assumed.

This became even more apparent in the 1930s with the breakdown of the Agrarians' municipal monopoly over Mladějovice. In 1931 the Agrarians' majority was overthrown, after Fascist and Catholic Populist lists contested the municipal election, respectively winning 57.4% and 12.3%. Of the twelve Fascist and Populist councillors and reserve councillors elected, five were cottagers who had previously served in the council on an Agrarian-Domovina ticket.[421] If in 1931 it was just individual cottagers who defected from the Agrarian-Domovina coalition, in the 1936 municipal election Mladějovice's entire Domovina chapter chose to present a separate electoral list and compete independently against both the Agrarians and the two other parties – a gamble that delivered 30.7% for Domovina compared to the Agrarians' 21.7%.[422] In the previous year's legislative elections 48.2% of Mladějovice's votes had gone to the Agrarians – roughly the same as the combined Domovina and Agrarian vote in 1936. Most likely, then, Domovina's 1936 electorate was drawn from 1935's Agrarian-voting constituency.[423] What 1936's municipal elections revealed, however, was that many of these voters' primary loyalty was to Domovina, not the Agrarians.

[420] Válečná kronika obce Mladějovice, images 17 and 19.
[421]SDA Strakonice, Archiv obce Mladějovice, 2, Kronika obce Mladějovice (1920-1969), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305409, (hereinafter Kronika obce Mladějovice), 229.
[422] Idem, 256.
[423] Village-specific results for the 1935 Chamber of Deputies elections are drawn from *Celkový přehled výsledku volby do poslanecké sněmovny v roce 1935 v kraji IX. (České Budějovice)* (Prague, 1935).

Amongst the villages surveyed, Mladějovice was not the only one to witness a fracture in the Agrarian-Domovina coalition in the 1930s. In nearby Čejetice – also the site of an agricultural labourers' strike in 1920 – Domovina and the Agrarians similarly put up separate electoral lists in the 1936 municipal election.[424] Given that in the previous year's legislative elections Fascists had trounced Čejetice's Agrarians with 155 out of 305 votes (compared to the Agrarians' 83), Domovina's electoral secession likely reflected a broader disillusionment with the Agrarian party. In 1938 conflict between the Agrarians and Domovina also burst into the chronicle of Hlavatce: this time it was only thanks to an electoral deal whereby the Social Democrats ceded a council seat to a Domovina candidate that the intra-Agrarian rift was quelled and the cost and bother of a municipal election avoided.[425]

These subtle signs of local Domovina discontent were, of course, far from the anti-Agrarian mutiny that South Bohemian Communists were hoping for in the 1930s and that they claimed to observe amongst poor peasants in more industrial regions such as Slansko. All the same, they attested the fragility of Agrarian gains amongst cottagers and small peasants: far from bonding these groups to the Agrarians, Domovina had primarily succeeded in bonding them to itself.

For the Agrarians such conditional support was nevertheless preferable to the anti-Agrarian stances that poorer villagers continued to evince in certain villages. Alongside places like Mladějovice where the Agrarians had merely failed to secure their gains

[424] Archiv obce Čejetice, SDA Strakonice, Archiv obce Čejetice, Kronika obce Čejetice (1925-1966), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305407, 37.
[425] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 80.

amongst the poor, there were also villages where they never managed to win a majority of the poor to begin with. Even after its battering in the early 1920s, the South Bohemian left still commanded the loyalty of a sizeable rural minority. Furthermore, in many villages, the socialist-Agrarian divide remained the primary cleavage in local politics. Its primacy was especially visible in municipal elections, where – unlike in national- and provincial-level contests – it was normal, in smaller municipalities, for only two or three parties to compete. In many of the villages surveyed, municipal contests boiled down to an electoral confrontation – or pre-electoral deal – between the Agrarians and one of the socialist parties (with the odd third party or civic list thrown in).[426] Crucially, based on the evidence that village chronicles offer, the division between Agrarians and socialists appears largely to have been a proxy for class divisions between the more and less landed peasantry.

Hlavatce once again offers a case in point. Even though the Hlavatce left was weakened after 1921, the cottager-*starousedlík* conflict rumbled on and, in the 1927 and 1931 municipal elections, fiercely re-erupted under the guise of Social Democrat vs Agrarian competition. As the Hlavatce chronicler disapprovingly noted, in their 1927 campaign the Social Democrats actively played on intra-village class divisions, fomenting fears that "if the Agrarians win, they will take communal land back [for the *starousedlíci*] and servants will have low wages…".[427] Considerations of class interest and unity were likely important for wealthier villagers as well: in the 1923 municipal election, for instance, the Catholic Populists stood aside so as not to undermine the Agrarians in their struggle with the

[426] For a similar case see C. Mesliand, "Gauche et droite dans les campagnes provençales sous la IIIe République", *Études rurales*, 63/64 (1976), 211.
[427] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 52.

Social Democrats. Similarly, when faced with Fascist attacks in the run-up to the 1931 election, the Agrarians agreed to withdraw in favour of a non-partisan "civic" list, presumably lest *starousedlík* unity against the Social Democrats be broken.[428]

Socio-political divisions were similarly binary in the municipal politics of Doubrava (Týn n. Vltavou district), the site of a Communist strike and (unrealised) conspiracy to take over a local estate in December 1920.[429] Here, too, the 1927 municipal election was a two-way race between Agrarians and Social Democrats. The social profile of Social Democrat supporters was revealed in 1931 when the Social Democrat list was replaced by that of their satellite organisation for small peasants and cottagers.[430] The dominance of wealthier peasants in Doubrava's Agrarian chapter, in turn, can be surmised from the profiles of its Agrarian councillors, a majority of whom consistently – whether in 1927, 1931 or 1938 – shared the surnames of Doubrava's more landed families.[431] Meanwhile, in the neighbouring village of Chrášťany, 1919's municipal election – a battle between National Socialists and Agrarians – was *explicitly* framed by the chronicler as a conflict between cottagers and more landed peasants. Of the seven elected National Socialist councillors five were characterised as cottagers, one as a blacksmith and another as a worker, whilst all five Agrarian councillors as peasants.[432] At the next municipal election in 1923, class not only persisted but became even more transparent as the *primary* basis for electoral divisions: the National Socialist list was replaced by the seemingly non-partisan "union of small farmers, tradesmen and workers", to be replaced in 1927, in

[428] Idem, 29, 59.
[429] César and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 242.
[430] Pamětní kniha obce Doubravy, 14, 19.
[431] For a list of these surnames and 1938's election results see idem, 13, 40-41.
[432] Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany, 63.

turn, by an alliance of "cottagers, workers and small peasants".[433] The candidate lists drawn up by different electoral groupings remained for the most part socially distinct: with the exception of the cross-class Catholic Populist list in 1923, non-Agrarian lists in 1923 and 1927 were overwhelmingly cottager-dominated, whilst the Agrarians continued to present more landed candidates, even in 1927 when their list was nominally shared with Domovina.[434]

The municipal politics of villages like Hlavatce, Doubrava and Chrášťany exposed the limits to Agrarian expansion amongst agricultural workers, cottagers and poorer peasants. For all their rhetorical overtures and economic inducements, the Agrarians were unable to persuade many in rural South Bohemia's poorer strata that the countryside was – or ought to be – one political family. Everyday socioeconomic tensions between different village groups and the prominence of village elites in Agrarian ranks[435] strained this slogan's credibility, thereby contributing to the endurance of the left as a rural force.

Alongside these obstacles, the Agrarians also faced constraints of a more subjective nature: the ideal of agricultural unity may simply have failed to inspire many of the rural poor, especially relative to other ideals that had become available in the early 20th century. It bears remembering that, for many South Bohemian cottagers, agriculture was only one – often supplementary – income stream amongst various others. Seasonal labour migration had been a mass phenomenon in the region since the last decades of

[433] Idem, 68, 72, 79, 86-87.
[434] Idem, 72.
[435] Whilst systematic membership data is lacking, scattered evidence suggests wealthy farmers occupied a privileged position in local party hierarchies. E.g., SDA Písek, Republikánská strana - okresní organizace Milevsko, sign. II B/2.

the 19th century. Before 1914 cottagers working in the building trade – the largest seasonal employer in South Bohemia – would set out each spring for construction sites in Vienna and industrial regions of Germany, only returning home in November or December.[436] After 1914 Prague became the cottager-masons' most frequent destination;[437] with the development of transport infrastructure the yearly migration was replaced, in some villages, by a weekly commute.[438] Contacts with the urban world and the alternative meanings and identities it offered were, thus, extensive and constant. As elsewhere, seasonal migrants developed a distinctive cultural consciousness and identity – that of the *světák*, "the man of the world" – that hinged specifically on this urbanity.[439] One possible component of the *světák* identity was an embrace of urban working-class radicalism. According to the leading Communist Josef Nepomucký, cottager-masons working in Prague were the "core" of the interwar Communist Party in South Bohemia.[440] Indeed, the readiness of so many South Bohemian cottagers to vote for a principally worker-oriented, urban party like the Social Democrats likely cannot be fully understood outside this context.

The remoulding of rural subjectivities through urban contact and left-wing ideology is showcased in the Stalinist-era memoir of Josef Štědronský. Originating from Varvažov (Písek district), Štědronský led a semi-peripatetic existence in the interwar period, working as an estate labourer in South Bohemia and the environs of Prague, before taking

[436] M. Špecián, "Sezónní vystěhovalectví v jihozápadních Čechách" (MA thesis, Ústav pro etnografii a fokloristiku ČSAV, 1981), 46-49.
[437] Idem, 49-50.
[438] E.g., E.g., SDA Tábor, Archiv obce Brandlín, 7, Kroniky obecní Brandlín (1922-1962), https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/305332, 14.
[439] Špecián, "Sezónní vystěhovalectví", 20.
[440] *Bojovali*, 140.

up work on a Prague construction site and, finally, returning to an estate in his native Varvažov. Despite his rural origins and semi-rural lifestyle, Štědronský framed his life-narrative, without any qualification, as part of working-class history. He began his memoir by affirming that "the working class under the old Austria-Hungary was a mass that accepted everything…". In the next sentence Štědronský illustrated this passivity by evoking the childhood of a typical rural pauper, forced to work for exploitative peasants. Tellingly, no justification was given for treating this seemingly incongruous rural example as prototypical of the working-class experience.[441] Štědronský became involved in the Social Democrat movement before 1914, presumably whilst still working as an agricultural labourer. The rural context of this political awakening did not, however, seem important to Štědronský: all he recounted was how he and his comrades wore red neckties, intoned a workers' chant demanding the 8-hour working day and attracted the antipathy of larger peasants – this final detail providing the only clue of a rural setting.[442]

After 1918 Štědronský found employment as a *deputatník* on an estate run by "a greedy [master who] wanted to get rich in a hurry" and, consequently, insulted his workers for their drunken indolence. In return, to Štědronský's clear delight, the estate coachman's son – a "fop [*frajer*]" who "worked somewhere in Prague" – recited a song defending the poor and threatening the rich, in the master's presence. This song, however, was not the product of an anti-seigneurial peasant tradition but an import from the Prague theatre scene: entitled "Hej, pane králi!" [*Hey, Lord King!*], the hit song originated in a popular 1935 play – Jan Werich and Jiří Voskovec's *Balada z hadrů* [Ballad of Rags] – that told of

[441] ANTM, sign. 1370, Štědronský,1.
[442] Ibid.

social injustice in François Villon's Paris.[443] Thus, even in its transcripts of resistance the *deputatník* milieu could owe more to the city than the countryside.

In the absence of other memoirs, it is hard to determine how typical Štědronský was amongst South Bohemia's rural poor in his near-total identification with the working class and almost comic insensitivity to urban-rural boundaries. Most probably, his was a particularly eccentric case, born of his status as a *landless* estate labourer, his longstanding experience of working in Prague and deep engagement in the Communist movement. On the other hand, as we have seen, Štědronský's oscillation between rural and urban work and his support for the left were hardly exceptional amongst the South Bohemian poor, including the smallholding peasantry. For this reason, even if it cannot be considered representative, Štědronský's voice offers a useful insight into how class-based identities, backed by the left and validated by intra-village conflicts, vitiated Agrarian attempts to build a comprehensive front of all agriculturalists. Equally, the example of the foppish coachman's son, memorably spouting subversive songs upon his return to the countryside, provides a glimpse into how the radicalism of the *světák* – mischievous and dressed in fashionable clothing – could acquire social appeal at the Agrarians' expense. Indeed, there is a certain likeness between the coachman's son and the returnee rural migrant fearfully evoked in a 1930 article in the Agrarian youth newspaper *Mladý Venkov*. The article warned against this Communist-like bearer of "pseudo-culture [who] having spent time in the city…spreads superficiality, a predilection for clichés and bold words" and whose corrosive influence had caused

[443] Idem, 2-3. Though Štědronský reported this incident as occurring in the immediate post-1918 period, the reference to a "residual estate" (most of these were established in the 1920s) and to a song composed in 1935 suggests he either conflated different occurrences or invented certain details.

"religious and social ideas and the party programme [to] become the butt of jokes…for a certain part of our youth which…has adopted as its commandment the pronouncement of grand, pompous words…against the rural social order and agrarianism".[444]

To sum up, the Agrarians' mission to enact rural unity encountered clear limits amongst poorer village groups. A part of this demographic proved immune to the Agrarians' appeal. Whilst another was won over to the Agrarian coalition, its support appeared conditional, transactional and in need of reassurance, rather than stable and affectively rooted. Agrarian political practice recognised this weakness, allowing for the proliferation of separate interest-based associations and encouraging class-based sub-identities alongside its "agriculturalist" macro-identity. But whilst the Agrarians were prudent to accommodate such plurality, this plurality was also capable of turning against them, as in those villages where Domovina presented its own electoral lists. Class identities that Agrarians hoped to subordinate remained central to political behaviour and capable of overriding loyalties to the Agrarian family. Importantly, despite being weakened, the socialist left retained its presence in the South Bohemian countryside and continued to represent a class-based alternative to the Agrarians whose appeal was likely reinforced by many villagers' persistent contact with the urban world.

The prominence of class divisions in politics did not mean these divisions consumed rural life. After the immediate post-independence period, class tensions almost entirely disappeared from village chronicles outside election season. Had open polarisation remained high, even conflict-averse chroniclers would have struggled to ignore it.

[444] "Jaký idealismus?", *MV* (22.08.1930), 2.

Outside the political realm, impulses towards communitarian coexistence – even harmony – likely prevailed. Indeed, as Gerhard Wilke argued in his study of a Hessian village that was also, before 1933, politically divided along class lines, formal political competition could help confine class antagonisms, preventing them from destroying the clientelistic bonds upon which villagers depended.[445] However, if class divisions were not all-consuming, for the Agrarians they were nevertheless a political handicap – a weakness that their opponents continually exploited and that placed them at continual risk of losing support to the left.

iii. Enacting Peasant Unity and Consciousness in Central Galicia

The SL's ideal of peasant unity became increasingly popular in the 1930s, notwithstanding persistent class tensions in the Galician village. During this decade, as this section argues, growing numbers of villagers became attached to peasantness as a source of identity whilst yearning for it to be foregrounded in various social domains. This attachment appeared affectively rooted and non-transactional, in contrast to the more lukewarm loyalties inspired by the Agrarian party amongst poorer villagers in South Bohemia. Its entrenchment was favoured by the various solidarity-fostering institutions and practices of the Populist movement through which class divisions were made to seem secondary and the interests of poorer peasants granted recognition. Whilst the poorest villagers were not always persuaded by such ideals, theirs was an insignificant political threat for the SL compared to the danger of cottager separatism for the Agrarian

[445] Wilke, "The Sins", 177.

party. Equally, some peasants' reluctance to partake in direct action did not fundamentally threaten the credibility of Populist ideals.

The societal resonance of peasantist ideas and styles is best attested by the memoirs that were produced *en masse* in the 1930s. Various scholars, both before 1939 and under state socialism, saw in them – especially those by peasant youths – the snapshot of an emergent peasant class or group consciousness.[446] This was an imperfect characterisation. Peasants had always been aware of the gulf between their identities and interests and those of other social groups such as Jews, "lords" and clergymen. What many memoirs – especially by more politically engaged peasants – attest is, rather, the fixing and valorisation of a pre-existing peasant identity. For many memoirists within the orbit of the Populist movement and its ideological relatives (e.g., the pro-governmental Siew youth group from which Wici seceded in 1928), peasantness now became a constant element in self-understandings and narratives rather than a merely relational (and hence situational) characteristic distinguishing peasants from other social groups,[447] a basis for belonging – even pride – and not just an ineluctable destiny.

This identity fusion between individual memoirists and the peasant category was often most pronounced in how memoirs were framed. Władysław Kluż, a former Peasant Party sympathiser, entitled his entry into the 1936 memoir competition for rural activists "A Peasant's Memoir", sandwiching his personal life-story between a baleful introduction

[446] E.g., Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, passim; Borkowski, *Postawa*, 386.
[447] Perhaps a more fitting model than "the rise of class consciousness" is that of "substantialization", the process – posited by Louis Dumont – whereby Indian caste transformed from a primarily relational system based on hierarchical interdependence into a series of separate, competing, quasi-ethnic groups, each with its own "substance". L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (New Delhi, 1998), 222.

and conclusion in which he ventriloquized the grievances of the crisis-stricken peasantry.[448] Another memoirist, the PSL Piast- and, later, SL-sympathising Andrzej Postrożny (b. 1874), had so internalised the stock theme of centuries-long peasant suffering as to frame a happy and agentive moment in his life – namely when, against his parents' initial wishes, he returned from America to his family farm and married the girl he loved – as an example of "that grey peasant plight".[449] An even more extreme example is offered by Alojzy Dziaduś, a Wici member (b. 1910) who identified so strongly with the peasant movement that, in his opening justification for writing a memoir, personal motives and collective experiences can barely be disentangled. Dziaduś wrote his memoir not for money or an award but in response to "an inner force [pushing] me to write down that which lives, which grows, which laughs with a peasant soul notwithstanding its tears, that which rejoices, which rebels within this soul, which forms new concepts, a new force within the peasant masses…".[450] Dziaduś even recognised this ambiguity a few paragraphs later, justifying his use of the first person plural on the grounds that "that which is reflected in my soul is not some individual quirk but the spirit that animates the countryside".[451]

Such peasantist language was far from inevitable. Many memoirs – especially by less politicised villagers – displayed an entirely different relationship to the peasant category, using the term *peasant* sparingly, for matter-of-fact purposes, rather than to signal deep group belonging. In some cases, this avoidance appears to have been almost deliberate,

[448] George, "Pamiętnik".
[449] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, box 443, A. Postrożny, "Życiorys społecznego działacza ludowego" (Stara Wieś, powiat limanowski), 30-31.
[450] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 1.
[451] Idem, 2.

a way to denote cultural aspirations from which peasantness was excluded. Various memoirs – typically written by pro-governmental village activists – which did not mention peasants made admiring references to "more serious" or "more enlightened farmers", hinting at an alternative self-understanding in which the progressive agricultural techniques and propertied respectability of village elites were foregrounded over cross-peasant bonds.[452] Another example of un-peasant-like self-representation is offered by the memoir of Ludwik Salamon Żółw (b. 1905), a smallholder active in the pro-governmental Riflemen's Association who repeatedly complained of his inability to secure an official post (*posada*) despite his gymnasium-level education. In a likely sign of his attraction to gentry culture, Żółw evoked his family ancestry in quasi-dynastic terms, writing: "Since the beginning of [the village of] Tuligłowy's existence, the Żółw lineage [*ród*] has existed here".[453] This approach to family history contrasted with that of a more peasantist-inclined memoirist (b. 1907) who proudly equated his lack of pedigree with adherence to "the tradition of the Polish peasant which disappears in the darkness of the past".[454] As these examples show, peasantist self-presentation was one stylistic option amongst many in the 1930s – a politically connotated choice rather than the spontaneous expression of an archaic identity. Though peasantism drew on pre-existing cultural elements, its enthusiastic take-up had as much to do with the success of the Populist identity project as with the endurance of pre-modern social categories.

[452] E.g., *Wiejscy działacze społeczni*, i, 178-179; ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 443, M. Malczyński (gr. Schönanger, p. Borowa obok Mielca), 17; ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 443, T. Romanek (Samoklęski, Jasło district), 8.
[453] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 443, L. Salamon (Tuligłowy, Jarosław district), 4.
[454] *Wiejscy działacze*, i, 146.

Beyond peasantist self-narratives, the hardening of peasant identities was also reflected in the growing drive to "peasantify" rural life and consciousness. For those who partook in this drive, peasantness was transformed from a self-evident, inborn quality into a behavioural ideal. One Siew-affiliated memoirist (b. 1913) even declared that "'being a peasant' is my life's highest goal".[455] During the 1930s this approach became a dominant feature of Wici's cultural programme, which set out to cleanse peasantness from external – particularly feudal and urban – adulterations.[456] In one telling example, the leadership of Krosno district's Wici organisation balked at helping rank and file activists stage plays, despite these activists' entreaties, on account of a lack of "suitable scripts [written] in a purely peasant spirit".[457] This fetishization of peasantness trickled down to the grassroots in various ways. Based on his experience of interwar village life, sociologist Józef Burszta listed, as signs of growing pride in peasant culture, behaviours as varied as "the ostentatious refusal to wear a tie…using patois in conversations with social superiors and avoiding speaking 'like a lord' (in the Lesser Polish countryside such people were severely mocked), maintaining and frequently renewing regional costumes…high esteem for one's own agricultural labour and overworked hands…".[458] The same tendency was also reflected in youth activists' changing literary diet which, in the 1930s, pivoted away from literary classics towards works dealing with the peasantry and its historic oppression.[459] Peasant history, in particular, became an object of

[455] Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, i, 300.
[456] For examples of Wici's interest in peasant authenticity see Lech, *Tradycyjna kultura,* 128-129, 222-223.
[457] APPrze, ZMW RP „Wici" we Lwowie z siedzibą w Gaci, sygn. 38, teczka akt powiat Krosno, letter from Edmund Patera to Władysław Fołta (27.02.1937).
[458] J. Burszta, *Kultura ludowa – kultura narodowa: szkice i rozprawy* (Warsaw, 1974), 294.
[459] S. Jarecka-Kimlowska, *Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej „Wici" 1944-1948* (Warsaw, 1972), 213; A. Zdanowicz, "Czytelnictwo chłopów w okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w świetle materiałów pamiętnikarskich (wybrane zagadnienia)", in H. Czachowski and V. Wróblewska (eds.), *Kultura wsi w egodokumentach* (Toruń, 2016), 181-196.

widespread fascination. By the late 1930s many young peasants clamoured for the incorporation of peasant history into the school curriculum (meanwhile, such calls were notably absent from the memoirs of older peasants).[460]

As with peasantist modes of self-presentation, there was nothing inevitable about this newfound enthusiasm for peasant history and culture. On the contrary, in many ways it ran against the grain of majoritarian cultural preferences. Peasantist literature, for instance, struggled to secure a broader peasant readership beyond activist circles. According to Jan Zamorski, a National Democrat politician long active in promoting rural education through the patriotic Folk School Society (*Towarzystwo Szkoły Ludowej*), literature featuring peasants as protagonists had – contrary to most activists' expectations – failed to pique the curiosity of unaccustomed peasant readers when it first became available in *fin-de-siècle* Galicia.[461] The acclaimed peasant writer Jan Wiktor was similarly sceptical of claims about the alleged popularity of Populist-adjacent writers such as Władysław Orkan and Leon Kruczkowski amongst the rural masses of the 1930s.[462] Peasantist yearnings were, thus, likely overrepresented in rural memoirs, most of which were produced by villages' most educated and politically conscious inhabitants. It is nonetheless significant, especially in the present comparative context, that the Populists' peasantist ideology had the capacity to alter at least some ordinary villagers' identities in a way that is much harder to prove for the Agrarian party in South Bohemia.

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[460] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 382; Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, iv, 126; Leżeński, *Wieś*, 112-123.
[461] J. Zamorski, "Czytelnictwo wiejskie", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/6 (1939), 440-441.
[462] J. Wiktor, "Na marginesie zjazdu i życia", *Wieś: miesięcznik poświęcony zagadnieniom myśli i kultury wiejskiej* (July-August 1934), 24.

The entrenchment of peasantist self-understandings in spite of persistent village hierarchies had much to do with factors already discussed: the emotional appeal of peasantness, the bonding effects of collective immiseration, the SL's various emollient techniques, and comparatively low inequalities within the Populist movement. An additional factor was the movement's political culture: even when they were not explicitly seeking to mitigate inter-peasant tensions, Populist practices fostered spaces of solidarity and equality that served to counterbalance everyday hierarchies.

Some of these spaces could be ephemeral, emerging in connection to specific events centred around the performance of peasant unity. One such example was the 1936 Nowosielce rally. According to a Czechoslovak Embassy cable, as peasants converged on Nowosielce from surrounding districts, they were "greeted [in the villages they passed through] with flowers, singing and mounted groups". Crucially, "more propertied farmers gave horses to poorer ones [and] horses were exchanged to make sure the 'cavalry' would be of one colour".[463]

This display of solidarity between rich and poor was, of course, a singular event and its effects on everyday relations may have only been temporary. Other solidarity-fostering practices, however, were institutionalised on a more permanent basis. The institution most emblematic of this egalitarian re-socialisation were the so-called "folk universities", several of which were established in the 1930s by rival youth groups following the model of the Danish folk high school.[464] The pioneer in this regard – the folk

[463] AZHRL, SL-59, 2.07.1936 cable from the Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
[464] W. Jamrożek, "Uniwersytety Ludowe w II Rzeczypospolitej (Zarys Problemu)", *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana* 19/2 (2016), 193-209.

university in Szyce (later moved to Gać Przeworska), run under the auspices of the Wici-affiliated Solarz couple – had as its stated goal to cultivate the "folk mass' ability to realise a mature, highly ethical, capable democracy".[465] Nurturing egalitarian social habits was a crucial part of this process. Indeed, visiting or attending folk universities often gave young peasants a transformative opportunity to experience new social dynamics. Upon making a much-anticipated pilgrimage to Gać Przeworska in 1934, the Wici member Alojzy Dziaduś was struck by the absence of "what one might call social forms"; instead, he encountered "a familial atmosphere…an intimacy, something that reminded us of our unity of goals: to free ourselves from the oppression and influence of the mighty".[466] For Stanisław Piotrowski (b. 1911), an attendee of the Tywonia folk university that was broadly affiliated with the pro-governmental Green Shirts, the university experience offered a dramatic contrast to the hierarchies of village life. Upon arrival in Tywonia, Piotrowski was astounded to discover that the people who had greeted him and whom he had taken, based on their dress and demeanour, for servants were actually educators: "At first I stood in a panic not wanting to believe my own eyes, for I had never encountered such genuine democracy in my life". Over the next two months the university experience converted him from "a 100% fascist" into "a democrat".[467]

Attendance at such universities was, of course, a minority experience in interwar Poland. Nevertheless, the same norms that were most intensively cultivated in places like Gać

[465] B. Domagała, "Ignacy Solarz i jego uniwersytety ludowe", in Paruch and Wójcik, *Pokolenia*, 231-232.
[466] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 18.
[467] In describing himself as a former fascist, Piotrowski was likely adopting a pejorative political category used by the peasant movement against its nationalist and pro-governmental rivals rather than invoking his own past identity. Warsaw, Gabinet Rękopisów Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (hereinafter GRBUW), Życiorysy wychowanków Uniwersytetu Ludowego w Tywonii k/ Jarosława, sygn. 1814, życiorys 35/3, S. Piotrowski (Chłopczyce, pow. Rudki), 242.

Przeworska radiated out into the broader countryside through the Wici movement (as well as its pro-governmental rivals) and its infrastructure of local chapters, newspapers and educational activities. Spreading the "democratic" gospel upon his return to his native village, Piotrowski found that "in my conversations [with them] backward people would concede I was right – only the headmaster considers me a 'communist', because I don't want to accept land reform with…compensation [for landowners]".[468] Meanwhile, in 1936 the Siedleczka Wici circle held a discussion about an article from a radical Wici monthly titled "The housewife and the servant", during which various participants bemoaned the disparity between Populist calls for "democracy" and the persistence of domestic hierarchies. Overall, the consensus was overwhelmingly on the side of servants' emancipation and against "gentry in the home".[469] Such examples point to how youth movements' educational practices helped establish deeper attachments to everyday "democracy", thereby reducing the force of village hierarchies – if not in village life at large, then certainly in the Populist subculture.

The credibility of peasantism, at least in the eyes of those towards the bottom of village hierarchies, was also enhanced by the symbolic and, increasingly, real leverage possessed by poorer peasants within the Populist movement, especially when compared to the poor in the Czechoslovak Agrarian party. In Czechoslovakia the institutional separation between Domovina and the Agrarians served not only to protect the interests of Domovina but also, whether intentionally or not, to shield the party itself from domination by smaller farmers. In Galicia the lack of such an institutional division,

[468]Ibid.
[469] AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 31.04.1936 [sic] entry.

combined with a social structure more heavily skewed against wealthy peasants, meant that poorer peasants could, in some cases, more readily impose themselves and their interests on party cells. There is sporadic evidence that this ability was boosted by the long-term downward levelling processes discussed earlier. In Wola Dalsza the centre of political gravity shifted away from wealthy peasants as their socioeconomic power declined. In the early 1930s Wola Dalsza's large peasants were, for instance, forced to accept a compromise mayor – a large peasant's son who had married into a poor family, lived in the paupers' neighbourhood and was active in Wici – thereby abdicating their erstwhile stranglehold over this office.[470] The uptick in direct action during the 1930s also likely improved the status of the poor within SL structures, given their higher rates of participation in such events[471] as well as the symbolic importance that direct action assumed in Populist martyrological narratives.[472] Indeed, in some instances, the poorer or simply more radical peasants' increased power to set the tone of local SL politics was sufficiently alienating as to provoke more landed or conservative smallholders to leave the movement altogether. This was the case in Żmiąca (Limanowa district) where, following reprisals against the property of those who failed to respect the 1937 peasant strike, "the most serious farmers" abandoned the SL.[473]

In symbolic terms, too, poorer peasants occupied a *relatively* privileged position in Populist discourse. Unlike Czech cottagers whose status as "agriculturalists" was

[470] Grad, *Dzieje*, 76.
[471] Amongst the 261 men investigated for participation in the unrest of mid-1933, for instance, 15% were landless and the remainder overwhelmingly dwarf or small farmers. Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza*, 398. For another example of the presumed correlation between semi-proletarianization and restiveness, see J. Borkowski, "Sprawa strajku chłopskiego w 1938 roku", *RDRL*, 5 (1963), 314.
[472] Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza*, 229-230.
[473] M. Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród: Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Toruń, 2012), 340.

occasionally open to question, poor peasants could partake fully in the SL's most prestigious social category. At times, it even appeared as if they were its most important representatives. Efforts to cast the poor, even landless, peasant as the prototype of the peasant category had already been undertaken in the early interwar period by radical peasantist and socialist actors.[474] In the 1930s, meanwhile, there are various signs that, at least at the rhetorical level, poorer peasants' interests were prioritised over those of the rich within the SL mainstream. In an otherwise moderate speech that stressed the peasantry's nationalist and anti-communist credentials, the deputy chairman for the Brzozów district SL, Antoni Kocaj, defended the SL's policy of uncompensated land reform by explicitly invoking the interests of the village poor: if peasants had to pay for estate land, "only wealthier farmers could benefit from it".[475] Similarly, in 1937 a national Populist newspaper printed an article penned by the leadership of the SL chapter in Markowa (Przeworsk district) in which Markowa's "wealthy villagers" [*bogacze*] were excoriated for showing a lack of "class solidarity" and buying land at an exorbitant price off the local Lubomirski estate, thereby "leaving nothing for the truly needy" – the land-poor villagers who could not afford such prices. Villagers who behaved this way, the article claimed, frequently transformed into "new landowner[s]…new parasite[s] feeding off others, determined enem[ies] of democracy".[476] In unsparingly condemning the interests of wealthy villagers, framing them as a new nobility and defining class solidarity in a manner that uncompromisingly favoured the poor, this article adopted positions and

[474] E.g., Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 210.
[475] APPrze, St.P. Brzozów, sygn. 5, Miesięczne sprawozdania ze stanu bezpieczeństwa, meldunek nr. 206 (11-12.09.1938), 25.
[476] "Na marginesie reformy rolnej", *Zielony Sztandar* (23.05.1937).

discursive frames that, in a Czechoslovak context, would have more closely resembled those of the Agrarians' opponents than of the Agrarians.

For all this rhetorical and material accommodation, a section of the Galician rural poor remained sceptical of the peasant unity represented by the SL. According to Grad, in the eyes of Wola Dalsza's paupers, the Nowosielce rally – that great performance of peasant unity – served primarily to affirm the gap between Populist ideals and de facto social distinctions. The narrative that gained most currency amongst the poor was that: "the paupers went to Nowosielce on foot, wearing sackcloth and with a crust of dry bread, whilst the rich peasants went on carts, gobbling down sausage". "When the price of wheat jumped up not long after Nowosielce," Grad added, "the paupers would sneer: 'you see, some people managed to get something out of it'".[477] The anti-kulak political context in which Grad wrote his account might incline us to view this story with scepticism; it is, however, unlikely to have been a complete invention. Uncannily similar remarks were, for instance, reported amongst Grodzisko's paupers in Burszta's *pre-war* village monograph. One Grodzisko pauper echoed the view, intimated by Wola Dalsza's poor, that attitudes to grain prices were a fundamental fault-line between different village strata, observing how: "if the lords are not in power, then the peasants will come and make things even worse for the paupers, because the peasants will make it so that grain will be expensive…".[478] Further clues suggesting Grad was faithful in recording paupers' attitudes can be found in his private correspondence with fellow villager, Jan Stryczek. Following the publication of Grad's monograph, Stryczek reported to him one

[477] Grad, *Dzieje*, 121.
[478] Burszta, *Wieś*, 146.

villager's complaint that "you [i.e. Grad] took the side of the paupers and collected your information from those who lived in the paupers' neighbourhood and who…were hostile towards [the SL]…".[479] That the complaint centred on the biases of Grad's sources rather than the accuracy of his representation suggests the paupers' alienation from the SL did not come as a surprise to Grad's readers in Wola Dalsza. Grad's representation of a pauper stratum hostile to the SL was, thus, unlikely to be a mere reflex of Stalinist ideology.

Given the paucity of sources produced by the rural poor, it is difficult to assess the scale of such sentiments. Compared to the anti-Agrarian impulses registered in South Bohemia, however, such dissent was unlikely to represent a threat to the SL. The demographic that Grad and Burszta referred to was much slimmer than the stratum of workers, cottagers and small peasants who made up the left's electorate in rural South Bohemia. In contrast to the Bohemian cottager class – a fuzzy category that included smallholders with up to several hectares of land – the term "pauper" (*dziad*) was, in Wola Dalsza and Grodzisko, reserved for the much narrower group of landless and near-landless villagers. The embittered rejections of peasant unity cited by Grad and Burszta, thus, came from the absolute margins of rural society rather than a key electoral demographic. Such landless villagers were, by various accounts, the most demobilised and atomised group in village society.[480] Even if their political behaviours differed from those of propertied villagers,[481] organised challenges to the Populist movement were

[479] Warsaw, Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego (hereinafter MHPRL), sygn. AN-2156-2158.
[480] E.g., Burszta, *Wieś*, 96, 114-119, 146; Grad, *Dzieje*, 64; Leżeński, *Wieś*, 42, 142.
[481] Besides displaying lower rates of political activity, the landless – owing to their greater dependency on the wealthy – were also, in some instances, more likely to vote in line with the preferences of local landowners. Borkowski, *Postawa*, 39. This is in line with Eric Wolf's theory of the political behaviour of landless villagers. E.R. Wolf, "On Peasant Rebellions", in Shanin, *Peasants*, 268.

unlikely to emerge from these quarters. Their weakness was reinforced by the fact that, in a largely non-industrial region such as Central Galicia where Socialists did not have a rural foothold, the landless or semi-landless lacked an alternative non-peasantist pole of political attraction. The path of radicalism led, instead, through the left flank of the Populist movement or the illegal Communist movement, which in Central Galicia frequently overlapped with the SL in rural areas. These constraints were articulated by Stryczek who, after commenting on the disparity of goals and interests exposed during the march to Nowosielce, rhetorically asked: "but where were [these poor peasants] meant to go? After all, the wealthy were in charge everywhere and no one cared about the poor".[482] Stryczek's own political behaviour testified to these constraints: for all his criticisms of the Populist movement and the wealthy peasants within it, he was himself a leading member of his village's SL chapter; moreover, in the mid-1950s he wrote his memoir largely to defend the Populist movement against Communist depreciation of its heritage.[483]

Just as the scepticism of the village poor did not damage the Populist movement, so its credibility was not seriously undermined by the unwillingness of some peasants to take part in village-wide direct action. Far more remarkable than the fact of strike-breaking was the aggressive response – ranging from social ostracism to violent reprisals – it elicited from members of the peasant movement. The strike-breakers who fell victim to such sanctions were often drawn from amongst the village rich. That their socioeconomic capital failed to protect them is revealing both of their dwindling ability

[482] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1957), 331-332.
[483] Grad, *Szkice*, 94-98.

to influence village life and of the intensity of community-wide outrage that strike-breaking inspired. In Wola Dalsza, for instance, Stryczek reported how "those few villagers" who broke the solidarity of the 1937 timber carters' strike "were boycotted by the village and treated with contempt…".[484] His claim was supported by the minutes book of Wola Dalsza's SL chapter which fulminated against the strike-breakers, declaring them "the disgrace of our village", listing them by name and reporting how all motions to ostracise them socially and economically were passed.[485] Whilst exposing intra-village disunity, strike-breaking – or, rather, the response it elicited – thus also demonstrated the power of peasant unity as a normative ideal.

In sum, peasantness – already a powerful source of identity – acquired new intensity in many villagers' self-understandings during the 1930s. Whilst undoubtedly spurred by the peasants' shared experience of immiseration, in a more proximate sense growing enthusiasm for peasantness resulted from the Populist movement's efforts to promote group consciousness and solidarity and to create spaces for their enactment. Though class-based tensions persisted and the poorest villagers were sometimes sceptical of peasant unity, poor peasants' symbolic and material power notably increased in the Populist movement of the 1930s. Unlike in South Bohemia where the left and its language of class presented an alternative to the Agrarians' estate-based identity, in Galicia there was no class-based alternative to peasantness and the radicalism of poor peasants was predominantly channelled into the Populist movement. This was, of course, facilitated by the relative weakness of Galicia's wealthy peasantry compared to its Bohemian

[484] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1984), 273.
[485] MHPRL, sygn. 5905, Książka protokułu Stronnictwa Ludowego w Woli Wielkiej, 17.02.1937 entry.

counterpart which, in turn, retained a dominant position in Agrarian party structures. As a result, insofar as SL moderates had to worry, it was more about a left *within* than a left *without*. For Agrarian elites it was the reverse: though the rural left was weakened after 1921, the Agrarians' poorer clientele always had one foot out of the party. Lacking a social identity powerful enough to dissolve identities based on class, the Agrarians were compelled to compensate by deepening the opposition between "agriculturalists" and their Others and thereby hardening the external boundaries of the "agriculturalist" identity. How this was achieved is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Agrarian Populism and its Others

This chapter is about the "constitutive Others"[486] against whom agrarian populist movements defined themselves and directed their hostility. It will discuss how for each movement different antagonists came to the fore during the interwar period; how much these antagonisms stemmed from historical legacies or, conversely, contemporary conflicts in socio-political life; what the primacy of certain antagonisms revealed about the constraints and agendas of each movement; how far discourses about antagonists were top-down or bottom-up in origin; and whether they succeeded in penetrating rural mentalities and reinforcing villagers' allegiance to their parties. Its focus is on agrarian populism's relationship to two major social Others: landowners and "the city", with a particular focus on the urban working class. Anti-nobilism and anti-urbanism, in both its anti-socialist and anti-bourgeois varieties, were present in all agrarian populist movements in East-Central Europe. Here, it will be argued that in interwar Poland and Czechoslovakia these antagonisms assumed different intensities and targets. While the peasant vs manor conflict tended to subside in the rural life of both countries, anti-nobilism retained and even increased its centrality to the Populists' political identity as well as their critique of 1930s Poland. By contrast, the Agrarians not only pursued a rapprochement with landowners but repurposed anti-seigneurial language as a rhetorical frame aimed at their principal interwar adversary: the socialist left. Indeed, during the interwar period anti-socialism became the dominant strand in Agrarian anti-

[486] S. Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", in S. Hall and P. Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, 1996), 1-17.

urbanism. Though rooted in the structural conflict between Agrarian and socialist visions of state policy, this centrality also bespoke the usefulness of anti-socialism at mobilising and defining the Agrarian coalition as well as obscuring its internal stratification. By contrast, though anti-urbanism was central to Populist identity-building in the 1930s, the Populists made a deliberate exception for the urban working class, which they increasingly viewed as a political ally. This stemmed from more than purely party-political interest. Rather, widespread semi-proletarianization in rural Galicia generated an affective affinity with the working class that translated into a growing stylistic and partially ideological convergence with socialism.

Inevitably, limiting this chapter to only two social Others is an act of simplification that erases other important relationships. Chief amongst these was the Populists' relationship with Jews, a sizeable minority in interwar Poland with a historically vital "middleman" role in its rural economy. Alongside the nobility, Jews were one of the two traditional Others of Polish peasant society and, with the rise of mass nationalism in the late 19th century, came to be viewed as a major national-economic antagonist of the peasants.[487] Anti-Jewish attitudes were widespread amongst interwar peasants and Populists.[488] Nevertheless, whilst discursively central to right-leaning strands of peasant politics, most notably Father Stojałowski's Christian-Social movement in the 1890s and PSL Piast after 1913, anti-Semitism was secondary in the discourse of the peasant left and visibly lost salience with Populism's broader leftward turn in the 1930s.[489] Whilst

[487] E.g., K. Struve, "Gentry, Jews, and Peasants: Jews as Others in the Formation of the Modern Polish Nation in Rural Galicia during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", in N. Wingfield (ed.), *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (New York, 2003), 103-126.
[488] E.g., Borkowski, *Postawa*, 348-349.
[489] K. Struve, "Die Juden in der Sicht der polnischen Bauernparteien vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1939", *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 48 (1999), 184-225.

somewhat indirectly advocating for the economic marginalisation of Jews through the cooperativization of trade, the Populist movement distanced itself from the increasingly violent anti-Semitism of the nationalist right – frequently even at the local level.[490] Even though Central Galicia had been rocked by anti-Jewish riots in 1898,[491] anti-Semitic excesses were largely avoided, for both tactical and ideological reasons, during the peasant unrest of the 1930s.[492] Thus, in the 1930s anti-Semitism was present within but not the driving force behind Populist politics. Also militating against the inclusion of anti-Semitism in this chapter was its peripheral role in interwar rural Bohemia. Provincial Bohemia witnessed bouts of anti-Semitic violence in the 19th century[493] as well as after 1918[494] and anti-Semitism undoubtedly featured in Agrarian politics, sharing with its Populist analogue a focus on expelling Jews from "middleman" positions in rural trade.[495] Nevertheless, whilst warranting further research, anti-Semitism was not a *decisive* theme in Bohemian rural life or Agrarian politics during the interwar period.

Other crucial relationships, including agrarian populists' ambivalent attitude towards the Catholic Church and non-Jewish national minorities, have also been omitted. Despite their importance, these antagonisms were, similarly, not decisive in the

[490] AZHRL, RM/I-29, Brzoza Królewska (gmina Leżajsk) – księga protokołów ZMW, 1934-1947 (hereinafter Brzoza Królewska), 28.11.1937 entry; AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 20.07.1936 entry.
[491] D. Unowsky, "Peasant Political Mobilization and the 1898 anti-Jewish Riots in Western Galicia", *European History Quarterly*, 40/3 (2010), 412-435.
[492] E.g., S. Mańko, *Polski ruch ludowy wobec Żydów (1895-1939)* (Warsaw, 2010), 377-378; AZHRL, SL-57, Kraków KPP Central Committee report (1.05.1933-15.06.1933), 4.
[493] M. Frankl, "'Silver!' Anti-Jewish Riots in Bohemia, 1866", *Judaica Bohemiae*, 45/1 (2010), 5-34.
[494] O. Konrád, "Two Post-war Paths: Popular Violence in the Bohemian Lands and in Austria in the Aftermath of World War I", *Nationalities Papers* 46/5 (2018), 768.
[495] M. Frankl and M. Szabó, *Budování státu bez antisemitismu?: Násilí, diskurz loajality a vznik Československa* (Prague, 2015), 144-154.

constitution of agrarian populists' identities as movements of the "peasant class" and "agricultural estate" – the process at the heart of this chapter.

i. "Lords" as the Galician Peasants' Enduring Other

The lord-peasant distinction was a central schema in how Polish peasants organised their mental world well into the 20th century.[496] That which was alien was frequently categorised as "lordlike": innovations were often rejected on these grounds. Hierarchies amongst peasants were, in turn, modelled on the lord-peasant relationship.[497] Whilst the "lord" category was elastic, at times expanding to encompass all village out607siders, its prototypical representatives were the landowners who continued to dominate Galician politics throughout the late Habsburg period and who in 1918 owned two fifths of the land. Mistrust was the predominant element in most peasants' attitudes towards the "lords". In part, this mistrust was historical in origin, rooted in the memory of serfdom that peasants assiduously cultivated. Stories of feudal injustice remained popular long after the abolition of serf labour in 1848.[498] By keeping the historical trauma of serfdom alive, such memory practices nourished the fears of re-enserfment that continued to provoke periodic panics in the late 19th- and early 20th-century Galician countryside.[499]

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[496] Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, i, 68-73; A. Engelking, "Between the Lord and the Jew: Some Remarks on the Identity Structure of Belarusian Kolkhozniks in the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 109 (2014), 81-108.
[497] Czarnowski, "Podłoże", 171-172; Bronikowski, *Drogi*, 178-181; Burszta, *Wieś,* 150-151.
[498] E.g., Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (1981), 85.
[499] L. George, "Rumours of Re-Enserfment, Anti-Feudal Identities and 'Folk Periodization': The Memory of Serfdom in Early 20th-Century Galicia", in L. George and J. McGlynn (eds.), *Rethinking Period Boundaries: New Approaches to Continuity and Discontinuity in Modern European History and Culture* (Berlin, 2022), 60-71.

Anti-seigneurial attitudes after 1848 were also reinforced by another more taboo current of peasant memory focusing on resistance to serfdom.[500] In much of Western Galicia the centrepiece of this tradition was the bloody events of 1846, when an attempted national uprising against Austrian rule, led by patriotically minded nobles, was thwarted by a counter-revolutionary peasant jacquerie. Animated by hatred for the lords and loyalty to the Austrian imperial regime, Galician peasants plundered over 400 manors and slaughtered around 1200 landowners, estate officials and clergymen.[501] The 1846 jacquerie left a long-lasting scar on elite national consciousness, entrenching mistrust towards popular emancipation. Its associations in peasant memory were, unsurprisingly, altogether different. The transformation of the jacquerie's leader Jakub Szela into a folk hero is, for instance, widely attested.[502] Multiple songs extolling the massacres survived into the 20th century, at times providing a chilling script for moments of confrontation with non-peasant society. On an expedition to a Galician village in the late 1930s, one ethnographer was taunted by village lads who had gathered outside her window with the chant: "Do you remember, oh lord, the year of forty-six,/ When for Carnival the peasants beat you with sticks?"[503]

Historical traumas were not the only source of lingering popular anti-seigneurialism. After the abolition of serfdom economic antagonism between landowners and peasants did not fully disappear. Conflicts over peasants' grazing and foraging rights on manorial land persisted in many locations in the years and decades after emancipation. Usually,

[500] For evidence of its taboo nature Sieradzki and Wycech, *Rok 1846,* 367.
[501] S. Kieniewicz, *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago, 1969), 122.
[502] Sieradzki and Wycech, *Rok 1846,* 367-382.
[503] "Pamiętos ty panie rok śtyrdziesty szósty/ Jak cię chłopy biły kijami w zapusty?" Cited in K. Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Społeczność wiejska: wspomnienia i materiały z badań terenowych: Zaborów 1937-38* (Warsaw, 1958), 31–32.

they were resolved in the estates' favour, producing long-lasting claims to estate land amongst much of the peasantry.[504] Contact with the manor was also guaranteed by mounting rural overpopulation, which made many villagers depend on seasonal labour opportunities offered by the estates – especially during economic downturns when work was scarce elsewhere. The loss of automatic grazing rights also forced some peasants to work for landed estates in exchange for access to manorial pastureland, frequently on highly disadvantageous terms. In some less developed areas where credit societies were never established, debt peonage became entrenched.[505] At times estates resorted to openly coercive stratagems, such as confiscating trespassing peasant livestock and demanding punitive labour in exchange for its release, in order to squeeze as much unpaid work out of the peasantry as possible.[506] Abuses such as these, low pay and the often fuzzy boundary between free and unfree labour within the manorial economy encouraged various political actors periodically to decry the estates for perpetuating "serfdom" – accusations that flourished throughout the interwar period.[507]

At the same time, landowner-peasant relations did not consist exclusively of antagonism in the early 20th century. At the macro-political level, Galician landowning circles had already partially reconciled themselves to the Populist movement's separate existence, right to a parliamentary presence and potential as a coalition partner in the early

[504] The ubiquity of such claims was commented on by Leżeński, *Wieś*, 140-141.
[505] E.g., AZHRL, Walki i Strajki Chłopskie (hereinafter WSC), Relacje 8 (hereinafter R-8), Interview with Michał Kusz.
[506] E.g., Fr. B. Janik and S. Orłowski (eds), *Myczkowce nad Sanem w Bieszczadach* (Rzeszów, 2009), 36.
[507] E.g., "Pańszczyzna stara i nowa", *Wyzwolenie* (9.07.1933); *Wiek Nowy* (12.07.1936), 10; Wichmanowski, "Niezapomniane krzywdy",134.

1900s.[508] Loud hostility on one plane could conceal cooperation on others. The vociferously anti-nobilist rhetoric of early Populist leader Jan Stapiński did not stop him from pursuing a political alliance with landowning conservatives on the grounds of national interest after the 1907 Reichsrat elections.[509] At the more local level, landowners' patronage was at times solicited even by radical peasant associations.[510]

More important than such sporadic instances of cooperation was the fact that landowner-peasant contact tended progressively to decline in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Migration opportunities that appeared from the 1880s diminished the economic dependency of the excess rural population on landed estates. After 1900 economic contact between landowners and peasants was further reduced, as estates sold off vast tracts of ploughland to the peasants, thereby changing the landholding structure in the latter's favour.[511] Despite the inadequacy and slow pace of land reform, this trend continued throughout the interwar period, during which Polish estates lost over 20% of their land.[512] In this context of diminishing economic interaction, anti-seigneurial attitudes could easily lose salience. Of the 61 peasant memoirs published by the Institute for Social Economy in 1935 only seven articulated (generally soft) criticisms of landowners: as the economist and former prime minister Władysław Grabski observed in his analysis of the memoirs, grievances against landowners were overshadowed by complaints about priests and teachers. On this basis Grabski concluded that "the manor

[508] T. Kargol, "Czy chłopi mogą pełnić mandat poselski? Spór konserwatystów z ludowcami o miejsce chłopów w systemie parlamentarnym Galicji na przełomie XIX i XX wieku", in A. Kołodziejczyk and W. Paruch (eds.), *Dzieje i przyszłość polskiego ruchu ludowego* (2 vols, Warsaw, 2002), i, 39-46.
[509] A. Garlicki, *Powstanie Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego-Piast, 1913-1914* (Warsaw, 1966), 15-16.
[510] E.g., AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 48-49.
[511] Mieszczankowski, *Rolnictwo*, 23.
[512] Idem, 85.

truly no longer plays a dominant role in the life of the Polish countryside…whereas the common folk has lost its former tendency of blaming it for all its ills".[513] Grabski's was not an isolated voice. Various Populist-adjacent intellectuals distanced themselves from gripes about landowners' enduring socio-cultural power on the grounds that they did not correspond to the reality of the 1930s countryside.[514] Less disinterestedly, conservative landowning circles in the late 1930s – fearing a revival of land reform initiatives – frequently denied the rationality and scale of anti-seigneurial attitudes amongst the peasantry, insisting that such attitudes were nothing but dwindling relics of the past, artificially kept alive by radical agitators.[515]

Whilst landowner-peasant contact diminished, optimistic assessments such as these relied on wishful thinking. That anti-seigneurial attitudes lost salience did not mean they disappeared. Despite his optimistic words, Grabski warned against assuming that "the village's hostility to the manor is a fact of the past".[516] The Catholic author Jur Leżeński similarly considered the thinking of many landowners who dismissed "prejudices against the manor as…hangovers of seigneurial traditions" as "optimistic delusions". The root of such delusions was understandable. As Leżeński acknowledged, everyday contact between the village and the manor was extremely limited and, thus, provided little direct fuel for antagonism. The drivers of hostility were, instead, more indirect in nature:

[513] W. Grabski, *Pamiętniki chłopów i środowisko społeczne wsi polskiej* (Warsaw, 1936), 31-32.
[514] Pigoń, *Na drogach i manowcach*, 112-113; Z. Stieber, "Pogadajmy…Prosimy o konkretne wskazówki!", *Wieś*, 1/3 (1934), 12-13.
[515] E.g., Leżeński, *Wieś*, 140-141; Wojtas, *Problematyka*, 49-55; K. Pruszyński, "Przytyk and the Market Stall", *Polin*, 17 (2004), 404-409.
[516] Grabski, *Pamiętniki*, 31-32.

historical memory of abuses, on the one hand, and simmering claims to estate land (often bolstered by historical memory of past usurpations), on the other.[517]

Furthermore, waning economic contact between landowners and peasants did not invariably diminish the salience of hostile attitudes. In the estimation of sociologist Stefan Czarnowski, declining employment opportunities in the estate economy actually exacerbated antagonism towards landowners amongst work-starved villagers in the interwar period.[518] Even without experiences of direct conflict, resentments towards the manor could arise as organic responses to inequalities in landownership and life chances. For instance, one memoirist from Rzeszów district (b. 1910) recalled, in the 1970s, the sudden sense of regret and "hatred" she felt as a child when, whilst out working barefoot in the meadows, she saw the well-dressed and well-shod "children of the count" playing with a ball – an object she had never seen before.[519]

The declining salience of anti-seigneurial attitudes was also significantly counteracted through the political sphere. Anti-nobilism was a prominent feature of Populist politics right from the movement's beginning.[520] In the interwar period this was particularly true of the movement's left flank whose demands for land reform were the most radical and uncompromising. Both historical and present-day injustices perpetrated by landowners were invoked frequently by the peasant left as a defining feature of peasantness.[521] Historical injustices were also instrumentalised to embolden *contemporary* political

[517] Leżeński, *Wieś*, 140-141.
[518] Czarnowski, "Podłoże", 182.
[519] F. Jakubczak (ed.), *Być w środku życia* (Warsaw, 1976), 191.
[520] E.g., A. Wójcik, "W walce z patronatem dworu i plebanii. Ziemianie na łamach „Przyjaciela Ludu" (1889-1914)", in Maj and Mich, *Anachroniczna kasta*, 97-112.
[521] J. Dąbski, *Ideologia chłopska* (Warsaw, 1929), 6.

claims against landowners and their perceived social allies. In a typical example, one Peasant Party politician argued that landowners did not need to be compensated for confiscated land for – since the 16th century – "land [...] had been stolen from the peasants by the nobility without any compensation".[522] At an anti-government rally in the early 1930s, another political activist interwove his demands with the story of a peasant who, after marrying without his lord's consent, was buried alive alongside his spouse, such that the vow of not severing their marital bond that the lord had made to the priest would still be honoured.[523]

Such was the political appeal of anti-nobilist language that it was increasingly mobilised by diverse interwar actors as a delegitimising tactic against new, non-noble adversaries. On the right of the Populist movement and the political spectrum more broadly, the left was the primary target of this reworked anti-nobilist rhetoric. In the 1920s PSL Piast frequently conflated its left-wing adversaries with the landowning class. Socialists' support for the 1926 May Coup, which had culminated in a strengthening of landowners' political leverage, was offered as proof that they were no more than conservative landowners' rebellious kinsmen.[524] The 1928 election victory of the *Sanacja* camp, in turn, was framed by *Piast* as a dual victory for "nobilism" and the proletariat who would now conspire together to shift the tax burden onto peasant "capitalists".[525] On the left of the Populist movement, by contrast, anti-nobilist rhetoric was employed in the struggle

[522] J. Dąbski, "Reforma rolna bez odszkodowania", *Gazeta Chłopska* (5.06.1927), 4-5. For other examples see Wojtas, *Problematyka agrarna*, 275-276.
[523] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13859, J. Kula, "Walki grodziskie w r. 1933", 8. Given this recollection was written after the war, it is possible the anti-feudalism of the original speech was embellished to ingratiate the author with the Communist authorities.
[524] Wichmanowski, "Niezapomniane krzywdy", 144.
[525] *Piast* (18.03.1928), 1.

against the Roman Catholic clergy, the most vehement adversary of the peasant left in many villages. To discredit clerical attacks in the 1930s, Wici frequently drew attention to the clergy's material and ideological involvement in the seigneurial system.[526]

More broadly, associating political opponents with serfdom or even accusing them of planning its reinstatement became routine techniques of delegitimization across the political spectrum. On the right, painting various leftist visions of collectivist living and agriculture as "new serfdom" was par for the course in the interwar period.[527] Accusations of "political serfdom" – code for authoritarianism – were, in turn, frequently levelled against the *Sanacja* government and its auxiliary organisations by the SL.[528]

To some extent the semantic loosening of anti-nobilist language confirmed the time-lag between anti-seigneurial feeling and interwar political reality: whilst anti-seigneurial feeling remained potent, the main axes of political conflict no longer had much to do with landowner-peasant tensions. Nevertheless, the Populist movement maintained its conviction that the landowning nobility remained a real and formidable adversary. After the 1926 May Coup this conviction was, in fact, considerably strengthened. Determined to prevent a social revolution,[529] the *Sanacja* regime quickly set about cajoling various social elites, including the landowning class, most of which had supported nationalist and conservative parties before 1926. In October Piłsudski undertook a much-discussed trip to Nieśwież, the residence of the Radziwiłł magnate family, to woo landowners to the

[526] E.g., Kołodziejczyk, *Ruch*, 443.
[527] E.g., "Rosja sowiecka przywróciła pańszczyznę", *Gazeta Grudziądzka* (10.03.1936).
[528] B. Jakubowska, *Ruch ludowy wobec przeszłości narodowej (do 1939 r.)* (Warsaw, 1995), 118.
[529] T. Kulak, "Rewolucja bez rewolucyjnych konsekwencji: o taktyce wyciszania społecznych skutków zamachu po maju 1926 roku", in M. Sioma (ed.), *Zamach stanu Józefa Piłsudskiego 1926 roku* (Lublin, 2007), 349-359.

new government; a few days later conservative landowners were appointed to the ministries of justice and agriculture whilst commitments to land reform were progressively watered down.[530]

The restoration of landowners' political leverage, combined with the *Sanacja* regime's increasingly authoritarian flavour, nourished Populist fears of a return to seigneurial hierarchies. Even the Populist right – hitherto measured in its anti-seigneurialism – began adopting a more strident anti-landowner rhetoric in the late 1920s.[531] The central concept used to articulate these fears was "nobilism" (*szlachetczyzna*). Though already present in earlier critiques of the Galician social order,[532] the concept took on a new lease of life in the late 1920s and 1930s. In interwar Populist parlance nobilism referred to something more diffuse than landowners' politico-economic power. Leading Populist intellectual Stanisław Miłkowski characterised it as "an ideology rooted in noble [i.e. pre-Partition] Poland", a hierarchical spirit that continued to permeate the culture of Polish elites and win over parvenus from different social strata. In Miłkowski's argument, in the years after 1926 the ascendancy of "landowners, capitalist circles and the upper bureaucracy" had led to the rebirth of nobilism – a process that reached its culmination with the anti-democratic 1935 constitution, a document whose "spirit…is nobilist through and through".[533]

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[530] W. Władyka, *Działalność polityczna polskich stronnictw konserwatywnych latach 1926-1935* (Wrocław, 1977), 85.
[531] Szaflik, *PSL Piast*, 204; Wichmanowski, "Niezapomniane krzywdy", 123.
[532] E.g, I. Daszyński, *Szlachetczyzna a odrodzenie Galicji* (Lwów, 1899).
[533] S. Miłkowski, *Walka o nową Polskę* (Warsaw, 1936), 7-8. Also see Z. Śliwka, "Szlachta w międzywojennej prozie chłopskiej", in W. Caban and M.B. Markowski (eds.), *Wieś a dwór na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku* (Kielce, 1999), 374.

The Populist movement's renewed fear of nobilism dovetailed with a hardening of its anti-seigneurial attitude during the 1930s. In 1935 the uncompensated expropriation of all landed estates – a policy previously limited to the Populist left – became official policy for the entire SL.[534] Even though direct peasant-landowner tensions tended to subside, the Populist press was careful to highlight indirect conflicts of interest and to ensure, through its framing of economic grievances, that a sense of conflict with the manor was maintained. A standard moral-economic frame sought to expose how resources essential for peasant subsistence were allocated through the workings of the state or industrial cartels to landowners. The sugar processing industry, for instance, was portrayed as favouring "the horses…of nobles, counts and various princes" over peasant children when it provided sugar at discounted rates to producers of horse feed.[535] Another recurring grievance concerned the unequal tax burden between landowners and peasants, as well as the fact that landowners were able to get away with far greater arrears.[536] This inequality was occasionally invoked – as in the spring of 1935 – by SL politicians to justify calls for the non-payment of taxes.[537]

Anti-seigneurial themes were also foregrounded through Wici's efforts to foster peasant pride and culture. Historical injustices were a central theme in the new peasantist literature promoted by the youth movement in the 1930s. In 1935 a series of articles by the veteran Populist Tomasz Nocznicki was reprinted as a booklet entitled *What Peasants Ought to Know about Serfdom*; the preface stated that this was in direct

[534] Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 315.
[535] "Cukier krzepi", *Wici* (22.09.1935), 6
[536] E.g., Wichmanowski, "Niezapomniane krzywdy", 138-139.
[537] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 231.

response to the "great interest in the peasants' history in Poland" that had begun to manifest itself "amongst the more enlightened peasants".[538] Meanwhile, the author Leon Kruczkowski, whose bestselling novel "Kordian and the Boor" [*Kordian i cham*] (1932) gave a searing portrayal of the deep social oppression that prevailed in the early 19th century, achieved semi-celebrity status in some Wici circles.[539] Also widely read was Aleksander Świętochowski's "History of the Polish Peasants" [*Historia chłopów polskich*] (1925),[540] described by Nocznicki as "a terrible indictment of the Polish nobility for the crimes it committed against the peasants for around 600 years".[541]

The anti-seigneurial subculture of the Populist movement drew on but also reshaped popular anti-seigneurialism. It was often amongst memoirists who fell within the Populist orbit that anti-seigneurialism – mostly peripheral to interwar peasant memoirs – was most apparent. At times, the influence of Populist tropes was unmistakable. A case in point is the 1935 memoir of Andrzej Postrożny, a 61-year-old sympathiser of PSL Piast and, later, the SL. In an obvious echo of right-Populist anti-socialist discourse, Postrożny characterised the May Coup as the work of "socialists and other fans of serfdom". The *Sanacja* regime, in turn, was lambasted as "a government of gentry fascists" in line with the anti-nobilist critique developed by the SL in the 1930s.[542] The political nature of Postrożny's anti-seigneurialism was even more striking given the total absence of antagonism towards the manor in his account of rural life.

[538]T. Nocznicki, *Co chłopi powinni o pańszczyźnie wiedzieć* (Warsaw, 1935), 2.
[539] Zdanowicz, "Czytelnictwo", 189.
[540] Idem, 191.
[541] Nocznicki, *Co chłopi powinni…*, 3-4.
[542] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 443, Postrożny, 54-55.

In other instances, exposure to literature about the seigneurial past intensified anti-seigneurial feelings in the present. After reading Świętochowski's history, the radical Wici activist Alojzy Dziaduś from Łańcut district claimed he could no longer walk past Łańcut's magnificent Potocki palace without meditating upon the centuries of peasant labour that had been poured into its "trees, roads, 365 rooms, cellars, and underground dungeons where many a bolder peasant thought was muted and, through its muteness, would speak of peasant misery…".[543] To convey the injustice of Count Alfred Potocki's half-hearted participation in the interwar land reform, Jan Stryczek – also from Łańcut district – similarly turned, for moral context, to the distant past and the historic injustices perpetrated by Potocki's ancestors. To this end, Stryczek offered the reader a lurid list of historical abuses going back to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth when, "as the historian will tell you, the lords of Łańcut would warm their legs during winter hunts by cutting open peasant bellies".[544]

The Populist movement's anti-nobilist framing of abstract, political-economic injustices also reshaped how popular discontent was expressed. One memoirist affiliated with the pro-governmental but Populist-influenced youth group ZMW "Siew", Władysław Samek from Rzeszów district, conjured up a mental image of land-hungry small farms "unable to feed [their] families even if the land were to bear fruit four times a year", which he juxtaposed with "large estates, frequently lying fallow because their owners pay more attention to *salons* and cabarets than their household economy".[545] Whilst undoubtedly informed by direct experience of fallow estate land, this vision also likely drew on the

[543] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 13.
[544] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1957), 236–237.
[545] Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, iii, 225.

economic debates between agrarian populists and their opponents around the relative productivity – and hence desirability – of small and large farming units, which could be encountered across interwar Europe. Samek also questioned the state's fiscal policies by asking:

> Is it justice when a small peasant has his property taken away for tax arrears, frequently depriving him of indispensable things, when millions [in debt] are cancelled for magnates who party on the Riviera or [go] on hunts in Africa and in a single night squander thousands of zloty?[546]

This was almost certainly an indirect reference to Count Alfred Potocki, the aforementioned latifundist from nearby Łańcut district whose lavish safari hunts and trips to Monte Carlo won interwar notoriety. An almost identical reference appeared in Stryczek's postwar memoir, which sarcastically justified the low wages on the Potocki estate as a natural outcome of Potocki's need for international travel.[547] For both Stryczek and Samek the salience of Potocki's exploits undoubtedly depended on the fact that he was a well-known local figure: a prominent employer, notable and subject of gossip. These exploits were, however, likely only familiar to them thanks to the interwar Populist press. Where some inequalities between the manor and the village were obvious from everyday life, it was only through an anti-nobilist political discourse that such lurid but empirically inaccessible manifestations of inequality as a landowner's safari hunts or an unfair tax policy could be, first, recognised and, second, conceptualised as part of the landowner vs peasant conflict.

Anti-nobilism was an entrenched part of peasant identity – an intergenerational trauma that was deliberately cultivated within rural society and perpetuated by enduring

[546] Idem, 224.
[547] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1984), 60.

inequalities and injustices within the peasant-landowner relationship. At the same time, in the early 20th century peasants' contact with the manorial economy declined and hostile attitudes lost salience. Nevertheless, this was counteracted by the centrality of anti-nobilism to Populist identity. Historical injustices committed by landowners provided justification for Populist claims and grievances; anti-seigneurial language was useful for discrediting opponents in the present; and after 1926 Populists became genuinely, not just rhetorically, concerned about the return of seigneurial hierarchies under *Sanacja* rule. In the 1930s, in turn, anti-nobilism became central to the Wici movement's efforts at fostering a peasant-led class culture. Whilst Populists' anti-seigneurial discourse drew on peasant experiences, it also trickled back into rural life, reinforcing and reshaping the anti-seigneurial attitudes of the party rank and file.

ii. Between Anti-Nobilism and Reconciliation: The Agrarians and the Landowning Class

Noble landowners retained considerable socioeconomic and political leverage in the post-1848 Bohemian Lands.[548] As in Galicia their continued power, combined with the late abolition of *corvée* labour, ensured fertile terrain for anti-seigneurial sentiment and discourse well into the 20th century. Here, too, serfdom remained a salient frame of reference through which contemporary social arrangements could be delegitimised. Thus, one Moravian tenant farmer criticised the state-peasant relationship in the 1930s by articulating the apparently widespread belief that "serfdom is returning[:] our

[548] E.g., E. Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge MA, 2005), 5, 20-21.

ancestors performed a *corvée* for the estates, we in turn for an oversized state…".[549] As in Poland, the collective memory of feudal oppression offered a potent source of identity for Bohemian villagers, making it an easy rallying device for political agitators. At a Domovina-organised 1 May rally in Mirotice (Písek district) in 1923, it was no accident that the district Agrarian secretary spoke "about the oppression of the common folk in the age of serfdom" before moving on to the upcoming elections.[550] Crucially for the Agrarians, this memory had the potential to bridge and thereby neutralise class divisions within the agriculturalist bloc. The non-noble landowner and future prime minister Rudolf Beran could, in good conscience, claim a bond with Domovina members in his 1929 New Year's address on the basis that "my grandfather, just like your grandfathers and grandmothers, performed the *corvée*".[551]

In certain regards anti-seigneurialism was even more salient in the Agrarians' self-representation than it was for Galician Populists. Unlike in Poland, Czech anti-seigneurialism went *with* the grain of the dominant post-1848 national narrative according to which the Bohemian aristocracy was a foreign, Germanic presence: a force of national as well as social oppression established after 1620's Battle of White Mountain.[552] These unambiguously patriotic connotations made it easier to centre anti-seigneurial themes in the Agrarians' public image. Unlike the Populists,[553] the Agrarians were successful in making the anniversary of the abolition of serfdom a central event of their ceremonial calendar.[554] The Agrarians also loudly proclaimed themselves heirs to

[549] L. Kuthan, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/12 (1933), 190.
[550] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 320/3, Mirotice gendarmerie report (2.05.1923).
[551] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina* (4.01.1929), 1.
[552] Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, 44-47.
[553] Jakubowska, *Ruch*, 68.
[554] E.g., Jiráček, "Místo", 48-50.

the anti-feudal serf rebellions of 1581, 1680, 1693-1695 and 1775 and the struggle for socio-national emancipation these rebellions embodied. Here, too, they differed from the Populists who were, in turn, denied the possibility of seeking historical legitimacy in past peasant rebellions, first, by the relative paucity of such events in the Polish past and, second, by the distinctly anti-national connotations of the most recent jacquerie of 1846.

However, if past conflict with the manor remained alive in Agrarian tradition, the same cannot be said of conflict in the present. At the societal level, antagonism between the manor and the Bohemian village lost most of its intensity after land reform and the decline of land hunger. When comparing the interwar Polish and Czech countryside, Agrarian intellectual Václav Dresler took it as a given that "in the Bohemian Lands there haven't been the same dramatic tensions between the manor and the peasant for many years".[555] This low level of antagonism was borne out by interwar municipal chronicles. None of those surveyed referenced contemporary conflicts with landed estates. Whilst chronicles often contained historical sections detailing the village past and the various abuses to which serfs had been subjected,[556] there was no sense that historical injustices had any bearing on present-day social relations.

At the level of high politics, too, relations between landowners and the Agrarians tended to be friendlier and more cooperative than landowner-Populist relations. To some extent this was a path-dependent outcome of each movement's early history. Galician Populists had always treated the landowning nobility as a primary obstacle to

[555] W. Dresler, "Młodzież czeska wsi na nowych torach", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/1 (1939), 40.
[556] E.g., Kronika obce Mladějovice, 43-49; Pamětní kniha obce Albrechtice, 93-103.

modernisation and popular emancipation.[557] By contrast, early Agrarian and pre-Agrarian programmes concentrated on threats originating in modernity rather than a tenacious past: "foreign competition",[558] "capitalist legislation",[559] and the resultant proletarianization of the peasantry. This orientation, combined with the well-to-do nature of the early Agrarian movement, facilitated an alliance with noble landowners based on the shared defence of agricultural interests against specific modern threats. In the pre-1914 period this alliance was concretised when Agrarians and landowning groups cooperated to push protectionist tariffs through the Reichsrat.[560] It would assume doctrinal significance when sectoral unity between all agriculturalists, including landowners, was enshrined in the 1903 party programme.[561] In practice, programmatic statements did not preclude conflict with the landowning class, especially as the leverage of smaller farmers increased in the party.[562] Tensions came to a head after 1918 as Antonín Švehla's by then dominant moderate faction embraced land reform, leading to the secession of part of the landowners' wing from the Agrarians and a simmering tug-of-war with the part that stayed.[563] Nevertheless, landowners retained their presence within the Agrarian party, increasing their influence after Švehla's departure from frontline politics. There is also evidence that, as the dust settled on land reform, part of

[557] Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 53-62.
[558] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 32.
[559] Ibid.
[560] J. Harna and V. Lacina, "Základní problémy vývoje agrárního politického hnutí v Československu v letech 1918-1939", *Sborník historický*, 34 (1987), 95.
[561] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy,* 34, 57.
[562] E.g., Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 24-25, 30-31.
[563] Uhlíř, "Dva směry".

the Czech-speaking landowning nobility became increasingly sympathetic to the Agrarian right.[564]

At the local level, the Agrarians' rapprochement with the landowning nobility in the second half of the interwar period can be traced in the minute books of Agrarian-affiliated riding associations, the Peasant Cavalries. In his study of the interwar Bohemian aristocracy Eagle Glassheim underscored the efforts undertaken by the former nobility[565] to maintain distinction through socially exclusive practices and networks.[566] What Peasant Cavalry minute books reveal, by contrast, was a willingness amongst various landowners, both noble and otherwise, to forge ties of sociability and patronage with plebeian civil society. Crucially, the prospect of such social and patronage ties was wholeheartedly embraced by Peasant Cavalry associations, in a way that would have caused most Polish Populists to bristle.

There were strong practical incentives for accepting such support: Peasant Cavalries were costly organisations to run; their minute books heaved with a perpetual anxiety around funding. Given such pressures, the material advantages of nobles' support were undeniable. It was nevertheless revealing of a relaxed attitude towards traditional rural hierarchies that Peasant Cavalries accepted landowners' patronage and the accompanying risk that such hierarchies would be consolidated.

An example of how patronage could reinforce hierarchy is offered by the Blatná Peasant Cavalry. In the second half of the 1930s five out of its 30 members rode horses provided

[564] Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, 142.
[565] Noble titles were officially abolished after 1918.
[566] Idem, passim.

by nearby estates.[567] Four of these came from the estate of Bedřích Hildprandt, an aristocrat whose Tyrolese ancestors had settled in Bohemia after 1620 and been in possession of Blatná castle since the late 18th century. In April 1937 Hildprandt offered the castle grounds as a cavalry training ground. Such consistent patronage did not pass without recognition. Alongside various riding contests and public festivities, 1937's calendar of Cavalry events also included a ceremonial greeting offered to "brother Hildprandt" at his castle by 24 Cavalry members on the occasion of his wedding – a privilege that was not afforded to any other member.[568]

A similar dialectic of patronage and deference could also be observed in the Mirovice Cavalry association whose 12-man leadership committee already included four members of landowning families in 1930.[569] In 1935 the committee was joined by a new member: Karel VI (Prince) Schwarzenberg (1911-1986), a South Bohemian aristocrat and right-wing Catholic intellectual whose writings lamented the decline of the old feudal order and lambasted centralising, democratic and secular tendencies unleashed by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.[570] Immediately, Schwarzenberg was singled out for special treatment. Where, usually, new additions to the Cavalry committee were passed over in silence, in this case the Mirovice minute book diligently recorded how Schwarzenberg was welcomed to the committee, how his help with finding a competition venue was enlisted and how he was thanked more than other members for his cooperation.[571] A gratitude bordering on the deferential was reiterated in the annual

[567] SDA Strakonice, Okresní selská jizda v Blatné, f. 1-61, sheets 18-19, 23.
[568] Idem, sheet 20.
[569] NAČR, Selské jízdy, f. 392, k. 3, Mirovice: kníha zápisů, 16.03.1930 entry.
[570] Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, 143-144.
[571] NAČR, Selské jízdy, f. 392, k. 3, Mirovice: kníha zápisů, 31.03.1935 entry.

report.[572] The summary of Cavalry activities in 1936 reported a riding trip in "the beautiful environs" of Schwarzenberg's forests, Schwarzenberg's appointment as head of the Cavalry's riding unit and, finally, his donation of a mace that would be awarded to a new distinguished Cavalry member every year.[573] In a comic turn, it was decided that the first custodian of the mace would be its donor, "brother K. Schwarzenberg", whose patronage was so generous that the gift he had offered now flowed back to him as homage.[574]

Feudally flavoured symbols and practices, from Schwarzenberg's mace to Hildprandt's greeting ceremony, seem hard to reconcile with the values and aesthetics officially underpinning Peasant Cavalries – organisations which were rich in peasantist iconography, harked back in their symbolism to the Hussite movement (widely understood at the time as a precursor of Czech democracy) and whose notional egalitarianism obliged members to salute one another as "brothers". In the case of Mirovice's Cavalry, however, this tension withered away once the fall of democratic Czechoslovakia in 1938-1939 removed any brake on re-feudalisation. Where in 1936 Cavalry members had partaken in memorial ceremonies for Švehla and Bohumír Bradáč – both leading Agrarian moderates – by July 1939 they were celebrating a new monument to Count Eduard Pálffy (1836-1915), a latifundist and Reichsrat deputy for the Party of Conservative Landowners.[575] By late 1939 any pretence of equality between Schwarzenberg and other Cavalry members had also collapsed. Schwarzenberg was now head of the Mirovice Cavalry and, rather than attending committee meetings in

[572] Idem, zpráva jednatele za r. 1935.
[573] Idem, zpráva jednatele za r. 1936.
[574] Idem, 13.12.1936 entry.
[575] Idem, 17.03.1940 entry.

hotels and taverns, was able to summon the committee to his Orlík castle. Following the official restoration of noble titles in September 1939, the Cavalry minute book even swapped his erstwhile appellation – "brother Schwarzenberg" – for the feudal-cum-democratic pastiche "prince brother Karel Schwarzenberg".[576]

How significant were such tendencies within Peasant Cavalries for broader village society and the Agrarian movement as a whole? On the one hand, Peasant Cavalries were one of the more socially exclusive satellites of the Agrarian movement, attracting a disproportionate number of wealthy peasants, landowners and rural professionals. On the other, Cavalries did not exist in a vacuum; they were bound by organisational and social ties with other Agrarian branches, frequently organising joint dances with Dorost and looking to recruit new members amongst rural youth.[577] Despite the overrepresentation of rural elites, Peasant Cavalries also included many ordinary villagers in their ranks, thus functioning as a bridge between elites and broader village society. The rapprochement with the nobility unfolding in many Cavalries was, thus, likely representative of a broader socio-political tendency. Though less abundant than in the case of the Cavalries, evidence of similarly deferential solidarism can certainly be found in other parts of the Agrarian movement. In 1934, for instance, the local news section of the *Mladý Venkov* weekly blithely reported how Dorost cyclists from the Plzeň region had taken part in a tour of two landed estates where they admired the landowners' management of their farms and related economic activities.[578] Two years later, in turn,

[576] Ibid.
[577] E.g., NAČR, f. 392, k. 4, Písek: kníha zápisů (1926-1941), 15.09.1926 entry; NAČR, f. 392, k. 3, Milevsko: kníha zápisů (1926-1941), passim.
[578] "Organisační ruch", *MV* (21.09.1934), 18.

the Agrarian newspaper for South Bohemia printed a supremely reverential obituary for the great-uncle of Karel VI Schwarzenberg: Bedřich Schwarzenberg (1862-1936), a conservative Reichsrat deputy and supporter of agricultural modernisation. The obituarist František Kroiher – a Catholic priest, senator and key figurehead of South Bohemian agrarianism – described Bedřich Schwarzenberg as a "true friend of the peasant people", before concluding how "[even though] we took away his noble title [after 1918] he retained a familial and personal nobleness which one willingly bowed before".[579]

If "actually existing" manor-village relations tended to improve over time, this did not neutralise the emotive potency of anti-seigneurial political language. As in Poland anti-seigneurial tropes continued to be used by various political actors in an increasingly loose manner, enabling their deployment against new targets. One such target was the Agrarian party. On the left, associating the Agrarian establishment with the old feudal landowning class became a popular technique of delegitimization. Generally, this delegitimization pivoted around claims that the owners of the "residual estates" which had survived land reform and other arrivistes who dominated the Agrarian leadership were reviving feudal relations. Rather than embodying a straightforward instance of continuity, this new elite represented a bitterly ironic revival, neo-feudal oppression by the once feudally oppressed.[580] At times, the left highlighted the gulf between the democratic, anti-seigneurial animus of early agrarianism, on the one hand, and the new "agrarian nobility" which had hijacked the land reform for its own enrichment, on the

[579] F.J. Kroiher, "Dr. Bedřich Schwarzenberg", *Pošumavský Kraj* (8.10.1936), 2.
[580] E.g., Fr. Herain, "Majitelé zbytkových statků se usnášejí", *ZD* (28.02.1931), 1; "Zrušte robotu a otročení zemědělského dělnictva", *ZD* (31.10.1931), 2.

other.[581] This tactic was apparent in some of the slogans deployed in 1937's Communist 1 May march in Písek, which included a quotation from the Agrarians' intellectual founding father, Alfons Šťastný: "the agrarian and financial nobility is a cancer on the body of the nation".[582]

The Agrarians, in their turn, did not remain passive in the face of such attacks but instead elaborated an anti-seigneurial discourse against their own political adversaries. In this discursive variant it was the left that was painted as a neo-feudal force: a haughty, anti-peasant, urban colonizer butting into village matters, usurping rural wealth for itself and even collaborating with the old landowning class to keep the peasant subdued. The left's unpopular collectivist approach to land reform presented an easy target for such framing: in favouring large economic units and obstructing attempts at parcellation in 1919, the left had revealed its real seigneurial colours.[583] When in the late 1930s socialists intensified their calls for a second land reform, *Venkov* reminded its readers how after 1918 there had been "workers' demonstrations in the squares of all towns in the republic against land reform": had it been up to the socialists, the landed estates would have remained in the hands of foreign magnates.[584] The Left's opposition to agricultural tariffs was likewise framed by the *Domovina* newspaper as a sign of their complicity with foreign – especially Hungarian – latifundists in squeezing the small Czechoslovak farmer (see fig. 2).

[581] E.g., "Vesnice na rozcestí", *OL* (7 May 1937).
[582] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 429/37.
[583] E.g., "Hanba národa a republiky", *Domovina* (18.01.1929), 3.
[584] "Republikánská strana pro majestát drobného lidu – socialisté pro majestát nečeských vládců půdy", *Venkov* (22.01.1937).

Fig. 2: *Domovina Domkářů a Malorolníků* (18.10.1929), 3. Caption: "What a Hungarian magnate hopes for from the Socialists' victory": "'*Hurrah*, thrice *hurrah*,/ Janos, pour the wine!/In Bohemia once more,/They'll be buying all our swine./Not just our pork/Our wheat and flour, too!/*I'll be fucking* their *mother*!'/Janos looks on, crazed..." (Hungarian words in italics)

Even seemingly benign socialist interventions in rural life could provide fodder for the Agrarians' brand of anti-seigneurialism. When National Socialists proposed to tighten anti-poaching laws as a way of combating a post-1918 poaching epidemic, *Domovina* framed this as neo-feudal indifference to the economic damages caused by game animals, asking rhetorically: "So hares belong to the nobility and losses to the cottagers?"[585] A few years earlier the Agrarian press fulminated against the socialist-

[585] "Zajíci patří šlechtě a škoda domkářům?", *Domovina* (12.04.1935), 1.

dominated Prague municipality's application to receive 10,000 ha of confiscated estate forest in South Bohemia, where it planned to build forest schools for consumptive children and various other amenities for the capital's inhabitants. In response, *Venkov* argued it did not matter to whom a latifundium belonged, for a latifundium it remained: "the poor, neglected Bohemian South" had its own consumptive children to take care of already and "we do not want for a new Lichtenstein or Schwarzenberg to dominate us from Prague".[586] Interestingly, the author of this anti-seigneurial tirade was František Kroiher, the very Agrarian senator who would, seven years later, pen a fawning obituary for an actual latifundist, Bedřich Schwarzenberg.

The neo-feudal framing of the left was not peripheral to Agrarian anti-socialism. On the contrary, this was a central rhetorical technique employed with far greater frequency than other discursive frames, such as that conflating the left with anti-social forces, prevalent elsewhere in Europe.[587] Nevertheless, whilst it drew on anti-seigneurial sentiment, the Agrarians' anti-seigneurial discourse did not have hostility towards and claims upon the landowning class as its primary goal. Rather, theirs was a reactive and instrumental anti-seigneurialism: reactive in its origins as a defence tactic against the left's own charges of neo-feudalism; instrumental in its mobilisation of anti-seigneurial sentiment as a means to denigrate a non-seigneurial opponent, the political left. The left's anti-seigneurial discourse was also instrumental, directed as it was against a new, capitalistic Agrarian elite – albeit a landowning one – rather than a traditional landowning

[586] "Bumbrlíček – Nesyta", *Venkov* (27.04.1929).
[587] E.g., A. Clift, "*L'homme au couteau entre les dents* and *Les classes dangereuses*: A 'Transwar' Perspective on Continuities in French Anticommunist Discourse", in George and McGlynn, *Rethinking Period Boundaries*, 93-117.

class. In this regard, both the Agrarians' and the left's anti-seigneurial discourses differed fundamentally from that of the Polish Populists. Whilst also prone to the semantic loosening of categories like "nobilism" and "serfdom", Polish Populists continued to foster antagonism towards traditional landowners, even when the objective grounds for such antagonism appeared to wane. By contrast, whilst historical anti-seigneurialism remained a source of rural identity and a powerful rhetoric in Bohemia, in the present it did not intensify conflict between landowners and villagers so much as between Agrarians and the left. Both because of declining tensions over manorial land and the Agrarians' rejection of rural class conflict, landowner-peasant conflict lost importance in the interwar period. Instead, as evidence from the Rural Cavalries shows, relations between landowners and peasants often improved, at times reinforcing paternalistic hierarchies. Anti-seigneurialism was, in short, a secondary force in determining the contours of socio-political conflict in the interwar Bohemian countryside.

iii. Anti-Socialism and Agrarian Identity

The message sent by an ailing Antonín Švehla to the 1929 Agrarian party congress caused shockwaves in the Czechoslovak public sphere. Stridently anti-urban in tenor, the speech was out-of-character for the famously compromise-seeking party grandee:

> [The agriculturalist's] virtues…should provide the order by which the world is run…[instead] it is the urban man who has determined the world's affairs and compelled the agriculturalist to destroy [the fruits of] his own labour…No human labour is and can be spoken about nowadays with such contempt…as agricultural labour…Even the new

> estate, the industrial proletariat which demands justice for itself through socialism, is equal to the others in its contempt…[588]

Švehla's words were met with widespread indignation. Catholic, nationalist and left-wing commentators alike scoffed at the caricature of a haughty, parasitic city locked in conflict with the countryside.[589] Uniting these reactions was bemusement that industrialised Czechoslovak modernity could be characterised in such anachronistic terms. "The entire press…is unanimous in saying that the modern peasant…is more likely to smell of an…elite cologne than a pigsty…nor does anyone in [our] republic reproach him for this alleged…stench," joked the Social Democrat *Právo Lidu*.[590]

Such bewildered reactions were not entirely unjustified. The civilisational gap between town and country was insignificant in the Czech Lands compared to most of East-Central Europe.[591] In contemporary historiography the positive socio-political implications of this fact have often been taken for granted. In Daniel Miller's telling, for instance, the relationship between town and country in the Czech Lands was relatively conflict-free thanks to considerably higher cultural and economic rural-urban integration compared to neighbouring countries.[592] According to Czech historians Eduard Kubů and Jiří Šouša, in turn, agrarianism was bound, as if by a sociological law, to converge with rival ideologies as a result of cooperation with urban political representatives, on the one hand, and the countryside's progressive cultural urbanisation, on the other.[593]

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[588] "Řádný sjezd Republikánské strany zemědělského a malorolnického lidu", *Venkov* (8.05.1929), 1.
[589] E.g., J. Doležal, "Křesťanský život je pramenem mravních sil venkova, nikolí stavovský agrarism", *Lidové Listy* (9.05.1929); V. Dyk, "Venkov a mesto", *Narodní Listy* (12.05.1929).
[590] "Lidé a dobytek, čili na okraj agrárního sjezdu", *Právo Lidu* (10.05.1929).
[591] E.g., W. Dresler, "Młodzież czeskiej wsi na nowych torach", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/1 (1939), 40.
[592] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 94.
[593] Kubů and Šouša, "Středoevropský a slovinský agrarismus", 259.

And yet, in many ways, Czechoslovak political life did not live up to these assumptions. Urbanisation produced rural backlash as much as convergence. Even a relatively narrow urban-rural divide proved capable of fostering political resentments and claims. As this section will show, anti-urbanism remained present in Agrarian discourse throughout the interwar period, with its most salient element – anti-socialism – increasingly placed at the heart of Agrarian identity.

Having emerged as a reaction against the neglect of small and medium agricultural interests in mainstream Czech politics, the Agrarian movement had opposition to urban domination built into its genetic core.[594] Loud – if inconsistent – resistance to urban influence was a central part of Agrarian cultural politics. Anxieties around urban-industrial interference in the rural world, be it through non-agriculturalists buying up land, crop theft in the vicinity of industrial centres or non-agricultural enterprises engaging in livestock-farming, were a common Agrarian refrain throughout the interwar period.[595]

Historical literature has at times treated Agrarian anti-urbanism as anti-liberal and anti-socialist in equal measure.[596] At its birth the Agrarian movement certainly defined itself against laissez-faire economics as much as socialist ones. By 1918, however, anti-socialism was visibly the dominant discursive strand. Its salience would only intensify in the second half of the interwar period. Various factors, originating in the structures of

[594] W. Dresler, "Rozwój ruchu chłopskiego na ziemiach czesko-morawskich", *Wieś i Państwo*, 1/5 (1938), 411; also F. Loskot, "Dovršení emancipace venkova", *Venkov* (6.01.1929).
[595] "Průkaz způsobilosti k zemědělství", *Domovina* (4.03.1938), 1; A. Hrubý, "Naše konkurence", *Domovina* (19.01.1934), 1; "Polní pych v okoli měst přesahuje meze", *Domovina* (13.07.1934), 3.
[596] E.g., Kubů and Šouša, "Historiografie", 70-71.

Czechoslovak politics, the composition of the Agrarian coalition and the experiences of rural life, would ensure this ascendancy.

The first factor favouring the increased salience of anti-socialism lay in the distribution of political power. Following the introduction of universal male suffrage, the main political exponent of economic liberalism – the Young Czechs and their successor party, Czechoslovak National Democracy – failed to acquire a mass constituency. By contrast, in the 1920 parliamentary election the Social Democrats emerged as Czechoslovakia's largest party. Though hobbled by the subsequent Communist split, the Social Democrats – along with the National Socialists – remained part of each interwar governmental coalition bar one (1926-1929), together consistently winning around a fifth of the national vote. By virtue of their size and involvement in government, socialist parties were bound to become both an important negotiating partner and adversary for the Agrarians. It was likely not fortuitous that the Agrarian press devoted considerably more hostile coverage to socialist parties than the Communists: though the latter were more radical, their permanent exclusion from power made them an unworthy target. By contrast, socialists' participation in government rendered them a competitor in the struggle to direct state resources and policy. At the heart of this competition lay the opposing interests of each bloc's primary constituencies: the predominantly rural taxpayers, food producers and employers represented by the Agrarians against the predominantly urban food consumers, workers and social welfare beneficiaries organised by the left. The major flashpoints in this conflict centred around food prices and the costs of social welfare. "Price parity" between agricultural and industrial goods was the watchword of interwar Agrarian ambitions. In its pursuit the Agrarians pushed for protectionist tariffs on

agricultural commodities from the mid-1920s and the creation of grain and, later, livestock monopolies from the early 1930s. On both these counts they were opposed by socialist parties, which feared an increase in food prices and the barriers to export-led industrial development that tariffs would incur. By contrast, where socialists sought to expand and defend social insurance schemes for workers and the unemployed, such schemes invited frequent hostility from an Agrarian party concerned with the resulting increase in fiscal and labour costs for rural producers.

Much of the political tension and horse-trading in interwar Czechoslovak governance stemmed from the tug-of-war between these opposing interests.[597] The conflict became particularly acute after Agrarians adopted a more aggressive stance on tariffs in 1925.[598] During the "Gentlemen's Coalition" government (1926-1929) when all left-wing parties were in opposition, the Agrarians successfully pushed through protectionist measures as well as tax and social insurance reforms that would benefit rural employers and producers over employees and consumers.[599] By intensifying the grievances of both workers and farmers as well as political pressure to reduce state spending, the economic crisis of the early 1930s further deepened the competition between Agrarian and socialist claims on the state. During this period Agrarian demands for increased agricultural protectionism (even at the expense of international trade), for reduced social expenditure and the reduction of industrial prices through wage cuts all directly clashed

[597] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 68-69, 134-135.
[598] Idem, 140; Uhlíř, "Republikánská strana", 204, 209.
[599] Idem, 216.

with the interests of socialist clienteles.[600] One National Socialist newspaper accused the Agrarians of pursuing socialism for agriculture and capitalism for the rest.[601]

Whilst competition over state resources and policy was central to Agrarian anti-socialism, it was not inevitable that farmers' policy preferences would clash with socialist ones. What most determined Agrarian policy choices and, with it, the contours of political conflict was the plurality of socioeconomic interests within the Agrarian coalition. Certain antagonisms fostered by the more socially homogeneous Polish Populists simply could not be pursued by the Agrarians. Landowners' and wealthier farmers' leverage within the party, for instance, limited its capacity to direct rural discontent against inequalities in landownership. When socialist parties began calling for a second land reform in the 1930s, the Agrarian press only engaged with the issue rarely and to deflect attention from it.[602] The Agrarians' pursuit of protectionist tariffs that were harmful to food consumers also reflected the political constraints imposed by their electoral coalition. In the 1920s the Agrarians forged a close partnership with the Party of Small Tradesmen and Artisans. According to the Hrad-affiliated journalist Ferdinand Peroutka, this alliance with the commercial middle class inhibited the Agrarians' ability to reconcile producer and consumer interests at the expense of economic middlemen. Forced to protect the profits of both agriculturalists and traders, the Agrarians had no

[600] V. Čada, "Politika". For differences between socialist and Agrarian understandings of the crisis as well as divisions within the Agrarian camp see Sekanina, *Kdy nám bylo*, 88-106.
[601] "Pro obilní a dobytčí monopol, pro povinnosti státu, ale proti právům státu", *České Slovo* (2.11.1932).
[602] E.g., "Nečachrujte s novou pozemkovou reformou!", *Domovina* (15.01.1937), 3; "O druhou pozemkovou reformu", *Domovina* (9.02.1934), 1.

choice but to push for tariffs and, hence, higher consumer prices, making conflict with socialist parties inevitable.[603]

The involvement of Agrarian elites in various food processing industries also limited their political room for manoeuvre. A comparison of SL and Agrarian attitudes towards cartelisation processes in the 1930s is instructive in this regard. On the one hand, the SL fiercely criticised the cartelisation of industry and food processing and its detrimental effects on peasant consumers. By comparison, the Agrarian critique of cartels was sporadic and largely limited to industry. This was not for want of demagogical potential. Moral-economy-style grievances against cartels were, for instance, central to Czechoslovak Communist propaganda in the 1930s. Rather, Agrarian coyness around this issue likely stemmed from their own involvement in cartelisation.[604] The Agrarian party establishment and the large sugar beet growers it represented were, for instance, instrumental to the creation of a cartel agreement between sugar plants in 1927.[605] During the 1930s Communists regularly lambasted this cartel for inflating the domestic consumer price of sugar whilst also exporting sugar at low prices and denaturing it for use as animal feed.[606] Their criticisms mirrored those targeted at the Polish sugar industry by the SL.[607] No such discursive option, however, existed for the Agrarians. The anti-socialist orientation of Agrarian discourse and policy, thus, partly reflected the unavailability of political alternatives: to reconcile the interests of their various

[603] Peroutka, *Budování státu*, ii, 580.
[604] E.g., "Agrární ochranářství v teorii a v praksi", *Právo Lidu* (10.01.1937).
[605] F. Dudek, "The Relation of the Sugar Crisis in Czechoslovakia to the Great Economic Crisis of the 1930s", *Hospodářské Dějiny/Economic History*, 15 (1986), 580.
[606] E.g., SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 259/36, security report on Communist meeting in Písek (3.03.1936); "Cukr proti demokracii", *Obrana Lidu (*20.08.1937), 1.
[607] E.g., "Obłędna polityka", *Zielony Sztandar* (22.10.1933), 3.

clienteles, Agrarians had no choice but to offset social costs onto consumers, workers and other socialist interest groups.

Agrarian anti-socialism, however, was not just an artifact of inter-party competition or an ideological construct by which landowning and capitalist interests manipulated the party base. Rather, anti-socialism also derived its animus from conflicts and resentments at the local level. Amongst its main bottom-up drivers was the memory of rural-urban tensions during World War I when intense food shortages in Bohemian cities sparked widespread urban resentment towards the supposedly crop-hoarding and profiteering peasants. In what Claire Morelon has characterised as a "circle of mutual envy", this resentment was mirrored in the countryside by analogous suspicions about concealed urban wealth and indignation at the crop theft committed by starving townspeople.[608]

After 1918 anti-socialist and anti-urban feeling was further exacerbated, as much-resented wartime crop requisitions remained in place – under socialist pressure but with Agrarian acquiescence – to ensure the cities were fed.[609] For many villages, post-war requisitions were a traumatic experience indelibly associated with urban, socialist indifference to rural suffering. Even several years after the policy had been dropped, the Hlavatce chronicler bitterly recalled how "the commissioners [charged with requisitions] were mainly adherents of socialist parties…as well as the army. The greatest enemies of the countryside [were] sent [to conduct] requisitions".[610] The well-to-do peasant chronicler of Plástovice, a village which actively resisted requisitions in 1921, also

[608] C. Morelon, "A threat to national unity?: the urban-rural antagonism in Prague during the First World War in a comparative perspective", in W. Dornik, J. Walleczeck and S. Wedrac (eds.), *Frontwechsel: Österreich-Ungarns "Grosser Krieg" im Vergleich* (Vienna, 2014), 332-334.
[609] Cesar and Otahal, *Hnutí,* 15.
[610] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 22.

returned to the experience over a decade later: in an exceptionally passionate passage in an otherwise dry chronicle, he insisted that villagers had been right to resist and unfairly maligned during the "great requisition", a policy that "knew neither justice [*pravdu*] nor mercy".[611]

In subsequent years rural anti-socialism was reinforced by the large-scale exodus of agricultural labour – much of it to urban areas where pay was better and living and working conditions more attractive. For peasant employers the rural exodus often appeared a double punishment: besides facing growing labour costs and shortages, peasants also saw their taxes directed to the very socialist-inspired social insurance schemes that helped drive rural outmigration to begin with.[612] The resulting resentments were deepened during the Great Depression, as agricultural prices fell but state spending on unemployment benefits ballooned. According to National Socialist reporter Václav Cháb, at the many Fascist rallies taking place across South Bohemia in the early 1930s speakers often lamented how:

> …Nowadays everyone is running off to the towns, to offices, to the factories. Officials take fat salaries; in the factory – when they don't work – a fellow gets paid for not working. If someone offers him to go work in the countryside, he won't go: why should he go there where he would have to work for food and earn his money?[613]

In this perspective there was no distinction between the striking worker and the parasitic official. Both were embodiments of the same magnetic urban indolence. This association between workers and idle privilege became so entrenched that even seemingly banal occurrences could be read through its lens. During his travels around

[611] Kronika obce Plástovice, 18.
[612] "První den konference Mezinárodního Agrárního Bureau", *Venkov* (4.11.1932).
[613] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 26.

South Bohemia the Fascist leader Radola Gajda won great sympathy after locals observed him frugally order eggs for dinner whilst his chauffeur ordered up a schnitzel, thus behaving like "an urban worker [who] eats whatever he earns".[614]

Resentments arising from World War I and the rural exodus were heavily dependent on discourse and the imagination. The self-indulgent strikers and overpaid officials who populated the city of many peasants' fantasies were figures encountered more often in rumour than the flesh. Popular anti-socialism, however, also drew on more direct experiences of conflict with socialists and workers. As the previous chapter showed, socialist parties maintained a foothold in many villages throughout the interwar period, tensions between agricultural labourers and more propertied farmers never entirely fizzled out, and seasonal labour migrations gave even a primarily agricultural region such as South Bohemia a degree of contact with the urban, industrial world. This proximity between workers and farmers ensured that some of their mutual resentments had a "lived" – and not exclusively discursive – quality.

This emerged clearly from a series of articles presenting local peasant voices in the moderate Agrarian youth journal *Brázda* in 1933. Unemployment support, for instance, was not just resented as an abstract drain on farmers' taxes; rather, peasant hostility also drew on personal encounters with unemployed neighbours whose ranks grew during the crisis years as migrants returned to their villages, burdening municipal budgets in the process.[615] Thus, the head of the Bašnice (Jičín district) shooting club justified his opposition on the grounds that "the demoralisation…emanating from unemployment

[614] Idem, 39.
[615] E.g., Pamětní kniha obce Albrechtice, 116.

support has spread to our villages; we observe with dread its effects amidst the ranks of the worker and artisanal youth".[616] The wealthy peasant Václav Kozina (Domažlice district) also argued against unemployment benefits by referring to rural experiences: "Why support people who work in the summer and who ought to plan for the winter during that summer? And they truly will remember to plan if they see they won't get anything in the winter!"[617] This seasonal conception of unemployment was almost certainly based on the labour patterns of South and West Bohemian cottagers who spent the summer months working in the cities before returning to their villages for the winter. Likewise, when František Udržal, mayor of Rozhovice (Chrudim district), demanded that legislators finally grasp that "the state cannot be a poorhouse, a sick house and a providential institute", it was probably no accident that Udržal's disparaging framing of state welfare referred to municipal-level institutions such as the poorhouse and the sick house that he, in his capacity as village mayor, would have been charged with maintaining.[618]

Agrarian anti-socialism both tapped into and moulded many of the anti-worker tropes and feelings operative in rural life. Resentments originating in the war and its aftermath were an especially potent political resource. Anti-Agrarian polemics by socialist newspapers were, for instance, endlessly paraded in the Agrarian press as proof that the left remained an urban force persistently out-of-touch with rural suffering – much as it had been when it accused the peasants of wartime profiteering, demanded crop requisitions and opposed estate parcellation after 1918. No instance of left-wing tactlessness or indifference towards the countryside was passed over in silence.

[616] V. Ludvík, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/9 (1933), 139-140.
[617] V. Kozina, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/10 (1933), 158-159.
[618] F. Udržal, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/10 (1933), 159.

Insensitive representations of peasants, such as one National Socialist cartoon depicting a gargantuan farmer robbing urban consumers, were meticulously described and used to discredit socialist overtures to the poorer peasantry.[619] Following a rally in North-Eastern Bohemia where poor farmers demanded higher prices for livestock products, the Domovina weekly parodied socialist accusations by asking: "Are poor cottagers agrarian gluttons?"[620] And in response to socialist accusations of partisan egotism, one *Venkov* article reminded readers of how after the war "socialists…wandered about with gallows" – a reference to the ritualised fake executions of farmers and shopkeepers accused of profiteering that were carried out by urban crowds after 1918.[621]

Insensitivity was not the only socialist vice played up in Agrarian discourse. Another was concealed privilege. The Agrarian press regularly suggested that workers were richer, lazier and more bound up with powerful interests than socialists were willing to admit. Such insinuations ran with the grain of longstanding rural resentments towards the idleness, arrogance and wealth of townspeople,[622] resentments that had been exacerbated by the war and rural depopulation. As already shown, one variant of this discursive tendency conflated socialists with feudal elites. Another portrayed socialist workers and industrial-capitalist interests as part of the same self-serving urban alliance. By opposing price reductions for industrial goods, for instance, socialists

[619] "Zemedelec na ceskosocialistickém obrázku", *Domovina* (5.07.1935), 1.
[620] "Chudí domkáři jsou agrární nenažranci?", *Domovina* (1.02.1929), 1.
[621] "Jejich ctností a naše hříchy", *Venkov* (4.09.1932). For more on ritual punishments see Konrád, "Two Post-war Paths", 759-775.
[622] E.g., F.J. Čečetka, "Zima na vsi", *Český Lid*, 11 (1902), 247; V. Schulz, "Zpěv spokojeného sedláka", *Český Lid*, 12 (1903), 47-48.

proved their primary loyalty was to capitalists rather than consumers.[623] The urban misery with which socialists justified their anti-protectionist positions was also occasionally disputed by the Agrarian press. Thus, amid the broader debate around protectionist tariffs, the Domovina weekly quoted a Prague butcher from "a street overwhelmingly inhabited by industrial workers" who sold five kilograms of pork – despite its being more expensive than beef – for every kilogram of any other meat.[624]

Besides questioning the moral entitlement that workers derived from poverty, the Agrarian press also contested the entitlement which they derived from labour. At first glance, this could appear counter-intuitive. After all, the Agrarians were only too keen to claim hard work as an Agrarian virtue and even to legitimise their own moral-economic claims by dressing them in the vocabulary of waged labour.[625] In short, the Agrarians did not deny labour as a basis for moral-economic entitlement; instead, they questioned how far socialists could legitimately lay claim to it. Simply by opposing protectionist tariffs, socialists proved willing to deny poor peasants their wages and, hence, to devalue the labour of others.[626] By favouring the employment of married women over immediate solutions to youth unemployment, socialists demonstrated their "hate for work".[627] Similar arguments were also made based on socialist support for unemployment benefits and industrial action.[628]

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[623] F. Olejník, "Snižování čisel na mrtvém bodu: socialistické šiditko prasklo", *Domovina* (26.01.1934), 1; see also "Vzali od nich penize a hlásy a nyní jim berou čest!", *Domovina* (15.02.1929), 1.
[624] "Masomilovná politika", *Domovina* (5.04.1929), 4.
[625] E.g., F. Mašata, "Naš boj o živočišnou produkci", *Domovina* (22.02.1929), 2; "Nevyrovnaný učet", *Domovina* (12.10.1934), 1.
[626] J. Vraný, "Socialistí žadají, aby domkáři slevili ze své mzdy", *Domovina* (11.01.1929), 1.
[627] "Socialisté proti mladým lidem", *MV* (9.03.1934), 2.
[628] E.g., "Organisácní Ruch", *MV* (23.05.1930), 14.

The importance of anti-socialism to Agrarian politics can be gauged from its central role in defining the content and contours of Agrarian identity. To some extent this tendency to define agrarianism *against* socialism was apparent from the movement's beginning. Commitment to private ownership was a core Agrarian dogma with an enduringly anti-socialist tinge.[629] This emphatically anti-socialist attachment to the existing social order only intensified in the 1930s. For instance, a lecture given to prospective Agrarian speechmakers in Prague and subsequently circulated to district-level party branches in 1932-1933 stressed the Agrarians' allegiance to the bloc of "civic parties" committed to the maintenance of a private ownership-based system rooted in the philosophy of Adam Smith.[630] Socialism's commitment to the abolition of private ownership, in turn, meant that it would "always [be] the main enemy of the countryside and of agriculture!"[631]

An emphasis on property, responsibility and conservatism, as well as the gulf between farmers and workers that these values implied, was also a core feature of how the Agrarian movement encouraged its followers to see themselves. Publications aimed at the rural lower classes – no matter how inadequately propertied – had no reservations about treating them as members of a property-based "middle estate". In one representative example, *Domovina* published an article by a small peasant from Blatná district who extolled the principle of "private ownership" that suffused the hearts of rural folk and pitted them against socialist visions of a society built on opposition between

[629] E.g., Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 38.
[630] The epithet "civic" was a widely used synonym for "bourgeois" or "non-socialist" in Czechoslovak political language. This usage can be encountered in a wide range of sources, from municipal chronicles to expert literature.
[631] SDA Písek, Republikánská strana – okresní organisace Milevsko (hereinafter RSZML – OO Milevsko), sign. II/B-8, J. Žilka, "Programy politických stran s hlediska Rep. strany", 1-2, 4, 6.

capital and labour.[632] An article in *Mladý Venkov* comparing "the agriculturalist and the worker", likewise, underscored differences over similarities: for instance, where the precarity of an agricultural income made the agriculturalist careful and thrifty, the security of the worker's wage inclined him to wantonness and irresponsible radicalism.[633] This conservative, property-centred and anti-socialist self-understanding also provided the rhetorical ballast for the Agrarians' lasting alliance with the Party of Small Tradesmen and Artisans".[634]

The Agrarians' "schismogenetic"[635] tendency to define themselves *against* socialism was most apparent in the contradictions it produced over time. Frequently, a desire for stylistic distance from the left led Agrarians to positions and modes of argument that were ideologically incoherent with other aspects of their thought and practice. Thus, even as they themselves coordinated a Green International of European peasant parties, the Agrarians loudly disavowed the left-sounding principle of internationalism.[636] Despite their own secularism and history of conflict with both the Church and its political representatives – the Catholic Populists – the Agrarians presented themselves as a bulwark against urban "anti-religious" ideologies, even arguing that the numerous industrial workers within the Catholic Populists' ranks discredited them as a religious party.[637] Further, despite claiming to represent the material interests of the agricultural

[632] F. Červený, "Boj o soukromé vlastnictví", *Domovina* (5.04.1929), 4.
[633] J. Frydrych, "Zemědělec a dělník", *MV* (11.04.1930), 4.
[634] "Zemědělci a střední stav", *Brázda*, 16/7 (1935), 107-108; "Součinnost agrárníků a živnostníků", *Lidové Noviny* (12.06.1936).
[635] D. Graeber and D. Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London, 2021), 56-58.
[636] E.g., "'Neveříme tem, kdož chtějí nás vésti po cestách kosmopolitismu, kdož věří v zázrak internacionalismu.' Velká řeč posl. R. Berana na Rep. sjezdu v Praze", *Večer* (31.10.1932).
[637] "Sněmování našich mladých Republikánů", *Venkov* (22.05.1929); "Tvrzení strany klerikální neobstoji", *MV* (22.02.1929), 2.

estate, Agrarian thinkers and politicians periodically vociferated against materialist ideology. Thus, class was proclaimed a divisive social artifice and contrasted with a supposedly "natural division of economic and social forces" based on estates,[638] whilst the folk traditions promoted by Dorost were framed as "national culture" and juxtaposed to "class culture".[639]

Despite its rhetorical ferocity and centrality to the movement's identity, Agrarian anti-socialism was not without limits. Unlike other interwar societies Czechoslovakia was never at risk of class-based civil war. Even as they fomented mutual hostility, Agrarians and socialists were bound together in ways that neither side was willing to imperil – most importantly, through their shared loyalty to the Czechoslovak state and the political dominance of the titular Czechoslovak nation within it. To ensure this predominance, coalition governments and political compromises involving both Agrarians and socialists were unavoidable. Thus, whilst fanning anti-socialist sentiment with one hand, with the other the Agrarian leadership was continually forced to rein in the maximalist expectations of their base and justify – even applaud – compromise with socialist parties.[640]

Political polarisation was also kept in check by each side's desire to win over new interest groups at the ballot box. Indeed, alongside their anti-worker and anti-socialist rhetoric, the Agrarians undertook highly public philanthropic efforts to win urban sympathy and redeem their own reputation for greed and hoarding.[641] Equally, amongst the main

[638] "Ona v nás, my v ní", *Venkov* (19.05.1937).
[639] Jiráček, "Místo", 23, 26.
[640] E.g., Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 144, 157.
[641] For early examples: idem, 42; "Pro děti našich hraničářů!", *MV* (6.12.1929), 1.

propagandistic purposes of 1937's Dorost procession through Prague was to demonstrate the kinship and cooperation between town and countryside.[642] Conciliatory moves towards the working class were to intensify especially from mid-1934, as the Agrarians embraced greater state interventionism in their quest for a path out of crisis[643] and sought to expand their appeal with and control over workers, especially in Agrarian-controlled industries.[644] Thus, in the run-up to the 1935 elections, anti-socialism became dramatically less salient in Agrarian discourse. At the same time an open critique of capitalism, which had in the early 1930s been marginal – at times outright rejected[645] – in Agrarian thinking, gained importance.[646] Calls for decartelisation, for economic planning and democracy, as well as for the nationalisation of mines and steelworks, started to appear with much greater frequency in the Agrarian press.[647] Workers were explicitly recognised as a key productive group that, like the peasants, was exploited by cartel monopolies.[648] Even left-wing actors were forced to acknowledge the Agrarians' leftward turn, however sceptical they were of its seriousness.[649] Ultimately, however, 1934-1935 proved to be a period of détente rather than of ideological convergence between Agrarians and socialists. Firstly, there was a heavy dollop of passing electoral

[642] Jiráček, "Místo", 90.
[643] Sekanina, *Kdy nám bylo*, 104-105.
[644] E.g, J. Králíček, "Co nám píše dělník?", *Venkov* (9.10.1934); "Agrární strana přichází všestavovství na chut", *Lidové Listy* (7.06.1934).
[645] E.g., "Řádný sjezd Republikánské strany zemědělského a malorolnického lidu", *Venkov* (30.10.1932).
[646] E.g., "Kapitalističtí anarchisté", *MV* (10.08.1934), 1.
[647] E.g., "Porady výkonného výboru Republikánské strany zem. a malorol. lidu", *Venkov* (26.05.1934); "Republikánský dorost přehlíží řady a doplňuje svůj program", *Venkov* (19.02.1935); "Řišský sjezd republikánského dorostu žádá okamžité převzetí všech dolů a hutí státem", *Venkov* (13.06.1935).
[648] "Nedopusťme, aby vznikla bratovražedná váda a boje!", *Domovina* (29.06.1934), 1; "Zasedání republikánského dorostu v Čechach", *Venkov* (6.09.1934).
[649] "Od slov k činům", *Sobota* (12.01.1935); "Co se děje v agrární straně?", *Rudé Právo* (6.03.1935); "Bylo by naivní věřit sociálnímu cítění agrárníků", *Národní Listy* (3.03.1935).

opportunism in the Agrarians' rhetorical shift.[650] Furthermore, even during this crucial period of détente, socialism remained a bankrupt ideology rather than a fraternal emancipatory movement in Agrarian thinking and propaganda.[651] Agrarian demands on the state continued to be seen by both Agrarians and socialists as at some level in competition with socialist ones rather than complementary to them.[652] Most importantly, the cleavage between producer and taxpayer interests, on the one hand, and consumers and welfare recipients, on the other, remained a flashpoint in Czechoslovak politics throughout the second half of the 1930s. Certainly, Agrarian language about consumers and workers tended to soften. The taunts and imputations of idleness, fake poverty and selfish entitlement that had, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, frequently been deployed against workers were more seldom heard. The Agrarians instead cast themselves as the party that would reconcile producers and consumers by pursuing full employment and thereby increasing the latter group's spending power.[653] In practical terms, however, this newfound concern for the urban poor translated into policy demands that only further inflamed tensions with the left. To combat unemployment, the Agrarians called for compulsory labour service: a measure that would also relieve peasant taxpayers overburdened by the state's welfare spending. Military-style work camps for unemployed youth became a central demand of the entire Agrarian party, including its left flank.[654] In socialist eyes, however, this was nothing but a continuation of class warfare against the

[650] "Ke sjezdu agrární strany", *Rudé Právo* (26.01.1936); "O agrárnickém diktátu", *Rudé Právo* (3.01.1936).
[651] V. Lednický, "K sjezdu mladých na pohraničí našeho státu", *Venkov* (28.07.1934); "Agrární strana si už připravuje hlavní volební heslo", *Lidové Listy* (14.10.1934).
[652] "Agrárníci hrozí socialistům volbami", *Národní Listy* (4.11.1934).
[653] E.g., "Jen zaměstnaný je řádným spotřebitelem", *Večer* (12.11.1935).
[654] "Republikánský dorost v Čechách volá po radikální zemědělské politice", *Venkov* (19.09.1935); "Pro pracovni povinnost", *Brázda* (1.03.1935).

needy by the Agrarians' landowner wing.[655] The resulting conflict would rumble on until the fall of the First Republic: just a few months before the Munich conference the Agrarian *Večer* provoked socialist outrage when it suggested putting up lists in every municipality of all locals on welfare support in order to expose the many undeserving recipients to public censure.[656]

Thus, even during periods of political détente, anti-workerism remained an abiding feature of Agrarian discourse and praxis. What remains less clear is how far this discourse succeeded in alienating the Agrarians' poorer constituencies from the workers' movement. It was often assumed on the left that the anti-workerist radicalism of the Agrarian right was a turn-off for the rural poor – an opening that the left could exploit. No proof was ever presented for these assumptions. In reality, they were far from self-evident. The national head of Domovina, the cottager František Mašata, was a man of the Agrarian right.[657] The main communication channels that reached smaller Agrarian voters, such as the *Domovina* weekly or the major Agrarian dailies, were widely considered to be dominated by editors affiliated with this wing of the party. This gave the right control of an important lever of opinion formation. Its influence was implicitly recognised by the South Bohemian Communist deputy Josef Nepomucký when he argued for a strategy of splitting the "democratic and genuinely agricultural majority" of the Agrarian party from its landowner wing, adding that "this way the demagogical campaign, [conducted by] the landowning senator and stock investor [Josef] Vraný in the

[655] "Velostatkáři žádají zrušení podpor v nezaměstnanosti", *Rudé Právo* (14.01.1936); "Velkostatkářský útok na státní sociální péči", *České Slovo* (3.01.1936); "Někoho mrzí, že máme ve státě klid", *Právo Lidu* (1.01.1936).
[656] "Nad špatnou distribucí na trhu práce", *České Slovo* (15.07.1938).
[657] Uhlíř, "Republikánská strana", 221.

Lidový denik and *Venkov* and by his second, [František] Olejník, in *Domovina*, will be disabled".[658]

Anti-socialism amongst the rural poor was also favoured by real experiences of worker-cottager antagonism. Inevitably, the Agrarian press was keen to feed off and draw attention to these experiences. Socialist obstruction of land reform was chief amongst these but far from the only example. Another recurring theme was labour discrimination. In the immediate post-war period, it was not uncommon for Social Democrat estate staff to mistreat labourers from more moderate formations – be they the Czechoslovak Socialists or Domovina – and even demand their dismissal.[659] In subsequent years *Domovina* repeatedly underscored similar cases of discrimination. In 1938, for instance, it reported how cottagers had been prevented from participating in a public works programme in Domažlice district by its Social Democrat administrators who preferred to reserve participation for the unemployed, thereby proving their party was "the cottagers' and small peasants' greatest enemy".[660] At other times, *Domovina* reminded cottagers of the mistreatment they experienced at the hands of socialists during their labour migrations to the towns.[661]

The gulf between workers and cottagers was further entrenched through *Domovina*'s thematic orientation towards producer-related issues. Most weeks the newspaper was dominated by articles about crop prices, food-processing industries, agricultural debt

[658] J. Nepomucký, "Jak proti agrárně-reakčnímu křidlu? O nové cesty v zemědělské politice", *Rudé Právo* (28.10.1936).
[659] Cesar and Otahal, *Hnutí,* 13.
[660] "Vylučování chudých lidí z práce", *Domovina* (25.02.1938), 5.
[661] "'Hromada slov a žadné skutky'. Několik poznámek k valné hromadě sociálně-demokratických domkářů v Plzní", *Domovina* (21.06.1935), 4.

and other questions that appealed to readers' interests as producers, taxpayers and proprietors – precisely the interests that cottagers shared with the rest of the agricultural estate. The same cottagers' interests as store-buying food consumers and migrant workers were, by contrast, largely ignored or deprioritised. One article, for instance, indignantly reported how Catholic Populists in Moravia were criticising Agrarian efforts to compel margarine manufacturers to use domestically produced butter and lard instead of imported fats in the production process. *Domovina* readers were thereby nudged to see themselves as outraged producers entitled to a commodities market rather than consumers entitled to a fair price for staple fats.[662] In other ways, too, *Domovina* readers were conditioned to adopt the mental habitus of bourgeois proprietors who shared more with other agriculturalists than workers. Despite representing the poorest rural strata, *Domovina* full-throatedly supported the Agrarian demand for crop theft to be punished more harshly.[663] Periodic articles about thieving gypsies and fraudulent beggars invading the countryside, similarly, encouraged cottagers to see themselves as part of a besieged "middle estate".[664]

Domovina's producer orientation undoubtedly left it vulnerable to criticism from the left. Indeed, in its rural propaganda the Czechoslovak left tirelessly reminded small farmers of the interests they shared, as store-buying consumers, with workers suffering from Agrarian tariff policies and high consumer prices.[665] In its coverage of South Bohemia, the Communist *Obrana Lidu* frequently highlighted the tension between the Agrarians' focus

[662] "Automobily musí žrát chalupnické brambory", *Domovina* (8.03.1935), 3.
[663] E.g., "Sněmování Domovin v župách", *Domovina* (3.05.1929), 1.
[664] E.g., "Potulní žebráci, nova metla venkova", *Domovina* (8.03.1935), 1.
[665] E.g., Prorok diktatury finančního kapitálu", *Rudé Právo* (11.05.1929).

on producer interests and the moral-economic entitlements of the rural poor.[666] Ultimately, however, the left's vehement defence of rural consumers and welfare recipients was undermined by its corresponding inadequacy at speaking to the producer interests of the rural poor. *Obrana Lidu* was largely silent on the problems that small farmers faced in marketing their goods and paying taxes. Here the Agrarian right possessed a clear advantage, both in relation to the left and the Agrarians' moderate wing. Amidst economic crisis, the Agrarian right's maximalism in calling for the protection of agricultural profits – and simultaneously attacking the left – imparted it with an appealingly radical aura. Where moderates in the Agrarian leadership were compelled to manage rural expectations downwards and compromise with socialist forces, the Agrarian right held rallies at the time of inter-party negotiations in early 1930 to create popular momentum behind its demands.[667] Indeed, it was clear from a lecture given by Rudolf Beran to an audience of lower-ranking Agrarian functionaries in March 1933 that, in Beran's estimation, it was not the vehemence of anti-socialist rhetoric but the Agrarians' inability to follow through on it that demanded justification in the eyes of the rural public.[668]

In a further sign of right-wing populism's appeal amongst the rural poor, cottagers and poorer peasants became one of the main Fascist constituencies in South Bohemia (in contrast to other regions where Fascists attracted better-off farmers).[669] To a lesser

[666] "Temešvár", *OL* (18.09.1936); "Čejkovy. Pastuška, tekoucí záchod a život chudých", *OL* (9.10.1936). "Jak je postaráno o přestárlé male zemědělce", *OL* (11.09.1936). "Agrárníci hrozí lidové straně", *OL* (5.02.1937).
[667] E.g., Čada, "Politika", 335, 340-343, 346.
[668] SDA Písek, RSZML – OO Milevsko, sign. II/B-8, R. Beran, "Co vykonala strana Republikánská pro zemědělský lid", 10.
[669] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 30-31.

extent this was true of Bohemia as a whole: of 1662 Fascist functionaries in four historical Bohemian regions in 1932 22.8% came from the ranks of the poorer peasants and agricultural labourers, second only to the middle and wealthy peasants and landowners (34.5%); both groups were vastly overrepresented relative to their weight in Bohemian society.[670] Anti-worker and anti-urban sentiment was widely exploited in rural Fascist propaganda: this then was no barrier for many lower-class supporters in the countryside.

In short, from its inception the Agrarian movement defined itself against the city. Over time this anti-urbanism became practically synonymous with anti-socialism. In interwar Czechoslovakia socialists were the Agrarians' main rivals in the struggle to direct governmental policy. Their political vision of an expanded welfare system and low trade barriers stood in direct opposition to Agrarian demands for agricultural protectionism and a reduced fiscal burden. Agrarian-socialist conflict, however, was not just a result of divergent interests. Rather, it was a conflict permeated with passions. In the rural imagination socialists were often associated with the injustice of wartime and post-war crop requisitions. Their welfare policies were resented for drawing agricultural workers to the city and making them lazy at farmers' expense. These emotions and the stereotypes they bred strongly coloured interwar polemics between Agrarians and socialists. So salient was anti-socialism that in party propaganda the Agrarian identity was increasingly defined in explicit opposition to the left. This did not mean that Agrarian anti-socialism was without limits. Both power-sharing and electoral pressures incentivised periodic overtures towards the working class. Nevertheless, even as anti-

[670] T. Pasák, *Český fašismus 1922-1945 a kolaborace 1939-1945* (Prague, 1999), 115-116.

socialism was toned down in the mid-1930s, the clash between Agrarian and socialist socioeconomic visions endured as a central political cleavage.

Agrarian anti-socialism reflected the leverage of wealthier farmers within the Agrarian party. It was they who bore the costs of rural outmigration and who benefited most from agricultural protectionism and by deflecting attention from rural inequalities. At the same time, as I have sought to show, anti-socialism was central to the Agrarians' strategy for binding the rural poor to their electoral coalition. The *Domovina* weekly encouraged poorer farmers to see themselves as proprietors and producers – the opposite of striking workers. Socialist discrimination against poorer farmers was also underscored. By entrenching the chasm between cottagers and workers, Agrarian anti-socialism served to compensate for the weaknesses of "the agricultural estate" as a source of identity. Even if cottagers could not be swayed to join the Agrarian family unconditionally, they could be persuaded that the left – the countryside's main Other – offered no alternative.

iv. City as Other and Worker as Brother in Galician Populism

The urban-rural divide provided ample fuel for rural resentment in interwar Galicia. Urban hauteur was experienced by peasants in myriad ways. For one post-war memoirist and former Wici activist, the iconic Old Town Square in Kraków represented above all a site of "bitterness": it was here that she, along with many other "simple girls who did not yet know how to cook or do the laundry", would gather – "like cows at a fair" – to be examined and hired as servants by urban ladies.[671] In Czuchnowski's novel on Galician politics, at

[671] Jakubczak, *Być*, 149-150.

the end of a peasant rally in the district town, "burghers wandered about the wooden cobblestone square gawking weirdly at this people that had come from the countryside".[672] Even in gaol their rurality frequently condemned peasants to the bottom of the prison hierarchy.[673] There were, of course, other ways the urban world was experienced and perceived in the countryside: as a place of escape, a source of fashion and cultural novelty, and increasingly – in the interwar period – a tourist destination. Nevertheless, its alienness was never in question and this alienness was often negatively connotated: towns were Jewish, full of exploitative officials, lordlike in their indolence – a space largely unfit for peasants.

Unsurprisingly, as a movement centred on the uplift and valorisation of the peasantry, Polish Populism rebelled against urban-rural hierarchies as much as seigneurial ones. Like their Czechoslovak counterparts, Populists rejected the automatic emulation of urban cultural models and the devaluation of traditional rural culture it implied. This was particularly visible in Wici's cultural activity. In its cultivation of folklorism, Wici stressed the need to root out urban as well as feudal adulterations from peasant culture. Thus, for its fifth anniversary, the Brzoza Królewska Wici circle congratulated itself, amongst its various achievements, on "unearthing and reviving old folk songs and eliminating various urban accretions".[674] Such cultural anti-urbanism often possessed an anti-nobilist tinge: urban – particularly intelligentsia – culture was seen as permeated with the influence of

[672] Czuchnowski, *Pieniądz*, 152.
[673] M. Rodak, *Pospolitacy, cuwaksi, powrotowcy. Osadzeni w więzieniu karnym Warszawa-Mokotów (1918-1939)* (Warsaw, 2017), 475-476.
[674] AZHRL, RM/I-29, Brzoza Królewska, 5.03.1939 entry.

the landowning class and imitative of its condescending attitude towards the peasantry.[675]

Anti-urban tendencies in Populist thought also extended to economic questions. Over the course of the 1920s all Populist parties began to treat agriculture as the primary branch of the economy and industrial development as ancillary to its needs.[676] With the growing influence of agrarian ideology in the 1930s, anti-industrial and anti-urban ideas – usually of an anti-capitalist hue – gained even greater salience.[677] Towns were frequently portrayed as economic parasites and exploiters of a productive countryside.[678] Another article discussing the roots of "peasant misery" ranked rent extraction by "towns" third on the list after monopoly capitalism and exploitative trade intermediaries.[679] Urban-rural economic antagonism also informed the Populists' repertoire of protest. The earliest form of SL-sponsored direct action in the 1930s was a series of market boycotts, referred to as "agrarian strikes", whereby peasants withheld food deliveries from market towns in protest at the various charges with which urban authorities saddled them for bringing their wares to market.[680] The agrarian strike remained the SL's go-to model of direct action for the remainder of the decade: even when the goals of protest shifted from the economic to the political plane and when the addressee of protest was the central state, peasant leverage was achieved and performed by waging economic war on the towns.

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[675] E.g., A. Łuczak, *Społeczeństwo i państwo w myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 1982), 193.
[676] Wojtas, *Problematyka agrarna*, 257-261.
[677] Idem, 276-277, 280-281.
[678] St. Chrobot, "Wyzwólmy się spod dyktatury gospodarczej miasta", *Wici* (14.07.1935), 1-2.
[679] M., "Źródła chłopskiej nędzy", *Wici* (31.03.1935), 1-2.
[680] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 81-85.

What primarily distinguished the Populists' anti-urbanism from that of the Agrarians was their attitude towards workers and the left. During the 1930s much of the Populist movement came to regard both as its indispensable allies. There was undoubtedly some ideological path-dependency in this divergence. Unlike in the Czech Lands, Polish socialism and Populism overlapped in their genealogies. Bolesław Wysłouch, a key figure in the early Populist movement, was a socialist in his twenties; the daily newspaper he established in 1883 featured many prominent socialists amongst its contributors.[681] Further, the "common folk" (*lud*) that was placed at the heart of Populist ideology was a concept shot through with connotations of labour, oppression and emancipatory struggle:[682] in short, the very themes that advocates of a peasant-worker alliance would foreground in the 1930s. Even on the Populist right, workers were nominally considered a fraternal social group. In its 1920 programme, for instance, PSL Piast endorsed demands for workers' rights and protections and "recognise[d] the workers' stratum as its natural ally in seeking to democratise the state and society".[683]

Such ideological elements certainly predisposed Populists towards an alliance with workers; ideological predispositions, however, could also be overridden. Many of the same tensions that bedevilled worker-peasant relations in Bohemia also flared up in Galicia. Here, too, worker-peasant hostility arose – albeit to a much lesser degree[684] – in

[681] R. Miazek, "Rodowody działaczy socjalistycznych i ludowych", in J. Gmitruk and T. Skoczek (eds), *Ludowa i socjalistyczna wizja niepodległej Polski* (Warsaw, 2020), 149-164. For more on the socialist influence on Wysłouch's thought see A. Kudłaszyk, *Myśl społeczno-polityczna Bolesława Wysłoucha 1855-1937* (Warsaw, 1978), 61-69.
[682] Łuczak, *Społeczeństwo*, 173, 176.
[683] Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 177-181, 198.
[684] For instance, one study of wartime life in a Galician district town uncovered extensive urban hostility towards traders and suspected profiteers but none towards the peasantry. K. Ruszała, *Wielka Wojna w małym mieście. Gorlice w latach 1914-1918* (Kraków, 2015).

the context of wartime food shortages and alleged peasant profiteering. As in Bohemia, its echoes continued to be heard in the 1920s. Lurid rumours of peasant wealth were reportedly widespread in Polish cities after the war.[685] Following a heated exchange between socialists and peasants at a 1925 rally in Radziszów, a village close to Kraków, various Populist speakers reminded the audience of how socialists had made light of a devastating fire in 1917, mocking the peasants for hiding all their dollars in their now-incinerated haystacks and straw mattresses.[686]

The competition between worker and peasant claims on the state that frequently dominated Czechoslovak political life also manifested itself in Polish politics during the 1920s. This was most apparent in the often-adversarial relationship between PSL Piast and the workers' movement.[687] Tensions reached a peak in 1923 when PSL Piast formed a short-lived coalition government with Catholic and nationalist parties, which the PPS leadership accused of seeking to roll back workers' rights;[688] an attempt to renew this coalition was what prompted 1926's socialist-endorsed May Coup. As late as 1973 the memoirist and former PSL Piast supporter Konstanty Radomski recalled the worker-peasant tensions of 1923 with rancour: defying the regnant martyrology of state socialist Poland, Radomski dismissed the bloody workers' demonstrations of that year as "the shrill cries and bitching of the towns and working class" whilst insisting that hyperinflation in 1923 had been beneficial to the smaller peasantry.[689] More generally, anti-socialism remained a significant strand in right-Populist discourse into the early

[685] Pigoń, *Na drogach*, 298.
[686] AZHRL, PSL Piast 19, 9.
[687] Against this see J. Borkowski, "Witos a Polska i chłopi", *RDRL*, 25 (1985), 16.
[688] Michałkowski and Trembicka, "Ludowcy", 324-325.
[689] AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 40.

1930s. As in Czechoslovakia, this discourse frequently invoked images of urban idleness and entitlement. A 1927 poem by the right-Populist poet, Adam Marzec, offers a case in point. In a tongue-in-cheek reflection on what he would do if appointed president, the lyrical subject joked that the fashionable principle of shortness – already visible in women's dresses – would be extended to the clothing and wages of working men, in light of their socialist indolence:

> Just like the eight-hour working day,
> So trousers eight inches short,
> That much is covered by their pay,
> And all will be as fashion has taught
> You ought to earn what you put in
> So Ignatius'[690] breeches will catch a trim.[691]

Whilst anti-worker attitudes were more common on the Populist right, relations between workers and the Populist left were not devoid of antagonism either. The radical Peasant Party may have openly advocated a peasant-worker alliance, but it remained alert to the conflicting interests of peasants as food producers and workers as food consumers. At times, this conflict was even granted ideological recognition, as when party leader Jan Dąbski argued that peasants possessed a "*producer's* (creator's) psyche" – in contrast to urban denizens, including workers, whose motto was "to work as little and earn as much money as possible".[692] Ultimately, despite their party's longstanding commitment to an alliance with workers, many within the Peasant Party rank and file were displeased with the Populist-Socialist electoral coalition (*Centrolew*) forged in 1929, fearing that

[690] A reference to the leading Socialist politician, Ignacy Daszyński (1866-1936).
[691] "Jak osiem godzin dzień pracy,/Osiem cali krótkie spodnie;/Na takie wystarczy płacy/I będzie wraz z modą zgodnie/Jaka praca, taka płaca:/Krótkie portki dla Ignaca". Pigoń, *Wybór pisarzy*, ii, 142-145.
[692] J. Dąbski, "Jak długo jeszcze…wieś będzie karczmą zajezdną dla różnych szlachto-łyków?", *Gazeta Chłopska* (16.10.1927), 1-2.

peasants' interests would be swamped.[693] For their part Socialists did not fully trust the Populist Left either, condemning it in the mid-1920s for its willingness to harm the urban population and water down workers' rights legislation despite no benefit to the peasantry.[694]

Given the scale of peasant-worker antagonism in the first decade of independence, the ascendancy of pro-worker and pro-Socialist attitudes in the 1930s SL cannot simply be treated as a logical outcome of ideological path-dependency. That the potential for worker-peasant conflict remained unrealised in the 1930s is, instead, best understood in light of the structural differences between the Polish and Czechoslovak polities, countrysides and peasant movements. Most obviously, after 1926 both Populists and Socialists were permanently excluded from government. Given their shared inability to influence government policy, the rivalry between workers' and peasants' claims on the state became less salient while their shared struggle against *Sanacja* authoritarianism became more so. Declarations of peasant-worker solidarity that may not have withstood the test of government could easily blossom in opposition.

Crucially, however, even at the peak of Socialist-Populist tension, Socialist and Populist demands had not been as fundamentally misaligned as socialist and Agrarian ones in Czechoslovakia. This was largely a function of the developmental divide between each state. Unlike their Czechoslovak counterparts, Populist parties generally opposed protectionist measures: the relative underdevelopment of Polish industry meant that tariffs tended to favour industrial rather than agricultural producers, impeding both

[693] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 20, 22-23.
[694] Michałkowski and Trembicka, "Ludowcy", 326.

agricultural exports and the cheap industrial imports from which agriculturalists stood to benefit.[695] Socialist-Populist conflict over food tariffs – a major source of antagonism between food producers and consumers in Czechoslovakia – was thereby averted. The rural depopulation that fuelled anti-industrial and anti-socialist sentiment amongst Bohemian farmers was, likewise, a non-existent problem for Polish Populists, confronted as they were with an overpopulated countryside. On the contrary, in its founding 1931 programme the SL hailed industrial development for its capacity to absorb "excess labour".[696] This comparatively muted sense of rivalry with industrial employers diminished Populists' inclination to frame the economic crisis as a competition between peasant and worker interests. The need for such framing was also reduced by the narrowness of the Populists' social base. This opened a wider range of political targets than was available for their Czechoslovak counterparts. Cartels and landowners – awkward antagonists for the Agrarians – were standard villains in Populist narratives of the crisis. Even when advocating reductions in state spending, Populists tended not to focus on workers. Whilst the Populist right occasionally called for reduced unemployment benefits and longer working hours in industry, such complaints were overshadowed by demands for a reduction in officials' salaries and the scale of governmental bureaucracy.[697]

Growing pro-worker sympathies were also informed by the desperate situation of the Polish countryside, especially in Galicia. Rural overpopulation and farm fragmentation

[695] Lato and Stankiewicz, *Programy*, 263, 278-280, 241-242, 308.
[696] Idem, 307-308. For similar reasons all Populist parties sought to facilitate emigration. J. Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja: ruch ludowy wobec wychodźtwa chłopskiego do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej (do 1939 r.)* (Warsaw, 2006), 421-422.
[697] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 60-61.

made many peasants reliant on supplementary waged employment. This made it harder for peasants to perceive workers as a fundamentally different group. Various memoirists recounted how their experience of seasonal estate work inspired compassion for agricultural labourers' struggles. "You need to know the [estate-] owner's relationship to his servants, then workers' strikes will not be a mystery. The workers get called scoundrels, pigs, boors etc. until your hairs stand on end," explained one politically moderate Siew activist forced to take up work on an estate after his mother's death.[698] This solidarity with rural labourers led Galician Populists to support various rural strikes in the late 1930s. According to the Lwów voivodeship authorities, those leading the agricultural labourers' strikes that swept the voivodeship in June 1936 were mainly under the influence of Wici or the SL.[699] Following the bloody repression of the estate labourers' strike at Krzeczowice, the Siedleczka Wici circle chose to honour its own fifth anniversary in sombre fashion, without organising a dance, out of respect for the victims.[700]

Far from being limited to estate labourers, peasant solidarity increasingly extended to the working class in its entirety. A quarter of the 61 peasant memoirists published in 1935 expressed sympathy with workers whilst not one expressed a hostile view.[701] Enthusiasm for a political alliance with workers also grew widespread. Demands for "peasant-worker unity" – with the adjective "peasant" deliberately foregrounded, in a reversal of the left's more famous "worker-peasant alliance" – had already been championed by the Populist left in the 1920s.[702] It was in the 1930s, however, that the social resonance of this slogan

[698] GRBUW, sygn. 1814, życiorys 161/8, Władysław Kikuł (Tuligłowy, pow. Rudki), 77.
[699] AAN, UWL 974/23, 15.07.1936 security report, 108.
[700] AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 30.07.1936 entry.
[701] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 348-349.
[702] Łuczak, *Społeczeństwo*, 182-183.

became apparent. Unsurprisingly, given its land poverty, the Wici-affiliated youth of Central Galicia was at the forefront of the national push for such an alliance.[703] At Wici meetings and in the Wici press it was repeatedly asserted how "a worker is the same as a peasant".[704] In the argument of various activists, this was a unity grounded in sanguinary ties – workers were no more than peasants who had been squeezed off the land – and a shared status as oppressed labourers.[705] Various sources confirmed that such feelings of affinity were not limited to the activist core. According to the Wici activist and poet Wojciech Skuza, for instance, the slogan of "peasant-worker unity" was less a top-down coalition-building strategy than a propagandistic response to bottom-up pressure – a sop "to satisfy the masses" that political leaders had no concrete plans of acting upon.[706] The Lwów voivodeship authorities also opined that the slogan commanded genuine support amongst the peasant movement's base.[707]

The Populist movement's pro-worker shift was accompanied by a broader stylistic and, in part, ideological reorientation. In many respects this was the opposite of the schismogenetic tendencies that drove the Czechoslovak Agrarians to define themselves against socialism. Instead, Polish Populism increasingly assumed the outward trappings of a left-wing movement. This mimetic drive had already manifested itself on the Populist left in the 1920s. The Peasant Party, for instance, tirelessly repeated that it was a "class-

[703] S. Jarecka-Kimlowska, *Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej „Wici" 1944-1948* (Warsaw, 1972), 48-49.
[704] Quote from Ludwik Sowa, an avowedly anti-Marxist Wici member. AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 21.03.1936 entry.
[705] E.g., W. Skuza, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (30.06.1935), 2; I. Wojnar and J. Rusinek, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (22.09.1935), 4.
[706] W. Skuza, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (30.06.1935), 2; also S. Ignar, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (2.02.1936), 3.
[707] AAN, UWL 974/23, 15.05.1936 report, 69.

based" force.[708] In the 1930s stylistic and ideological convergence with the left became an even more comprehensive tendency across the Populist movement. Anti-capitalism, for instance, assumed a central role in Populist discourse from the middle of the decade. This was a novel development, even on the Populist left. The Peasant Party's main press organ – the weekly *Gazeta Chłopska* – had made occasional reference to "capitalists" in the late 1920s but barely ever mentioned "capitalism" as an oppressive force; most of its radical energy had, instead, focused on the need for land reform. From the mid-1930s, by contrast, Wici – and to a more limited extent the SL – began to treat capitalism as Poland's overarching structure of injustice. Anti-capitalism became an everyday, at times idiosyncratically used, discursive frame. In an example of its vernacular adoption, one memoirist – Piotr Rusek from Mielec district – condemned the clergy for attacking the peasant youth movement despite the latter's anti-communism, adding that "[priests] do not apply Christ's ideas, instead of comforting and helping the poor they stay at the top with capitalism".[709]

This anti-capitalism was certainly different from its Marxist variant. Rather than focus on exploitation at the site of production, most Populist ire was directed against perceived rent-seeking, whether by predatory middlemen traders or the industrial cartels that emerged with state support in the 1930s.[710] Nevertheless, for all its idiosyncrasy, Populist anti-capitalism possessed a decidedly left-wing flavour. Anti-Semitism, anti-socialism and hostility to finance capital – prominent features of more right-wing critiques of

[708] E.g., J. Dąbski, *Klasowa polityka chłopska* (Warsaw, 1927), 25.
[709] Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, iv, 129.
[710] E.g., Wojtas, *Problematyka*, 273-274.

capitalism, including that of the Czechoslovak Agrarians[711] – were either absent from or peripheral to anti-capitalist Populist discourse. Much like the PPS and the KPP, Populists routinely juxtaposed capital to the "world of work", stressing peasants' adherence to the latter. One prominent Wici activist, the university student Józef Olechawski, even framed the most prototypically peasant cause – the struggle for land reform – as a clash between "the camp of capitalism" and "the workers' camp".[712] In a crucial contrast to Agrarian discourse, such references to labour were more often designed to underscore the fundamental unity of peasants and workers than the competition between agricultural and industrial sectors and the depreciation of agricultural work by the latter.

Such was the rhetorical importance assigned to labour that it increasingly eclipsed property as a Populist identity marker. Overall, Populists continued to defend small-scale peasant property, insisting on its socially salvific, non-exploitative qualities. Nevertheless, property was far from the article of faith and identity shibboleth that it represented for the Agrarians. From the mid-1930s various Wici and SL intellectuals debated and at times advocated the voluntary collectivisation of agriculture.[713] By 1935 Wici had embraced a composite economic vision in which the role of private property was significantly circumscribed: whilst small-scale private farms were to remain the backbone of the rural economy, socialist designs on industry were fully accepted.[714] Even in relation to agriculture, it was cooperativist structures rather than private ownership that received most attention in Wici's plans for a new rural order from the mid-1930s.

[711] E.g., "Politické prázdniny se chýlí ke konci", *Národní Osvobození* (20.08.1932).
[712] APPrze, St.P. Ropczyce, sygn. 4, Ref. Bezp.: Stowarzyszenia (sprawy org. Kół ZMW), B.I.6/32-B.I.6/33, report from Bobrowa (03.09.1933), sheets 43-44.
[713] Borkowski, *Wizje*, 43-44; Wojtas, *Problematyka*, 291-292.
[714] Borkowski, *Wizje*, 46-48.

Convergence with the left also manifested itself in the Populists' growing tendency to speak about historical change in stadial, systemic and emancipatory terms. In part, this derived from a desire to dignify Populist thought with the aura of a comprehensive ideology capable of holding its own against other "isms". By itself, however, this cannot explain the stylistic parallels between Populist and left-wing discursive patterns. Agrarianism, after all, was in many ways a Czechoslovak intellectual import amongst Polish Populists. It would be much harder, however, to find the same future-oriented focus on systemic transformation and emancipatory struggle in the Czechoslovak Agrarians' political communications. By contrast, these themes became central to Populist discourse and self-fashioning in the 1930s. A representative page from a 1935 issue of *Wici* included both an extended quotation from the father of left-wing cooperativist thought, Edward Abramowski, on the challenges of birthing a new world and a reprinted poem (*Czemu ta przepaść*) by 19th-century poetess Maria Konopnicka lamenting injustice in human history and expressing hope in a new dawn.[715] The same discursive tendency also worked its way into the broader consciousness of the Populist base. The aforementioned memoirist Alojzy Dziaduś claimed the peasants' voice was "a prophecy of the general panhuman culture growing like a chick out of the eggshells of dictatorships and the deformed capitalist-landowner order".[716] Likewise, in a letter to *Wici* one villager from Ropczyce district declared that "the shared peasant-worker goal is the overthrow of the bourgeois-capitalist order and the creation, in its place, of a system based on the principles of social justice".[717]

[715] *Wici* (23.06.1935), 3.
[716] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 2.
[717] S. Haber, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (6.10.1935), 1-2.

The discursive emphasis on emancipatory transformation was most apparent in Wici's approach to cooperativism. During the 1930s Wici became increasingly entangled with the consumer cooperative movement, Społem. The number of Społem-affiliated cooperatives with a majority of farmer members went up from 580 in 1934 to 1052 in 1937 in Poland as a whole.[718] This willingness to foreground peasants' consumer interests was in itself indicative of a shift towards more worker-like identities: more traditional agricultural cooperatives, frequently dominated by wealthier farmers, tended to resist the spread of consumer cooperativism to the countryside, precisely because its privileging of the consumer over the producer seemed incompatible with agricultural interests.[719] Społem's growth, however, was also emblematic of a more fundamental radicalisation: a deepening of what Populists hoped cooperativism would achieve in socio-political terms. In the words of two Wici members, until the 1930s:

> The cooperative movement…[was] no more than a shopping booth…to buy cheap and sell dear…It was only the organised rural youth [movement] that…has begun to see in cooperativism…a huge lever of the new social order that excludes exploitation by capital and gives…power to the world of work.[720]

Drawing on Abramowski's cooperativist ideas, Wici increasingly envisioned consumer cooperatives as the moral training ground for a new economic regime.[721] At their meetings Wici circles proclaimed cooperativism the only path to a new "People's Poland", contrasting its promise of systemic change with the crude methods of terrorising Jewish traders favoured by the National Democrat camp.[722] Here, too, the

[718] M. Rapacki, *Spółdzielczość spożywców na wsi* (Warsaw, 1938), 27.
[719] A. Bilewicz, *Społem 1906-1939: idea, ludzie, organizacja* (2 vols, Warsaw, 2017), i, 120-123.
[720] Dec and Mleczko, *Młodociani*, 28-29.
[721] S. Zdąbłacz, "Jaki winien być charakter ruchu spółdzielczego?", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/7 (1939), 538-541.
[722] AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 16.01.1936 and 20.07.1936 entries; AZHRL, RM/I-29, Brzoza Królewska, 28.11.1937 entry.

contrast with Czechoslovak agrarianism was striking.[723] Though heavily invested in the development of rural cooperatives, Wici's Czechoslovak counterpart – Dorost – pursued this goal without the transformational rhetoric that permeated Wici's efforts. The Mirovice district Dorost's minutes books offer a case in point. Whenever discussing cooperativist matters, its tone was practical and humdrum; the larger discursive frame it invoked was one of agricultural profitability and self-help, not social emancipation.[724]

Though radically different from prevailing rightward trends in Czechoslovak agrarianism, Populism's workerist turn was not without limits. Part of the rural population remained suspicious of workers and socialism. Anti-clerical attitudes may have been common in the Galician countryside, but the left's irreligious aura continued to inspire mistrust. In the view of one former Communist activist writing in 1952, Communists were at times unwelcome at Populist meetings precisely "because those communists don't go to church".[725] Mistrust towards the Left was also perpetuated by its reputation for Jewishness. One radical Wici activist publicly beseeched worker organisations not to send Jewish representatives to joint meetings, lest the anti-Semitic argument "that only Jews are socialists" be reinforced.[726] As was often the case in the 1930s SL, divergent attitudes towards the peasant-worker alliance were also informed by generational divisions. Józef Chmura, head of the Siedleczka Wici circle and an advocate of tighter

[723] This is consistent with a broader division in East European cooperativism between more and less economically developed contexts: cooperative movements in more backward regions were more likely to embrace political radicalism. T. Lorenz, "Introduction: Cooperatives in Ethnic Conflicts", in T. Lorenz (ed.), *Cooperatives in Ethnic Conflicts. Eastern Europe in the 19th and Early 20th Century* (Berlin, 2006), 39-40.
[724] "No one will help us countrymen/agriculturalists" was a stock phrase in this context. SDA Písek, Okrskové sdružení republikánského dorostu československého venkova Mirovice 1911-1939 (OSRD Mirovice), sign. I/3, Kniha sociálně-politické komise OSRD Mirovice, 18.12.1932 entry.
[725] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13466, Stanisław Bodzioch (Humniska, Brzozów district, 1952).
[726] S. Ignar, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (2.02.1936), 3.

cooperation with workers, explicitly framed the question of peasant-worker cooperation as a generational litmus test, separating a conviction-driven youth from a timid, opportunistic older generation.[727]

The peasant-worker alliance was further hampered by a dearth of concrete expressions of solidarity that went beyond the discursive or symbolic plane. Even as enthusiasm for a peasant-worker alliance spread, the sentiment was only rarely converted into anything more than gestural politics. Thus, in 1935 the radical Wici activist Wojciech Skuza lamented that whilst "it is ever more common for our members to attend the conventions of worker organisations and…for workers to appear at our own larger gatherings…for now these remain occasional, neighbourly visits on festive days, leading to no more than mutual well-wishes".[728]

During 1937's Great Peasant Strike worker-peasant cooperation intensified but remained unsystematic. On the one hand, large-scale workers' solidarity strikes were held locally – frequently under joint Socialist-Communist auspices – especially in western Galicia.[729] In some cases, this solidarity was reciprocated by peasants: in Munina (Jarosław district), for instance, striking villagers brought food products to the community centre [*dom ludowy*] where they were, in turn, collected by worker delegations.[730] At the same time, workers' solidarity strikes lacked the official support of the PPS leadership and failed to spread to any major working-class centres. Moreover,

[727] AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 11.06.1936 entry.
[728] W. Skuza, "O jedność chłopsko-robotniczą", *Wici* (30.06.1935), 2.
[729] H. Cimek, "Idea strajku chłopskiego oraz jej zwolennicy i przeciwnicy", in W. Wierzbieniec (ed.), *Wielki Strajk Chłopski w 1937 roku: uwarunkowania i konsekwencje* (Rzeszów, 2008), 108-109; M. Śliwa, „Partie robotnicze wobec strajku chłopskiego 1937 r.", in J. Gmitruk and D. Pasiak-Wąsik (eds.), *Bądźcie solidarni! Wielki strajk chłopski* (Warsaw, 2007), 61-67.
[730] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13429, Antoni Brożyzna (Munina, Jarosław district).

even at the local level, there were many PPS and trade union activists who actively denied the peasants support. The Lwów PPS workers' committee even went as far as petitioning the voivodeship authorities to take more vigorous action against the peasants to prevent further increases in food prices.[731]

Workers' hostility to the peasantry was thus as much – if not more – of an obstacle to the peasant-worker alliance as similar sentiments amongst the peasantry.[732] The resultant failures of solidarity represented an additional hurdle to Populists' convergence with the left. In Łańcut district, for instance, trade union representatives' refusal to stand by striking estate labourers was exploited by the SL right "at every possible occasion" in order to prove that "peasant interests do not coincide with workers' interests and [that] workers disdain the peasants".[733] According to an Interior Ministry report, enthusiasm for an SL-PPS alliance in SL ranks gave way to "a mood of anticipation and…mistrust" in the spring of 1938 as ordinary SL activists learnt about the PPS' foot-dragging on organising a solidarity strike to coincide with their own and as they were exposed to PPS speakers' views on "irritating problems [like] religion, the clergy, private property [and] the Jewish question".[734]

An additional brake on the Populists' leftward turn was their professed anti-communism. The desire to define themselves against communism incentivised Populists to moderate their radical self-presentation. As in the Czechoslovak Agrarians' discourse, land reform was routinely extolled as a prophylactic against Bolshevism – a means of giving the poor

[731] Cimek, "Idea strajku", 108-109.
[732] E.g., S. Rychliński, "Mysłakowski, Zygmunt i Gross, Feliks: Robotnicy piszą", *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi: studia i materiały*, 3 (1938), 290.
[733] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1957), 341.
[734] Borkowski, "Sprawa", 296.

a stake in the social order. This discursive frame was employed by the Populist right and left alike.[735] The accusations of communism that were regularly cast at Populists by priests and the political right also compelled them to accentuate their non-communist credentials. At one 300-person Wici meeting in Ropczyce district in 1933 a prominent local activist, Feliks Zawiślak, insisted that "[Wici] is not communist, as most communists are Jews and [Wici] fights the Jews for they are leeches on the peasants…".[736] This anti-communism trickled down into popular consciousness: it was, for instance, a prominent feature of young peasant memoirs, appearing in 23 out of 47 memoirs published in 1938.[737]

Ultimately, however, the Populists' declarative anti-communism did not prevent the rise of pro-worker sentiment or a rapprochement with non-Communist – and, in some cases, Communist – sections of the left. Wici's leftward turn offers a case in point. The *Wici* weekly only began to criticise communism in response to the KPP's efforts to forge a Popular Front after 1935: namely, in the very period when Wici also began to clamour for a peasant-worker alliance.[738] And whilst the Popular Front was explicitly rebuffed by the Wici leadership, this was far from a unanimous position amongst Wici activists.[739] In some cases the Popular Front may only have been resisted for pragmatic reasons connected to the Communist Party's illegality.[740] Anti-communism was at times no more

[735] E.g., M. Bukała, "Komunizm i komuniści w prasie ruchu ludowego z lat 1931-1939", in M. Bukała and M. Krzysztofiński (eds.), *Komuniści w II Rzeczypospolitej: ludzie – struktury – działalność* (Rzeszów, 2015), 567-570; J. Dąbski, "Niedola wsi polskiej. Przy pozłacanej nędzy w państwie", *Gazeta Chłopska* (15.04.1928), 1.
[736] APPrze, St.P. Ropczyce, Ref. Bezp.: działalność polityczna kół ZMW, sygn. 8, Gnojnica police report (14.05.1933), sheet 4.
[737] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 396.
[738] Borkowski, *Wizje*, 93-94.
[739] E.g., Gołębiowski and Jarecka-Kimlowska, *Związek*, 119-123.
[740] Borkowski, *Wizje*, 94-95.

than a form of rhetorical camouflage. For instance, despite his anti-communist diatribe, the aforementioned Zawiślak was himself a KPP member and a leading instigator of the peasant unrest of 1933.[741] Indeed, Communist infiltration of Wici and SL circles was substantial in places – Lwów voivodeship being one such region. Though it is hard to ascertain how much truth there was behind the bluster, many Communists who doubled as Wici or SL activists even presented themselves in their subsequent life-narratives as frontline players in local Populist politics.[742]

In sum, the cultural gulf between town and country was a widely observed feature of interwar Poland. Rural feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the towns were widespread. In their efforts to promote peasant group consciousness, Populists frequently challenged such insecurities. This was especially visible during the 1930s, when an increasingly class-oriented Wici movement subverted urban-rural as much as seigneurial hierarchies in cultural matters, at times even conflating the two. The anti-urban rebellion also extended to Populist thinking on the economy which, over the interwar period, increasingly centred agriculture as Poland's principal economic sector.

Absent from this growing anti-urbanism were the anti-socialist and anti-worker themes that dominated Agrarian discourse on the city in Czechoslovakia. Instead, the 1930s witnessed an unprecedented convergence between the SL and the left. Pre-existing ideological ties certainly facilitated this convergence. Nevertheless, convergence between Polish Populists and Socialists was far from a predetermined outcome. During

[741] G. Woźny, "„Powstanie ropczyckie" w wybranej prasie międzywojennej", *UR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4/5 (2017), 20-22

[742] E.g., APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13426, Władysław Bobiński (1958-1973). For an alternative official assessment see Borkowski, "Sprawa", 297.

the 1920s Socialist and Populist claims on the state had often been in conflict and anti-socialism had frequently dominated right-Populist discourse. Whilst less conflictual, relations between Socialists and the Populist left had also been marred by mistrust.

In the 1930s such tensions lost salience as Populists and Socialists were brought together by their opposition to the *Sanacja* regime. Crucially, this was also facilitated by the absence of policy differences around protectionism and rural outmigration – key fault-lines in the Agrarian-socialist conflict in the Czech Lands rooted, in turn, in the latter's greater industrial development. This Populist-Socialist convergence, however, was more than a marriage of political convenience. Rather, rapprochement with the left went deeper, finding support in changing rural attitudes and shifts in Populist style and thought. In Galicia peasant attitudes towards agricultural labourers – indeed the working class in general – improved in the context of growing rural immiseration. During the 1930s slogans of peasant-worker unity acquired genuine grassroots appeal. At the same time, the increasingly oppositional Populist movement restyled itself as a radical, implicitly left-wing force – the opposite to the Agrarians' desire for stylistic distance from socialism. In programmatic terms Populists retained their distinctly non-socialist emphasis on agriculture and small peasant property. Stylistically, however, boundaries between Populism and the left were blurred: anti-capitalism became centred in Populist critiques of modern Poland; labour began to overshadow property as a Populist identity marker; and a growing emphasis was placed on the need for systemic transformation and emancipatory struggle. Such blurred stylistic lines undoubtedly facilitated the Populist movement's infiltration by Communists at the local level. This convergence with the left was not without limits: sections of both the peasantry and the working class

remained hostile to one another; de facto cooperation with Socialists was limited to gestural politics; and anti-communism remained central to Populist self-presentation. Nevertheless, Polish Populism had by the mid-1930s overwhelmingly rejected the view of workers as the peasants' Other – nowhere more so than in the former PSL Piast stronghold of Central Galicia.

As this comparison has shown, the antagonisms pursued by peasant movements were significantly informed by the experiences and attitudes of their base. Just as resentments originating in World War I coloured the content of Agrarian anti-socialism, so the Populists' anti-seigneurial stances were hardened by the memory of feudal abuses. Nevertheless, the ultimate determinant of political antagonisms lay not in mass experiences but in considerations of interest: each movement's political interest in holding its electoral coalition together, combined with the economic interests of dominant constituencies within each coalition. The social experiences of each movement's rank and file were rarely sufficient to dictate the political primacy of some antagonisms over others. For instance, in both South Bohemia and Central Galicia the material basis for peasant-landowner conflict declined during the interwar period, even as anti-seigneurial sentiment remained potent. Thus, both peasant movements could *choose* to deepen this antagonism or, alternatively, allow it to wither, even if the endurance of semi-feudal relations in rural Poland made the latter option harder. That the Agrarians *chose* to reconcile with landowners whilst repurposing anti-seigneurial language against the left was *ultimately* decided by their desire to preserve and deflect attention from rural inequalities of which their own elites were beneficiaries and, connectedly, to build a coalition founded on agricultural unity rather than any single rural

class. Conversely, for the Polish Populists there were no political or economic disincentives to playing on anti-seigneurial attitudes and even artificially perpetuating their political visibility. Rather, anti-nobilism served only to invigorate the Populist class-building project and to reinforce the Populists' demands for land reform as well as their critique of the re-feudalised *Sanacja* state. Its only cost – impeding a possible landowner-peasant alliance – was insignificant once landowners had allied with the *Sanacja* regime and intensified land hunger in the 1930s drained such an alliance of any residual political appeal.[743]

Peasant movements' attitudes to the urban working class can be similarly explained. Once again, in neither country did the experiences of the party base predetermine a specific political course. In both states peasants had a material basis for resenting urban socialists whose demands for cheap bread and fiscally costly social insurance schemes conflicted with peasant interests. At the same time, in South Bohemia and Central Galicia alike, small, semi-proletarianized landholdings were the norm and poor peasants shared with workers their anxieties over consumer prices and unemployment, as well as a more diffuse sense of social subalternity and labouring identity. Only in Poland, however, was the emotional potential for peasant-worker solidarity accommodated within the confines of the peasant movement. Once again, this was ultimately determined by political and economic interests. For a Populist movement condemned along with Socialists to permanent opposition, the advantages of a Socialist-Populist alliance against economic and political elites outweighed any prospective policy

[743] When the *Sanacja* regime defied landowners and renewed its support for land reform in the late 1930s, some conservative landowning circles did in fact attempt to revive such an alliance with the peasantry. A. Wojtas, "Agraryzm", 126-127.

disagreements. Equally, the weakness of wealthy farmers within the Populist base removed most economic obstacles to the expression and cultivation of peasant-worker solidarity. By contrast, regardless of the experiences of the poorer Agrarian base, for Agrarian elites working-class socialism represented, above all, an economic threat. Further, the presence of commercial, landowning and food-processing interests within the Agrarian coalition made it impossible to improve small farmers' economic situation at the expense of these interests and, thus, in ways that would not harm urban consumers, a key socialist clientele. Besides serving economic imperatives, anti-socialism was also politically advantageous, obfuscating what small peasants shared with workers and thereby binding them to an otherwise brittle sectoral coalition (even as many of them continued to vote for the left). Once again, therefore, the class composition of peasant movements proved a key determinant of their political direction, conditioning their choice of social antagonists and thereby deciding against whom party foot soldiers defined themselves and what aspects of their social experience were erased or granted political salience.

Chapter 5. Oscillating between Class and Nation: Rural Politics and the State in the 1930s

There is no more studied question in the historiography of European peasants than their relationship to nationalism. Following the example of Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* and with the rise of constructivist approaches to the nation, a whole crop of studies set out to investigate how East European peasants were turned into citizens between roughly 1848 and 1918.[744] In the late 2000s this trend was partially reversed, as historians of East-Central Europe turned to ways peasants failed to be nationalized, drawing attention to the persistence of pre-national or anti-national attitudes.[745] What remains largely understudied is the evolution of rural attitudes towards the nation after 1918 – especially in the 1930s, when economic hardship challenged the hopes placed in national states at the time of independence. Did the economic crisis of the 1930s erode national enthusiasm and faith in the state? How far was rural radicalism inflected with nationalism or, conversely, was anti-systemic sentiment directed against the nation-state? And what was the role of organised peasant movements in shaping or redirecting challenges to the state and the political system? To what extent did the class loyalties of peasant movements conflict with state-nationalist loyalties in this period?

[744] E.g. J-P. Himka, *Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1988); J. Molenda, *Chłopi, narod, niepodległość: kształtowanie się postaw narodowych i obywatelskich chłopów w Galicji i Królestwie Polskim w przededniu odrodzenia Polski* (Warszawa, 1999); K. Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, 2004).
[745] E.g. P.M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge MA, 2006); Linkiewicz, *Lokalność*.

Before turning to these questions, it is worth surveying the similarities and differences in how peasants and peasant movements related to the nation in Galicia and Bohemia before 1929. From their very inception both agrarian populist movements had accepted the nation as a paramount value, in line with the general norm in East-Central European politics.[746] This similarity defied contextual differences between the countryside and political culture that each movement was forced to navigate. On the one hand, Galician Populists faced a peasantry that at the turn of the century was generally indifferent or hostile to the idea of Poland – a synonym for re-enserfment in many peasants' minds. Adding to the Populists' woes was a landowning political elite that largely opposed the peasantry's involvement in national affairs. Populists were thus compelled to fight on two fronts: promoting national consciousness in the village whilst also persuading elites of peasants' patriotic spirit and right to co-govern the nation. By contrast, no such challenges fell upon the Agrarians. The countryside they faced had already been extensively nationalized in the late 19th century.[747] No association between Czechness and lordliness stood in the way of plebeian patriotism.[748] Furthermore, opposition to the political integration of wealthier peasants was relatively limited amongst national elites. The peasantry's preservation of the Czech language during the two centuries after the Battle of White Mountain (1620) – a period when the Czech nobility became increasingly Germanized – had won it a central position in mainstream nationalist narratives from the

[746] J. Connelly, *From People into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton, 2020).
[747] J. Petráň and J. Havránek, "Rolnické hnutí v českých zemích v letech 1775-1918", *ČSČH*, 17 (1969), 876; M. Řepa, "Between the nation and self-interest: the Czech peasantry in Moravia at the daybreak of civil society, 1848-1814", in Brassart et al., *Making Politics*, 231.
[748] Indeed, whilst the Agrarian 1903 programme was at pains to justify its separate existence and, hence, its splitting of the nation, it took the Czechness of the peasantry largely as a given. Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 47-48.

time of the Czech National Revival.[749] The symbolic and practical barriers to national integration were, in short, much lesser for the Czech peasantry.

Despite these contextual differences, both rural movements adopted nationalist discourses that were similar in substance and function. Both promoted visions of national history in which peasants or peasant-friendly national heroes were assigned a prominent role.[750] Both underscored the peasantry's contributions to the survival of the nation, whether through linguistic preservation in the Czech case or armed defence of the state in the case of Poland.[751] For both, these peasant-centred histories served not just to bind peasants to the nation but to make clear the nation's debt to the peasants and thereby legitimise the peasantry's claims. Indeed, class-based grievances coloured the nationalism of both movements. Just as peasants' contributions to the nation were foregrounded, the nobility was frequently portrayed in treacherous terms, thereby delegitimising its right to lead the nation.[752] However, even as they exploited nationalist language to advance their own class-based goals, Agrarians and Populists also allowed nationalist concerns to blunt the militancy of their politics and push them into alliances with social opponents.[753]

During World War I nationalist enthusiasm gained ground in rural society, as wartime hardships, crop requisitions and persecutions of deserters shredded the legitimacy of the Habsburg state. This was true in both regions under study, even as traditional fears

[749] J. Rak, *Bývali Čechové: české historické mýty a stereotypy* (Prague, 1994), 85-95.
[750] E.g., Jakubowska, *Ruch*, 55-99.
[751] Idem, 69-99.
[752] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 46; Rak, *Bývali,* 76-77; Wójcik, "W walce", 110.
[753] Harna and Lacina, *Politické programy*, 56; Wójcik, "W walce", 103-104.

of a "lordly" Poland continued to linger amongst Galician peasants.[754] Crucially, in peasant eyes the idea of national independence often became inseparable from that of social justice. This conflation was best reflected in the demands for expropriatory land reform that swept the countryside and imposed themselves on peasant parties after 1918 – demands cloaked as much in the idiom of national as social justice.[755]

It was not, however, just the radical strand of peasant nationalism that was invigorated around 1918. As peasant parties embraced the cause of national independence during the second half of the war, they also doubled down on their self-representation as "state-building" actors. This newfound emphasis on the state became deeply entwined with an ostentatious commitment to the rule of law and to treating the state interest above that of the farmers. It was partly for this reason that the Czech Agrarians changed their name to the Republican Party. In Poland the same tendency was especially visible on the peasant right. In the decade after 1918, PSL Piast frequently touted its "state-building" character as a partisan marker setting it apart from its left-peasantist (and thus more class-oriented) rivals.[756]

Czech Agrarians and Galician Populists thus entered the interwar period with a nationalism composed of contradictory strands, both radical and solidaristic. On the one hand, both movements inflected their nationalism with peasantist motifs and used it to advance class-specific agendas. Class and nation, however, were not always easily reconciled. At times, the solidaristic strand in peasant parties' nationalism eclipsed their

[754] E.g., Słomka, *Pamiętniki*, 274; Rataj, *Pamiętniki*, 29-30.
[755] For examples of this conflation at a societal level see George, "Pamiętnik", 264-265; Cesar and Otáhal, *Hnutí*, 351; Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany, 64.
[756] J. Brodacki, "Polityka a etyka", *Piast*, (24.02.1924), 5-6.

loyalty to their principal clientele. And after 1918 the pressure to prioritise the interests of the nation-state frequently reinforced this solidaristic tendency in the name of "state-building".

For all these early similarities, Agrarian and Populist attitudes towards the nation-state evolved in largely opposite directions during the 1930s. Both continued to walk a tightrope between nation/state and class, never surrendering either source of allegiance. Nevertheless, as this chapter will argue, where class increasingly prevailed over nation and state in the priorities and discourse of the SL, the Agrarians gradually restyled themselves as a party representing the nation-state in its entirety. It will be argued that this divergence was closely connected to the differences in anti-systemic sentiment that proliferated in each society during the economic crisis and in the strategies adopted by each party in response. In 1930s Galicia the state apparatus was increasingly perceived as a vehicle of class domination and a legitimate target for class anger – a view that a politically marginalised SL often encouraged. By contrast, amongst Czech-speakers in rural South Bohemia it was political parties rather than the state that bore the brunt of social discontent – an anti-politics that simultaneously reflected Agrarian ideological influence, threatened Agrarian hegemony and most probably informed the Agrarians' state-nationalist turn.

i. Anti-Regime Sentiment in Rural Galicia

The early 1930s were a turning point for state-peasant relations in rural Galicia – the moment when alienation from the *Sanacja* regime began to overshadow patriotic attitudes. This oppositional turn was most acute in Populist circles where, in the

immediate aftermath of the May Coup, attitudes towards the emergent regime had varied greatly. By the late 1920s, however, the *Sanacja* government's mounting authoritarianism had pushed all Populist parties into opposition. Simultaneously, governmental persecution of the opposition intensified – a process culminating in the incarceration of Socialist and Populist leaders in the lead-up to the 1930 elections. In subsequent years this persecution also came to be felt at the village level. Administrative obstruction of even the most anodyne Wici and SL activities became routine. A 1936 letter from the Wici leadership to the prime minister enumerated myriad forms of persecution facing its Central Galician branch. Educational courses were arbitrarily and violently prevented from taking place by the police. Wici circles were either dissolved or banned from forming under the pretext of public security. In Jarosław district leading Wici activists who refused to renounce their activities were routinely thrown into a so-called "Wici cellar" where they were beaten, insulted and chained for a day or two.[757] More often, district authorities resorted to semi-legal forms of harassment. Activists faced frequent fines for political as well as non-political violations, from flouting sanitary norms to road traffic offences.[758]

However, worsening conflict with public authorities was not limited to activist peasants in the early 1930s. Rather, this was a generalised phenomenon. As the peasantry became more immiserated, the state's impositions and interventions in rural life came to appear more unjust. Simultaneously, if Populist sources are to be believed, state officials grew haughtier and more aggressive under *Sanacja* rule. Evidence of the resultant hostility

[757] AZHRL, RM/I-23, April 1936 letter from Main Directorate of ZMW RP to Premier Zyndram-Kościałkowski, sheets 20-33.
[758] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 165-166.

towards various aspects of governance is easy to find. As elsewhere in Europe, state bailiffs looking to seize peasant property in lieu of unpaid taxes became a frequent target of social resistance,[759] at times even provoking larger-scale confrontations with the police and district authorities. The underlying grievances around fiscal injustice and the behaviour of officialdom were amply reflected in peasant memoirs.[760] Nor did such sentiments weaken over time – even as the economic crisis waned – or across generations: of the 1544 responses to the 1937 memoir competition for young peasants, 525 spoke about state officials, 516 of them in negative terms.[761] Hostility also transcended partisan divisions, even manifesting itself amongst peasants who were politically aligned with the government and social elites. In an opinion survey of peasant youth active in the Catholic youth movement, for instance, most responses expressed some resentment towards tax authorities as well as district- and village-level state officials.[762]

Such animosity was certainly nothing new. Hostile attitudes towards public authority had recent precedents in the Galician countryside, especially during World War I and its aftermath. Village mayors and gendarmes were frequent targets of popular vengeance in 1918-1919.[763] The new Polish state, which revived requisitions in April 1919 to sustain its war effort against the Bolsheviks, easily became heir to some of the same resentments.[764] Even before the May Coup, in many peasants' eyes, the state apparatus

[759] Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza,* 147; E. Lynch, "Collective peasant struggles under the Third Republic in France: learning and inventing new protest tactics", in Brassart et al., *Making Politics*, 206.
[760] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 346-347.
[761] Idem*,* 379.
[762] Crucially, such hostility towards local-level state officials was for the most part not accompanied by oppositional feelings towards the government. Leżeński, *Wieś*, 19.
[763] E.g., Czerpak, "Ruch", 96; Słomka, *Pamiętniki*, 260-265.
[764] Stankiewicz, *Konflikty*, 252.

appeared bloated and parasitic – an impression that Populist parties indulged through their demands for a reduced political and administrative class.[765] The charges of political and anti-peasant bias routinely levelled against state administrators in the 1930s, likewise, had precedents before 1926. The Populist left, for instance, had frequently complained that voivodeship, district and police authorities were dominated by hostile PSL Piast-affiliated and other right-wing elements.[766]

Just as anti-state attitudes were not entirely novel, so they seldom became systematic or total in their reach during the 1930s. In the 1935 published memoir collection disparate complaints about state officials and fiscal injustice only rarely translated into a consistently oppositional stance towards the broader political regime.[767] Further, even in deeply oppositional regions such as Central Galicia, sections of the peasantry could be persuaded to join pro-governmental civil society organisations such as the Riflemen's Association or Agrarian Circles – seduced by their promise of material patronage and aura of state patriotism and apolitical efficiency.[768] Nor were SL representatives above being coaxed – or simply bullied – into more cooperative stances.[769] Even radically oppositional activists appreciated how cooperating with parts of the state apparatus and setting them against others could redound to the peasants' advantage. Post-war memoirs gleefully recounted instances where authority figures showed tacit sympathy for the SL's cause or where SL activists successfully solicited the help of district- or even

[765] AZHRL, PSL Piast 19, sprawozdanie z Radziszowa (20.09.1925); E. Podgajna, *Stronnictwo Chłopskie (1926-1931): studium z dziejów myśli politycznej* (Lublin, 2011), 74.
[766] E.g., J. Kulisiewicz, "Dosyć tego Chjeno-Piasta", *Gazeta Chłopska* (8.01.1927), 3-4; Kulak, "Rewolucja", 357.
[767] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 348.
[768] E.g., W. Fołta, *Wspomnienia z walk młodzieży chłopskiej* (Warsaw, 1956), 57, 82; ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 443, Malczyński; Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, i, 272.
[769] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 200.

voivodeship-level authorities when trying to oust incompetent *Sanacja* administrators or establish rural cooperatives.[770]

Nevertheless, whilst peasant hostility towards the state was neither novel nor consistent, it did assume an unprecedented intensity and coherence in the 1930s. This was reflected in the style and substance of peasant grievances and protest; a burgeoning class-based separatism from state institutions; and, finally, an increasingly explicit disenchantment with the nation-state itself. Each of these symptoms warrants further comment.

The first sign of *intensified* anti-state sentiment was the peasants' growing mistrust towards the state's various agencies. As the *Sanacja* regime tightened political control over its administration, peasants lost faith even in those branches that had previously appeared reasonably non-political. According to Witos, in the early 1930s the judiciary came to be perceived as so partisan that many peasants – though formerly litigious – stopped bringing neighbourly disputes to court.[771] Schoolteachers' dependence on the regime as well as their indulgent attitude towards the children of state officials, likewise, turned them into objects of mistrust. The Populist movement readily drew attention to instances where teachers had used violence against pupils, especially where this was done on political grounds, as when one child in Ropczyce district was beaten for wearing a pro-Witos symbol on the 25th anniversary of his career as a deputy.[772] One peasant song

[770] E.g., AZHRL, Pamiętniki 266 (hereinafter P-266), J. Mądrzak, "Moje wspomnienia" (1973), 29-30; AZHRL, P-375, L. Lutyk, "Nowosielce/Wspomnienia działacza", 15-19; AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 48-49; *Wspomnienia działaczy spółdzielczych* (2 vols, Warsaw, 1963), ii, 274, 277.
[771] W. Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (3 vols, Paris, 1965), iii, 353.
[772] E.g., APPrze, St.P. Ropczyce, sygn. 8, Ref. Bezp.: działalność polityczna kół ZMW, B.II.1/78/33, Góra Motyczna police report (05.09.1933), sheet 8; AZHRL, SL-57, Kraków KPP Central Committee report

composed in 1937 launched a full-throated attack on teachers for impeding "Progress", betraying "the interests of the Polish village" and "perpetuat[ing] serfdom alongside the clergy".[773] In an another instance of deepening mistrust, in April 1937 the *Piast* weekly claimed that Galician SL circles were increasingly deciding to boycott radio broadcasts due to their adulatory treatment of Adam Koc, the ideological leader of the newly-formed governmental party, the Camp of National Unity (OZN).[774]

The wide range of such experiences reinforced the perception of the state as a vehicle of class rule. On the one hand, this was nothing new: in the peasant imagination government had always been the preserve of "lords" – an association entrenched by the accusations of "nobilism" levelled by the SL against the *Sanacja* regime. In the 1930s, however, it was the state apparatus – not just the classes it represented – which occupied an increasingly salient position in folk understandings of exploitation. Prior to 1926 the party-political system had provided a partial buffer against such framing: state administrators and police chiefs who persecuted the peasantry or enriched themselves at its expense could be resented *qua* representatives of a rival party.[775] In the 1930s, with the entire state apparatus under the control of the ruling bloc, state oppression was not as easy to dress up in partisan terms. Increasingly, both in SL rhetoric and peasant grievances, various branches of the state figured as cogs in a self-serving, bureaucratic

(1.05.1933-15.06.1933),1. Nevertheless, relations with teachers were varied and highly dependent on locality.

[773] AZHRL, SL-55/2, J. Baranowicz, "Nauczycielstwo".

[774] "Dlaczego chłopi bojkotują Radio", *Piast* (4.04.1937), 6.

[775] The anti-political arguments used by Piłsudski's allies to justify the May Coup – arguments which equated rule by political parties with corruption – had even enjoyed some purchase on the Populist left. R. Turkowski, "Ruch młodowiejski wobec Marszałka J. Piłsudskiego i jego powrotu do władzy po przewrocie majowym w świetle prasy (1918-1928)", in J. Gmitruk (ed.), *Przyczyny i skutki przewrotu majowego 1926 roku* (Warsaw, 2017), 217.

machine lavishly living off and repressing the common folk. In a typical example, at a 400-strong meeting in Dynów (Brzozów district) in 1938, speakers railed against the misuse of peasant taxes to pay for police repressions of the peasantry, on the one hand, and the luxurious habits of leading military men, on the one other.[776] Even a peasant active in pro-governmental organisations like Władysław Kluż – though unwilling to blame the government directly – echoed many of these grievances with the 1930s state: in his memoir Kluż lambasted the ill-defined, supposedly German-speaking state employees who frittered away the peasants' blood-soaked taxes at restaurants and hotels, asking rhetorically how the state could expect its citizens' loyalty in light of such injustice.[777]

Intensified dissatisfaction with the state was also reflected in the growing state orientation of 1930s protest culture. To some extent this orientation was inevitable. All protest – including that directed against other social groups – was bound either to be addressed to the state or, in the case of violent direct action, to provoke its intervention. For many peasants, however, defying and confronting the state was more than an incidental feature of protest; frequently, it appeared to be its main objective. This was most apparent during the many performative displays of peasant strength that studded the 1930s. In one post-war memoirist's telling, the frequent flag-blessing ceremonies held by the SL in his native Brzozów district between 1934 and 1938 were expressly designed "to demonstrate peasant strength [and] organisation, for a [police] commander from Brzozów district would always attend such ceremonies".[778] Similarly, one speaker

[776] APPrze, St.P. Brzozów, sygn. 7, Sprawozdania starosty z działalności SL, 11.03.1938 security report from Dynów, sheets 6-7.
[777] George, "Pamiętnik", 242-243.
[778] AZHRL, P-4a, J. Banat, "Wspomnienia z powiatu brzozowskiego", 3.

at the aforementioned Dynów meeting averred that the 1937 Peasant Strike had, despite its ostensible failure, been a success precisely because "it showed the Government that the peasant is no longer a passive mass to be guided by *Sanacja* district governors and gendarmes as if on a leash".[779]

At other times, it was not just confrontation but the humiliation of state authority that peasants revelled in. During the 1933 unrest, for instance, authority figures were frequently coerced into participating, even leading, in peasant marches and illegal gatherings.[780] The importance of this symbolic humiliation was borne out by many peasant voices. When in 1937 *Piast* announced a competition for a "popular anthem", one caustic entry cast the ruling class as a euphemistic "elite lady" (*pani z „elity"*), full of disdain and gluttonous in her appetites. In an accompanying letter, the poem's author – Marcin Baran from Groble (Nisko district) – implored *Piast*'s editors to print his anthem so that the *Sanacja* "gang", "many of whom no doubt peruse the *Piast* weekly", could see for themselves that peasants were more than capable of "giving the Varsovian harlot a withering retort".[781] Similarly, when post-war memoirists looked back on confrontations with the state, the theatrical deflation of state authority was often at the heart of their memories. As late as 1973, one memoirist recalled how, during the Lwów voivode's visit to his village in 1936-1937, a peasant delegation had handed him a scroll of tax execution orders, normally issued to those who had fallen into arrears.[782]

[779] APPrze, St.P. Brzozów, sygn. 7, Sprawozdania starosty z działalności SL, 11.03.1938 security report from Dynów, sheet 4.
[780] Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza buntu*, 180; L. George, "A Comparative Study of Two Peasant Revolts in 1930s Poland" (MA thesis, Central European University, 2016), 158-160.
[781] AZHRL, SL-55/2, M. Baran, "Pani z „elity" ma głos!"
[782] AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 59.

Nowhere was the peasants' desire to symbolically overthrow the state's class-based privilege more dramatically displayed than in the actions taken against motorcars during protests. In the 1930s countryside automobiles were strongly associated with the state: the only ones most peasants likely encountered were those of the police and the district governor. In Wincenty Witos' critical estimation, the *Sanacja* state deliberately invested in such vehicles to boost the grandeur of the district governor's office.[783] In this context the motorcar easily came to symbolise the aloofness and elitism of public authority. In Czuchnowski's novel on the 1930 elections, for instance, the alienness of the BBWR to the Galician countryside was signalled with a simple visual cue, to wit, the district governor arriving at a BBWR rally in "a huge, black car".[784] Similarly, a 1935 poem by Szczepan Markowicz, a Populist-supporting peasant from Białobrzegi (Łańcut district), used the motorcar to denote the gulf between social elites and peasants. Entitled "The Farmers' Patron", the poem scrutinised the iconographic hierarchy of Łańcut's St Stanislaus Church in which the stained-glass window representing St Isidore, the patron saint of farmers, occupied a marginal position compared to the "kings, bishops and other estates" who graced the altarpiece. Crucially, to render St Isidore's lowliness, Markowicz fell back on the anachronistic image of the motorcar which "the holy patron of farmers…never once rode in his life…".[785]

It is unsurprising, considering these associations, that motorcars became a frequent target of popular vengeance during state-peasant confrontations. Whilst there were certainly practical reasons for attacking police and other state-owned vehicles, it was

[783] Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (1965), iii, 353.
[784] Czuchnowski, *Pieniądz*, 180.
[785] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13916, Szczepan Markowicz (Białobrzegi, Łańcut district).

the symbolic dimension of the act that ensured its endurance in subsequent peasant memories. For instance, the scene from the 1937 strike that remained impressed on one participant's memory 25 years later was a confrontation in Dębica, during which – after a failed attempt to halt the peasants' march – the police had their vehicle overturned by the crowd.[786] Similarly, a post-war account of the 1937 strike in Jasło district recounted how:

> ...some big shots were taking a taxi from Niesłowice to Jasło and did not want to stop when the peasants told them to, so [the peasants] grabbed...the taxi, lifting it up with these gentlemen inside, forcing them to leave the taxi, whilst the apples and tomatoes these gentlemen had with them were emptied into a ditch, even though the peasants were very hungry...[787]

Though non-violent by comparison, an equally carnivalesque occurrence from 1936's march to Nowosielce that seared itself into Jan Stryczek's memory was when an automobile carrying "some 'big cheeses'" attempted to honk and insult its way through the crowd. In response, the peasants threatened to tip the car over; when a polite policeman intervened, the peasants cooled down but nevertheless kept the car waiting for an hour to teach its passengers a lesson.[788]

As these examples have shown, the 1930s state was increasingly centred as the primary villain in peasant jeremiads and the main adversary of peasant protest. Confronting the state, humiliating its authority and attacking the symbols of its elitism became essential parts of how many peasants approached and experienced situations of unrest. Nevertheless, such agonistic engagement with the state was not the only manifestation of intensified anti-statism; rather, this was also reflected in the opposite process, namely

[786] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 13732, Michał Jewiarz (Skrzyszów, Ropczyce district, 1962).
[787] APRze, KW PZPR, sygn. 14004, Józef Przybyłowski (Mytarz, Jasło district, 1956-1958), 15.
[788] Stryczek, *Chłopskim piórem* (1957), 336.

a growing *disengagement* from the state and state-friendly institutions. As mistrust towards the regime became more entrenched, peasants – especially those connected to the SL – increasingly realigned their practices and values to diminish its symbolic prestige and material presence in their lives. According to Witos, for instance, incarceration turned from a source of stigma into a cause for pride, as thousands of "the most serious farmers" were hauled before the courts.[789] After 1933 many peasants in Central Galicia distanced themselves from the pro-governmental paramilitary, the Riflemen's Association, after it became implicated in the suppression of that year's unrest.[790] In 1936, in turn, the pro-Populist journalist and writer Jan Wiktor reported that villagers in Central Galicia were setting up "peasant courts" to resolve intra-village disputes at a reduced cost.[791] In its cable on the SL's 1938 party congress the Czechoslovak Embassy cited, as a supposedly typical example of the prevalent radical mood, the case of "a delegate in peasant clothes [who] proposed that peasants fight the state by announcing a boycott of state monopolies, refusing to smoke and drink vodka".[792]

Such tendencies towards class-based separatism, in some respects mirroring the "nation-building through separation" pursued by various national groups in turn-of-the-century East-Central Europe,[793] had longstanding roots in the Populist movement. Right from the 1890s Galician Populists had insisted that peasant organisations be peasant-

[789] Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (1965), iii, 352.
[790] E.g., AZHRL, SL-52/2, 20.06.1933 Kraków Voivodeship security report, 50; *Wyzwolenie*, (29.10.1933).
[791] These courts reportedly followed a different logic from official civil courts: instead of driving litigants to financial ruin, "[their] guiding principle [was] to reconcile conflicting parties through moral pressure, by suggesting ways for them to make up…". J. Wiktor, "Ku czemu idzie wieś polska?", *Wici* (5.04.1936), 2.
[792] AZHRL, SL 60/2, 07.03.1938 Czechoslovak Embassy cable to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, 7.
[793] Werner Conze's expression cited in K. Struve, "Peasant Emancipation and National Integration. Agrarian Circles, Village Reading Rooms, and Cooperatives in Galicia", in Lorenz, *Cooperatives*, 249.

led, free from the patronage and interference of landowners and clergymen alike. A similar emphasis – captured in the slogan "For ourselves by ourselves" (*Sami sobie*) – was also apparent in the Populist circles gathered around the popular journal *Zaranie*, the ideological and organisational antecedent to Wici, in early 20th-century Russian Poland.[794] At first glance, not much changed in the interwar period: rather, Populists continued to celebrate peasant agency and self-reliance. Nevertheless, in the 1930s these themes assumed new, anti-governmental connotations: being peasant-led increasingly meant freedom from governmental – and not just clerical or landowners' – influence. Wici propaganda, for instance, relentlessly contrasted its own peasant authenticity with the "servile soul"[795] of youth groups that received clerical or governmental backing.[796] To distance itself from the pro-governmental Siew youth group, Wici cast out any reference to state authorities from its harvest festival rites.[797] Increasingly, those perceived to have collaborated with the *Sanacja* regime were ostracised. Jakub Bojko, for many decades a leading PSL Piast politician, was even marginalised in his own village of Gręboszów, following his defection to the pro-governmental bloc. In a 1936 interview Bojko complained that not a single local peasant – other than the village mayors who had been summoned by the authorities – was in

[794] In Russian Poland this emphasis on peasant self-management also reflected the ideological influence of Edward Abramowski, an anti-statist socialist who considered social self-government, especially through the cooperative movement, essential both for the struggle against the Tsarist regime and for a socialist future. J. Gmitruk, "Ruch ludowy w okresie rewolucji 1905 roku", in A. Żarnowska, A. Kołodziejczyk, A. Stawarz and P. Tusiński (eds), *Dziedzictwo rewolucji 1905-1907* (Warsaw/Radom, 2007), 117-134.

[795] A popular phrase referring to the supposed endurance of deferential attitudes even after the emancipation of the serfs. It was coined by J. Bojko, *Dwie dusze* (Warsaw, [1904] 1949).

[796] At Wici meetings members were routinely congratulated on belonging to "an independent peasant organisation" and the fact their circles were "founded by ourselves, not by some instructors". E.g., AZHRL, RM/I-29, Brzoza Królewska, 28.11.1937 and 10.02.1936 entries.

[797] Lech, "Dożynki", 451.

attendance when the provincial governor came to award him a state honour.[798] Such ostracism could also be meted out for more trivial kinds of engagement with the regime. In April 1939, for instance, one distinguished Wici activist from Racławice was expelled from his circle after attending the funeral of the former *Sanacja* prime minister and honorary citizen of Racławice, Walery Sławek, without obtaining his fellow Wici members' consent.[799]

Such radical separatist tendencies also manifested themselves in village life and mentalities. At one Wici meeting in Brzoza Królewska (Leżajsk district) in 1936, members discussed and voted on whether "to stop dealing with people who do not belong to Wici…be it socially or in other endeavours etc.".[800] A few years later, the same circle's librarian, Anna Szczęchówna, "reminded members that – at least at [Wici-organised] parties – they should dance with female comrades [*koleżanki*] rather than some [girl] from outside the [Wici] circle who is often inimical towards us".[801] Meanwhile, the aforementioned Wici activist Alojzy Dziaduś became so mistrustful towards state authority and its interventions in the countryside that, on the first page of his memoir, he lashed out at the organisers of the memoir contest he himself was participating in: the Major School of Rural Economy (SGGW) in Warsaw. Dziaduś insinuated that the SGGW's sudden interest in "the peasant question" was part of the broader "turn to the village

[798] J. Rostworowski, "Wójt z Gręboszowa", *Czas* (16.09.1936), 5.
[799] AZHRL, RM/I-8, A. Nowakowski (Racławice), "Z działalności ZMW RP w powiecie miechowskim w latach 1929-1939", 82.
[800] AZHRL, RM/I-29, 5.08.1936 entry.
[801] This was presumably a reference to village girls active in either pro-governmental or, more likely, clerical youth groups. Idem, Jan. 1938 entry.

[*frontem do wsi*]" – a popular *Sanacja* slogan of the mid-1930s – which elites were only pursuing to put an end to the peasantry's growing independence.[802]

The final sign of mounting anti-systemic feeling in the 1930s countryside was an increasingly explicit disillusionment with the Polish nation-state. This was a layered phenomenon that manifested itself differently according to age and political consciousness. Amongst older peasants, disillusionment was frequently expressed through negative comparisons of life under Polish independence with that under Austrian rule.[803] Politically, this was an awkward sentiment, challenging the overwhelming socio-political pressure to celebrate national independence. Despite such discursive pressures "from above", after 1929 post-Austrian nostalgia began to assert itself more openly and plaintively. Mostly, this nostalgia had an economic focus, contrasting life after 1929 with the boom decade leading up to the First World War.[804] An additional subcurrent focused on perceived fiscal injustice in the new state and differences in governance between the Polish and Habsburg states. [805]

Nostalgia was likely more common amongst less educated villagers who had always been wary or indifferent towards the emancipatory promise of the Polish state; resentment, however, also took root amongst educated sections of the peasantry. The pro-governmental memoirist Władysław Kluż, for instance, remarked how "not only backward people but even patriots" could be heard bitterly recalling how under Austrian

[802] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 1.
[803] For a similar phenomenon elsewhere see F. Erdeljac, "Between nationalism and indifference: the gradual elimination of indifference in interwar Yugoslavia", in M. van Ginderachter and J. Fox (eds.), *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (Abingdon/New York, 2019), 109.
[804] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 346.
[805] „Listy ze wsi", *Gazeta Chłopska* (18.11.1928), 5; George, "Pamiętnik", 276; AZHRL, SL-30, Działalność SL w woj. lwowskim, sheet 9.

rule they had sung the religious patriotic song entitled “God the Father, Your Children” (*Boże Ojcze, Twoje dzieci*) in which God was implored for national redemption. Kluż himself was “saddened, as a patriot and a Pole, to agree with the despairing population that…life was better under the Austrian partition”.[806]

At times, post-Austrian nostalgia served a performative purpose, offering villagers an iconoclastic idiom in which to communicate the depth of their current discontent. According to one post-war memoirist, during an agricultural strike in 1932, peasants in Nisko district recited “God the Father, Your Children” – the same Austrian-era song referred to by Kluż – in the presence of the district governor, prompting him to abandon the meeting and summon the police to the village. This was presumably a provocation, designed to challenge the district governor’s authority by implying an equivalence between the oppressiveness of Austrian and Polish rule.[807]

At the same time, it would be wrong to overestimate the politically radical implications of nostalgia. Disillusionment with the nation-state was not intrinsically or even primarily a politically mobilising sentiment. Given its positive correlation with age and low political consciousness, the sentiment was more likely a predictor of political disengagement than of radical activism. That no necessary connection between national disillusionment and radicalism was perceived by contemporaries is borne out by Wincenty Witos’ remarks about the peasants’ political mood in the aftermath of Piłsudski’s death in 1935. On the one hand, Witos noted in his diary, there were reports of a revolutionary atmosphere amongst the peasants. On the other, Witos added:

[806] George, “Pamiętnik”, 276.
[807] AZHRL, O-480, Radomski, 59.

> as if to contradict this, I was brought a letter from Faber, a peasant from Jasło district, where he wrote that peasants have lost faith in everything and everyone, they live from day to day, cursing Poland, Piłsudski, the government and all patrons.[808]

In this perspective, an aversion to the political order that went as far as rejecting the nation-state was more likely to reflect political inertia, a despair that prevented organised revolutionary action.

Nevertheless, alongside the embittered, politically ambiguous nostalgia of older villagers, there existed a more radical, albeit limited, variant of national disillusionment – one typically found amongst younger and more politically conscious peasants. There were various reasons anti-systemic feelings took such different forms based on generation. For those born soon before or after independence, post-Habsburg nostalgia held little traction.[809] Besides stemming from the experiential gap between those who could and could not remember the pre-1914 world, this likely reflected the "banalisation"[810] of nationalism that had occurred after 1918 through the Polish school system, civil society, state institutions and mass communication: for most young Polish-speaking peasants the nation-state had already acquired a taken-for-granted quality, dampening any urge to question its existence.[811]

Besides taking the nation-state for granted, many young peasants had at various points espoused genuine enthusiasm for it. Patriotic optimism was a crucial part of the socialisation of those villagers who attended school during World War I.[812] Wholesale rejection of the Polish state was, thus, much harder to entertain for this generation. In Jur

[808] W. Witos, *Moja tułaczka, 1933-1939* (Warsaw, 1967), 185.
[809] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 395.
[810] M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995).
[811] E.g., Leżeński, *Wieś*, 42.
[812] Mędrzecki, *Młodzież wiejska*, 176.

Leżeński's analysis, the political attitudes of young Catholic peasants were nuanced: "coloured by a conscious critical attitude, capable of treating the government and officialdom separately from the state and the nation".[813] Based on his reading of 1938's collection of young peasants' memoirs, historian Jan Borkowski also concluded that memoirists had proved adept at distinguishing between government and state.[814]

Even so, as hostility towards the state apparatus and class-based separatism grew, so enthusiasm for the nation-state waned amongst many younger peasants. This was not a universal tendency. Those active in pro-governmental youth groups continued to advertise their declarative attachment to the state;[815] and for young peasant memoirists from mixed Polish-Ukrainian parts of Galicia, where ethnic conflict frequently intensified in the interwar period, national identity at times acquired greater salience.[816] Nevertheless, for many – especially those within the SL's orbit – nation and state increasingly paled as sources of meaningful identity compared to class. At the village level, national historical anniversaries came to be celebrated with much less frequency compared to the pre-1918 period.[817] In the eyes of various commentators the cult of the nation lost its emotional authenticity.[818] In the aftermath of the Nowosielce rally and the suppression of the Krzeczowice estate labourers' strike, for instance, the Populist youth

[813] Leżeński, *Wieś*, 43.
[814] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 393, 395. At the same time, Borkowski's interpretation may have been coloured by his own national-communist political leaning. T.P. Rutkowski, "Jan Borkowski — kontrowersyjny historyk ruchu ludowego", in P. Franaszek (ed.), *Stłamszona nauka? Inwigilacja środowisk akademickich i naukowych przez aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 288-323.
[815] E.g., Chałasiński, *Młode Pokolenie*, iii, 221 and iv, 127.
[816] E.g., GRBUW, sygn. 1814, życiorys 259/16, Franciszka Gąsiorówna (Piskorowice, Leżajsk district).
[817] Jakubowska, *Ruch*, 142.
[818] Miłkowski, *Walka*, 5.

newspaper *Młoda Myśl Ludowa* opined that "the most passionate patriotic songs that once shook society now sound false".[819]

Contributing to this perception of falseness was a growing cynicism around nationalistic and statist rhetoric. Though Populists had always been critical of elite nationalism, claims that nationalism was nothing more than an elite-driven form of popular manipulation became more extensive in the 1930s. In 1935, for instance, the radical Wici activist Stefan Ignar (1908-1992) characterised the period since 1918 as one in which national-solidaristic illusions fostered during the struggle for independence were shattered. Since the Polish-Bolshevik war "the peasant has changed his view of Polish life and now sees the face of his exploiters and rulers stripped of the patriotic mask with which it had disguised itself".[820] Scepticism towards ideals of national solidarity was also reflected in the partial rehabilitation of national anti-hero Jakub Szela, the leader of the 1846 jacquerie, by Populist intellectuals.[821] A poem paying homage to Szela by Stanisław Nędza-Kubiniec, the mayor of Tatra village Kościelisko, explicitly derided the nationalist cant of those who condemned the peasant-led massacres as acts of treason:

> 'National' outrage held sway,
> And 'national' curses did reign,
> Yet this was but one day's pay
> For centuries of agony and shame.[822]

This cynical view of nationalist rhetoric was all the more striking considering the poem's author had himself fought in the Polish Legions during World War I.

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[819] "Nowosielce – Krzeczowice", *Młoda Myśl Ludowa* (June-July 1936), 1.
[820] St. Ignar, "Pamiętniki chłopów", *Wici* (8.12.1935), 1-2.
[821] F. Ziejka, *Złota legenda chłopów polskich* (Warsaw, 1984), 252, 257-258.
[822] "I „narodowe" rozdarto wszerz szaty,/I „narodowe" rzucano przekleństwo,/A był to tylko jeden dzień zapłaty/Za całych wieków hańbę i męczeństwo" (from *Chłopy idą*). S. Nędza-Kubiniec, *Na nową perć* (Kościelisko, 1936), 69-70.

Whilst class-oriented and militant in tone, these expressions of disenchantment were nevertheless more limited than the more sweeping curses cast at the Polish state by older peasants or those who had always been nationally indifferent. Many radicals who denounced national solidarism were, for instance, careful to avoid the heresy of rejecting the nation entirely. The memoir of Wici activist Alojzy Dziaduś (b. 1910) offers a good example of the balancing act between radicalised national disenchantment and continued allegiance to the nation-state. In this instance the seeds of national disenchantment were sown even prior to Polish independence. In the final stages of World War I the Dziaduś family received a letter from the Italian Front informing them that "father had been turned into meat". This experience transformed the young Dziaduś' attitude towards the patriotic education he was receiving at school. Now, the future memoirist found himself unable to read about Polish history with the same equanimity as before or to join in with the singing of the Polish Legionnaire song *Wojenko, wojenko* ("Oh war, oh war").[823] Twelve years later, in 1931, Dziaduś was called up for military service. Once again, the thought of fighting for Poland failed to excite him. This time, however, Dziaduś's antimilitarism had a different quality. In the intervening years, he had acquired an acute sense of class consciousness and social injustice, both through personal experience and exposure to peasantist literature. These new ideas coloured his attitude to war and the nation. Military service was framed as "thoughtless, mechanical training in the craft of murdering lower classes in the name of unknown ideas…".[824]

[823] ASGH, Archiwum IGS, 445, Dziaduś, 6-7.
[824] Idem, 14.

Class-based thinking also made Dziaduś cynical about the patriotic ideology underpinning military sacrifice:

> In my mind I envisioned patriot figures, counts, princes, landowners, deans and the others for whose wealth hundreds, thousands, of people laboured and continue to labour all their lives…Such a lord goes around and teaches the principles of patriotism, of loving the fatherland, of sacrificing for him one's miserable life for the misery of life [*oddania dla niego nędznego życia za nędzę życia*].[825]

And yet, despite this cynicism, Dziaduś was hardly ready to cut his attachment to the Polish state. This attachment, however, appeared more duty-based than affective. Thus, in somewhat contradictory terms, Dziaduś stated: "I left the army devoted in the name of the idea of the fatherland but without enthusiasm for it".[826]

ii. The Populist Movement and the State in the 1930s

What was the role of the Populist movement in the peasantry's growing estrangement from the Polish state? In the government's eyes it was clear that Populism deserved much of the blame for this tendency; meanwhile, in the movement's own propaganda, Populism was – if anything – a constraint on anti-state radicalism, a school of civic virtue and statist patriotism that an ungrateful government failed to recognise. The reality was more ambiguous: the Populist movement's relationship to the state was contradictory and oscillatory in the 1930s, a balancing act frequently resembling that performed by Dziaduś in his memoir.

On one point the government was right: the Populists' permanent exclusion from power hardened their oppositional stance to the point where it bordered on the subversive. This

[825] Idem, 15.
[826] Ibid.

was apparent at the level of tactics, political culture and party ideology. In all three areas Populist radicalisation nourished the anti-state tendencies manifest in rural life. At the tactical level, Populists actively contributed to the subversive state orientation of 1930s protest culture. Admittedly, their political instincts remained legalistic. The SL was a predominantly nonrevolutionary party. Its leaders and activists did not systematically plan anti-state violence or engage in illicit activity. Where violence occurred in the first half of the 1930s, it was virtually never the result of a premeditated SL strategy, stemming instead from grassroots anger, the SL's rhetorical belligerence and heavy-handed attempts by local authorities to clamp down on SL gatherings or otherwise intervene in village life.[827] Nevertheless, Populists were increasingly willing to engage in brinkmanship, inciting – through words and deeds – forms of protest that could easily lead to confrontations with the state and that challenged the legitimacy of the state's demands. In various parts of Poland in the early 1930s, SL activists encouraged the non-payment of taxes as a way of both protesting fiscal injustice and starving the government of money.[828] In the face of mounting state-peasant tensions in Central Galicia in mid-1933, the SL did not adopt a unanimous stance: instead, whilst some local leaders voiced fears that a revolutionary atmosphere would allow Communists to win over the peasantry, a substantial section of SL opinion actively favoured a confrontation.[829] Later in the decade, part of the SL incorporated anti-state violence into its tactical repertoire

[827] By way of example, the immediate causes for the eight confrontations, four of them violent, between peasants and the police that made up the unrest of mid-1933 included three instances of resistance to state bailiffs or attempts to arrest peasants who had been involved in such resistance (Kozodrza, Nockowa, Borzęcin); two police interventions following the theft of manorial wood (Łukawiec, Wólka pod Lasem); a police search in the home of a "communist-leaning" villager (Radwan); one mass assault on the police following an illegal rally (Grabiny); and one attempt to ban the use of mortars during Corpus Christi celebrations (Grodzisko). AZHRL, SL-52/2, sheets 19-20.
[828] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 160-161.
[829] Cichoracki et al., *Oblicza*, 399.

with even greater calculation. This became apparent in the planning for a nationwide peasant strike in 1938 – a strike that ultimately never occurred. According to Interior Ministry reports, whilst most activists encouraged peaceful, non-coercive conduct in the event of a strike, in more militant regions there was talk of cutting telephone lines between police stations and, more sporadically, of attacking police stations and disarming policemen.[830]

Even if political violence had not been sporadically encouraged by SL activists, the anti-governmental tenor of Populist agitation was enough to increase its likelihood. It was no accident that the only large-scale peasant unrest of 1933 was concentrated in the highly politicised region of Central Galicia. According to one Interior Ministry report, even amongst many leading SL activists the popular radicalisation that culminated in 1933's unrest was considered the product of "an artificial factor – demagoguery".[831] And whilst demagoguery was a favourite slur of the *Sanacja* government, liberally used to delegitimise political contestation, it was certainly true that Populist communications were relentlessly oppositional in tone and content, determined to discredit *Sanacja* governance in all regards. It was this that led pro-governmental peasant deputy Mieczysław Michałkiewicz to complain that, instead of promoting awareness of governmental debt relief initiatives, Populist agitators resolved to paint the economic crisis in the darkest possible colours and thereby harvest discontent.[832]

[830] Borkowski, "Sprawa", 300-302.
[831] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 143.
[832] *Front Ludowy* (11.11.1933), 4.

Anti-state feeling was further entrenched by various aspects of the SL's internal culture. Most prominent amongst these was the collective martyrology cultivated in the context of state-peasant confrontations. Instances of police brutality, whether during confrontations or the pacifications that followed, were frequently documented by the SL. In 1932, 1933 and 1937 written testimonies were collected from witnesses and victims and the damage inflicted on peasant property calculated.[833] State censorship significantly muzzled coverage of these incidents by the Populist press; nevertheless, in mid-1933 the Interior Ministry complained that the SL was using private letters to circulate its own "tendentious…communiqués" on the unrest that had occurred that summer.[834]

The martyrology of peasant unrest was also propagated through various public performances. In mid-1933 the funeral of a peasant shot by the police during a rally in Grabiny (Ropczyce district) attracted a crowd that was 4000-strong, including three SL deputies. Various speeches were given raising the victim to the rank of a political martyr; the deputy Jan Brodacki informed the crowd that during the unrest "police used ammunition which was not even allowed in wartime".[835] Later in the decade, at the 1938 SL party congress, the names of all peasants killed by police in the 1937 Great Peasant Strike were written out in black letters on a board above the congress stage. A model speech distributed amongst SL activists for that year's Folk Holiday spoke of the endless "death notices…and permanent black ribbons affixed to our [party] flags [which]

[833] AZHRL, WSC, R-37, testimonies of police victims (1933), sheets 7-9; AZHRL, SL-52/1, testimonies of police victims (09.06.1932), sheets 32-35.
[834] AZHRL, SL-52/2, 26.06.1933 letter to prosecutor's office re. SL communiqués, sheet 18.
[835] AZHRL, SL-52/2, 20.06.1933 Kraków voivodeship security report, 45-46.

constantly remind us of…the numerous peasant sacrifices laid down at the altar of the peasant cause…".[836] So extensive was this martyrological culture that stories of police brutality became a standard element in Populist self-understandings. The trope of police repressions – as well as the incarceration and mistreatment of Populist leaders in 1930 – appeared in many of the song entries submitted to the *Piast* newspaper as part of a 1937 competition to create a party anthem. At times, even the names of specific villages where police brutality had occurred were memorised by the Populist rank and file: one entry – entitled *A Song about Peasant Agony!* – by Marja Smagowa of Kwasowice (Myślenice district) spoke of how "heartlessly the lords/beat [peasants] in Łapanów…Splintering bones/Which they repeated in Kasinka/During the peasant strike"[837]; another by Marcin Baran (Groble, Nisko district) cast 1932 as the year in which "the blood of innocent peasants flowed in streams" in reference to that year's violent confrontations in Lubla and Łapanów.[838]

At the ideological level, too, the Populist movement flirted with positions that undermined the state's legitimacy. In his study of the Wici press, Jan Borkowski observed the emergence of a more cynical view towards the nation-state after 1932.[839] Increasingly, the state apparatus was represented as an instrument of class rule and patriotism as an ideological hoax peddled to the masses in order to ease their oppression. As this *Marxisant* view of the state became more established and the *Sanacja* regime came to appear increasingly irremovable by democratic means, so the

[836] Borkowski, "Sprawa", 322.
[837] AZHRL, SL-55/2, M. Smagowa, "Piosenka o męce chłopskiej!", sheet 118.
[838] AZHRL, sygn. SL-55/2, M. Baran, "W pewnym kraju…", 141.
[839] Borkowski, *Wizje*, 58-59.

Populist attachment to constitutional methods of political contestation was shaken. In 1934 a debate broke out in the Populist press around the possibility of a more authoritarian, leader-centred party structure and a peasant dictatorship during the transition to popular democracy.[840] Certainly, those advocating more revolutionary and authoritarian methods failed to shift the SL's overarching commitment to parliamentary democracy and the *raison d'état*. Nevertheless, their voices in themselves attested the growing tension between the movement's self-representation as a loyal opposition, on the one hand, and the anti-systemic tendencies brewing underneath, on the other. This was also visible at the local level where revolutionary methods continued to be discussed, and more rarely endorsed, at SL and Wici meetings and educational courses throughout the 1930s.[841]

Ideological shifts within the Populist movement also dovetailed with tendencies towards national disenchantment. In the mid-1930s the SL increasingly de-emphasised nation in relation to class. Various manifestations of this process, such as the partial rehabilitation of Szela and growing calls for more peasant-centred rather than nation-centred history-teaching, have already been discussed. Another sign was the movement's increasingly solidary attitude towards Ukrainian and Belarussian peasants in Poland's ethnically mixed Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy wschodnie*). Right from the 1890s Galician Populists had been torn between conflicting impulses towards recognition of Ukrainian national aspirations and class solidarity with Ukrainian peasants, on the one hand, and hostility towards Ukrainian nationalist claims to

[840] Borkowski, *Postawa*, 222-227.
[841] E.g., AZHRL, RM/I-60, Siedleczka, 24.04.1936 entry; AZHRL, SL-52/2, 20.06.1933 Kraków Voivodeship security report, 49-50; APPrze, St.P. Brzozów, sygn. 8, security bulletin (31.08.1838), sheet 1.

political-economic control over East Galicia, on the other.[842] After 1918 divergent attitudes towards national minorities became a key ideological cleavage between different Populist parties.[843] Crucially, over the 1930s, it was the class-centred perspective that became the dominant element in the now-united SL's thinking and practice in relation to Slavic minorities. The SL's 1935 political programme, for instance, endorsed both Slavic minorities' right to develop "their own national culture" and the parcellation of (an unspecified share of) estate land amongst Ukrainian and Belarussian peasants.[844] In the late 1930s the Populist press boasted about Ukrainian peasants' growing interest in SL-organised events in Central and Eastern Galicia.[845] Administrative sources corroborated the validity of such boasts. One 1938 security report from the ethnically mixed Jarosław district related how "by foregrounding the class interests of the peasant, the SL seeks to draw Ruthenian peasants into the orbit of its influence, frequently with positive results".[846]

Through its confrontational style of protest and martyrological response to repression, its dalliance with revolution and foregrounding of class over nation, the Populist movement indulged and advanced the alienation that many peasants felt towards the state in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the Populists' denials of their own subversiveness were not entirely unjustified. Declarative allegiance to parliamentary democracy always

[842] K. Struve, "'Chłopi z chłopami' albo 'Ziemia polska dla Polaków'. Das Verhältnis des ruch ludowy zu Weißrussen und Ukrainern bis 1939", in G. Kotlarski and M. Figura (eds.), *Oblicza Wschodu w kulturze polskiej* (Poznań, 1999), 104, 107; J. Hampel, "Chłopi i ludowcy wobec kwestii narodowej w Galicji", in K. Karolczak and W. Żaliński (eds.), *Galicyjskie Dylematy* (Kraków, 1994), 7-17.
[843] Z. Hemmerling and A. Łuczak, „Miejsce kresów i słowiańskich mniejszości narodowych w koncepcjach ruchu ludowego", in *Polska myśl polityczna XIX i XX wieku. Tom VI: Między Polską etniczną a historyczną* (Wrocław, 1988), 214-216.
[844] Struve, "'Chłopi z chłopami'", 119.
[845] Idem, 121.
[846] APPrze, Starostwo Powiatowe w Jarosławiu, sygn. 1, 3.03.1938 security report, sheet 15.

outweighed revolutionary statements in Populist discourse. Much of the time, the peasant movement loudly accepted the *raison d'état* as the paramount political value to which all other goals were subordinate. Even an event such as the Nowosielce rally – in many respects a challenge to the state – could be cast by the *Wici* weekly as "a testament to the statist feeling [*poczucia państwowego*] of the peasant stratum, which appreciates its army and the importance of defence for the State".[847] Populists also retained their ability to "speak national" even as their emphasis on class increased. This was as true of the rank and file as of the leadership. When in 1937 *Piast* announced a competition for a "popular anthem", the overwhelming majority of song entries from the *Piast*-reading public included patriotic or national motifs.[848]

Such ostentatious displays of peasant patriotism only increased in the face of new geopolitical threats in the late 1930s. As the danger from Nazi Germany grew, the *Sanacja* government sought to rally society under the slogan of "national consolidation". Efforts were made by various governmental agencies to increase the war-readiness of the rural population.[849] Not to be outshone, the SL rushed to prove its own willingness to bear martial sacrifices for the nation-state. Incantations about the peasantry's war-readiness became widespread in the Populist press. In the months before the war, Miechów district's Wici circles demonstratively assigned all the savings they had earned from various village plays and parties to arms purchases for the army.[850] Such displays of

[847] "Wójt Pyrz i Nowosielce", *Wici* (18.07.1936), 1.
[848] AZHRL, sygn. SL-55/2. Of the 57 authors whose songs can be found in this archival file only five omitted any reference to the nation.
[849] B. Wagner, "Oświatowe i polityczne aspekty propagandy obronnej – casus polskiej wsi przed II wojną światową", in J. Gmitruk and A. Indraszczyk (eds.), *Historia i tradycje ruchu ludowego* (2 vols, Warsaw/Kielce, 2016), ii, 11-20.
[850] AZHRL, RM/I-8, Nowakowski, 87.

martial loyalism were not just for outside consumption; rather, they permeated Populist self-representations, even in the absence of external observers.[851] The theme of martial patriotism was also popular amongst party grassroots: around a third of surviving entries in the 1937 anthem contest referred to the peasantry's central role – both past and present – in defending the nation.[852] Further, concerns about national security were powerful enough amongst Populists to moderate their subversive impulses in the late 1930s. According to one 1938 Interior Ministry report, for instance, governmental propaganda around national security had succeeded in "blunting" the zeal for a new peasant strike in Galicia.[853]

Nevertheless, even as Populists rallied round the flag in the late 1930s, they did not do so without reservations. Open misgivings about the government and its vision of "national consolidation" persisted alongside outpourings of patriotic loyalty.[854] Moreover, even as Populists maintained – and ultimately intensified – their public allegiance to the nation-state in the 1930s, their manner of doing so was often consistent with the *anti-state*, *anti-nationalist* and *class-centred* tendencies discussed in this chapter. Crucially, Populist invocations of statist and nationalist values became increasingly instrumental and agonistic: instrumental to the pursuit of partisan, class-oriented goals and agonistic in relation to the *Sanacja* regime and social elites. Even if they did not admit it, Populists thereby diminished nation and state – at least as these

[851] E.g., AZHRL, RM/I-29, Brzoza Królewska, 28.11.1937 entry.
[852] AZHRL, SL-55/2.
[853] Borkowski, "Sprawa", 319.
[854] Resolutions passed by the SL's supreme council in January 1939, for instance, included both declarations of unconditional loyalty to the Polish state and extensive criticisms of the authoritarian methods by which the Camp of National Unity sought to enact "consolidation". "Przegląd prasy", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/2 (1939), 142-152.

were understood by their opponents – as values relative to the class interest of the peasantry.

Instrumental invocations of state-nationalist values were largely threefold in the 1930s. First, peasantist claims were represented as being in line with the interests of the state. The prestigious language of state-building, typically employed by the *Sanacja* government to imply the transcendence of social particularisms, was thereby "grafted" onto a value usually understood in opposition to the state: namely, the particular interests of a social class.[855] At one level, this was consistent with earlier Populist arguments stating that Polish independence could not be won without the emancipation of the common folk and that, by extension, the interests of the peasants and the nation were one and the same. The 1930s, however, saw this style of argument employed to justify a far wider range of de facto class-oriented goals. By way of example, one of the activists seeking to legitimise the idea of a transitional peasant dictatorship did so by invoking the interests of the state rather than of the peasantry: a peasant dictatorship could be justified in the event that "the state was threatened by another kind of dictatorship".[856] Meanwhile, in a 1936 letter to the prime minister, the Wici head office criticised the countryside's enduring ideological subordination to other social groups as a threat not just to the "future of the countryside [but also] the future of the state". In this perspective, only through the empowerment and autonomous ideological development

[855] On "grafting" see S. Gal, "Making Registers in Politics: Circulation and Ideologies of Linguistic Authority", *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 23/5 (2019), 450-466.
[856] Siew, "Na temat chłopskiej dyktatury", *Piast* (14 Oct. 1934).

of different social groups would citizens develop loyalty to the state: promoting peasant class consciousness was, in effect, in the national interest.[857]

Implicit in this final invocation of the *raison d'état* was a threat: if peasants were stopped from realising their agency as a class, their agency risked turning against the nation-state instead. This points to the second major instrumental function of state-nationalist values: throughout the 1930s Populists connected their anxieties over the peasantry's lot with concerns that the state risked losing the peasants' loyalty. Just as peasant interests were framed as coextensive with the state interest, so the marginalisation of the peasantry was represented by Populists as a threat to the state's survival. For example, to protest the undemocratic effects of the 1935 constitution, the SL complained that this constitution drove the people away from the state at the very time when, in light of foreign threats, the state most relied on their loyalty.[858] Through such indirect threats, peasant discontent – and, just as importantly, the peasants' recent history of national indifference – was weaponised as an instrument of blackmail against the state. At the same time, the Populists themselves were left morally untarnished: their ostentatious preoccupation with peasants' flagging loyalty to the state only attested their patriotism whilst also proving that the state needed a strong Populist movement to serve as an intermediary with a potentially disloyal peasantry. Once again, therefore, Populists' appeal to state-nationalist values served an instrumental purpose: by framing

[857] AZHRL, RM/I-23, April 1936 letter from Main Directorate of ZMW RP to Premier Zyndram-Kościałkowski, sheet 28.
[858] T. Rek, "Próby rozbicia ruchu ludowego w latach 1934-1935", *RDRL*, 7 (1965), 81.

rural discontent as a threat to the highest political value – the nation-state – Populists transformed it into a bargaining chip for extracting concessions for the peasants.

The third instrumental function of state-nationalist values was to provide an authorised idiom in which those obstructing peasantist goals could be attacked. SL discourse repeatedly accused the *Sanacja* regime of failing in its obligations towards the nation-state and betraying the nation's most patriotic group, the peasants (the contradiction between the peasants' alleged patriotism and their flagging loyalties to the state was never acknowledged). Once again, this agonistic current was not so much a departure from as an intensification of pre-existing discursive tendencies: as already mentioned, even before World War I Populists frequently evoked the nobility's betrayals of the nation and the peasants' patriotic sacrifices on its behalf, casting Poland as a negligent "step-mother" who failed to reward her more loyal, non-noble children. In the 1930s Populists doubled down on such narratives, using them to structure their grievances against the *Sanacja* state and their own claim to political primacy within it. At rallies and protests it became practically *de rigueur* for peasants to sing the 19th-century radical anthem *Gdy naród do boju* ("When the people went to fight"), in which the patriotic common folk pay a deeply ironic tribute to and swear vengeance against noble elites for their betrayal of Poland.[859] The familiar narrative model of unrewarded peasant sacrifice for an ungrateful Polish "step-mother" was also central to the SL's efforts to mythologise the 1920 Battle of Warsaw in the 1930s.[860] In SL propaganda the battle became the symbol of a betrayed

[859] D. Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, "'Gdy naród do boju wystąpił z orężem'...(Dzieje życia Gustawa Ehrenberga i jego pieśni)", *RDRL*, 4 (1962), 169-170.
[860] Prior to 1935 the anniversary of the battle had only featured on one *Piast* front page, in 1930. Thereafter, it appeared every year, except for 1939.

social contract: whilst peasant-soldiers had saved Poland from the Bolsheviks in 1920, they were not offered land in return and after 1926 were even deprived of their political rights.[861] From 1936, 15 August – the anniversary of the battle – was celebrated nationwide as the "Feast Day of Peasant Action" (*Święto Czynu Chłopskiego*): an occasion to hold mass rallies where Populist demands were aired. This agonistic flavour also characterised the nationalism of the Populist rank and file. Around a third of surviving submissions in the 1937 "popular anthem" contest interwove nationalist themes with a critique of the ruling class. Around half of these also stressed the Polish nation's failure to reward the class that had defended Polish independence, both in 1920 and the more distant past.[862]

To conclude, the peasant discontent that erupted in 1930s Galicia assumed a predominantly anti-state tinge. Though neither total nor unprecedented, this anti-state feeling was both more intense and systematic than in previous decades. Its roots lay in the increased opportunities for conflict between peasants and state officials during the economic crisis and the peasants' growing sense of exclusion from and persecution by the authoritarian *Sanacja* state. Class radicalism and anti-regime sentiment became closely interwoven, with the state apparatus – and at times the nation-state in its entirety – increasingly perceived as a vehicle of class oppression. Peasants targeted the state in their protests, disengaged from its institutions and frequently lost enthusiasm for the national project. Alongside better-known attitudes towards the nation – national indifference and national consciousness – there emerged a new affective stance:

[861] E.g., "W wielką rocznicę", *Piast* (18.08.1935), 1.
[862] AZHRL, SL-55/2.

national disenchantment. Marginalised by the *Sanacja* regime, the Populist movement partially fanned this anti-statist turn, encouraging radical protest tactics, cultivating martyrological narratives and prioritising class over nation to an unprecedented degree. At the same time, Populists continued to proclaim their allegiance to the nation-state and intensified such proclamations on the eve of the war. This nationalism, however, had a radical peasantist tenor, devoid of the solidaristic overtones that had occasionally characterised Populist nationalism in previous decades. As such, it was consistent with the subversive trajectory of peasant attitudes towards the nation-state and the intensified class-orientation of the Populist movement in the 1930s.

iii. State Legitimacy and Anti-Politics in South Bohemia

Anti-systemic, especially anti-state, feelings did not erupt in the 1930s Bohemian countryside with anywhere near the vigour seen in southern Poland. And yet, in many respects, the conditions for a similar radical turn were propitious. Here, too, in the phrase of the young Agrarian intellectual František Kutnar, the economic crisis produced a "profound discontent [even in] the most peaceful and patient".[863] As Václav Kozina, a well-off "peasant from Nevolice" (Domažlice district), put it, the belief that after 1918 "the peasant had lived better than before the war" lost its lustre in the process.[864] Agricultural labourers, for whom the 1920s had not been a time of comparable

[863] F. Kutnar, "Vesnice rebelující", *Brázda*, 13/4 (1932), 50-51.
[864] V. Kozina, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/10 (1933), 158-159.

optimism,[865] may not have experienced as dramatic a caesura after 1929. Nevertheless, they too compared the crisis of the 1930s negatively with earlier periods.[866]

As in Poland, much of this rural discontent was aggravated by and directed against various aspects of state policy. The state's unrelenting fiscal demands were a particular irritant for smallholders.[867] Besides seeming heartless, the tax system also appeared unjustly skewed towards the interests of undeserving groups. According to Kutnar, the state's harshness towards small taxpayers and tolerance for the tax arrears of large industrial debtors convinced many in the countryside that Czechoslovakia was ruled by and for the rich. State spending, Kutnar continued, also reflected this reckless injustice: prudent and forward-looking countryfolk could hardly understand a state frivolous enough to "get into debt, give unemployment support to those who did not need it and erect unproductive representational buildings where the citizen feels like an alien" – not least the august Ministry of Agriculture.[868]

Perceptions of unjust governance and worsening living conditions were not the only factors with the potential to generate anti-state radicalism. Another was recent discursive precedent. In the years after independence, some South Bohemian villagers had used anti-national language to protest the new Czechoslovak state's continuation of unpopular wartime requisition policies. According to the chronicler of Hlavatce, the local councillor and educated peasant son Václav Kartous, requisitions dealt an enormous blow to the legitimacy of the new order:

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[865] Fr. Herain, "Zastavte dokud je čas!", *ZD* (30.11.1933), 1.
[866] "Jak žije zemědělské dělnictvo", *ZD* (31.01.1931), 1.
[867] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 57-58.
[868] F. Kutnar, "Vesnice rebelující", *Brázda*, 13/4 (1932), 50-51.

What happened at this time was unbearable; it often happened that people would resort to self-defence and chase the requisitions [officials] out of the village. What a surprise that people soon began saying it's a shame about [the fall of] Austria.[869]

Indeed, when the wealthy village of Plástovice (České Budějovice district) resisted requisitions, peasants were recorded insulting members of the requisitions commission with anti-national cries of "this is not a republic, it's muck" and "under Austria things were better, [you] crooks, thieves, rascals etc.".[870]

And yet, despite widespread rural discontent during the 1930s and the ready availability of a recent anti-Czechoslovak script, there is practically no evidence of a broader anti-state turn in rural political behaviours and thinking. In South Bohemia no clashes between villagers and public authorities were registered. Unlike in Galicia, villagers did not openly reject the state's symbolism or disengage from public institutions and state-sponsored organisations. Those who publicly complained that living conditions had worsened relative to the 1920s or even the pre-1914 period stopped short of worrying that popular loyalties to the nation-state might decline, let alone of voicing post-Habsburg nostalgia or questioning their own commitment to the nation.[871] Similarly, outside the Communist movement, criticisms of classist governance and unjust fiscal policy did not translate into SL-style claims that the state had been captured by a hostile social class and was being used as a vehicle of class rule.

[869] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 22.
[870] Cesar and Otahal, *Hnutí*, 411.
[871] E.g., "Jak žije zemědělské dělnictvo", *ZD* (31.01.1931), 1; Fr. Herain, "Zastavte dokud je čas!", *ZD* (30.11.1933), 1.

Why then did the anti-state dog fail to bark? What differentiated the Bohemian sociopolitical context from the Galician countryside? Was anti-systemic sentiment simply channelled differently? How far was it concealed or disenfranchised? What was the role of political movements, especially the Agrarians, in determining this outcome? It will be argued that various factors related to village life, Czech symbolic culture and the configuration of the political system shielded the legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state amongst Czech-speaking villagers in South Bohemia and, furthermore, directed anti-systemic sentiment away from the state and towards political parties.

One reason there was little outward hostility towards the state lay in the relatively harmonious relations between low-level public authority and the village. In the South Bohemian countryside there is no evidence state representatives were viewed as neo-feudal "lords" as they often were in Poland. For the most part, this can only be inferred from an absence: even a Communist newspaper like *Obrana Lidu* was largely bereft of complaints about haughty officials and bullying gendarmes. Occasionally, however, the harmonious nature of state-society relations was explicitly remarked upon. According to the Mladějovice schoolteacher and chronicler, both gendarmes and teachers tended to "feel like the agriculturalists…amongst whom they lived". The chronicler illustrated this with a story about a 1918 requisitioning expedition in which he had taken part. No sooner had he arrived in the target village than he was told by the village mayor that no food products would be found, as farmers had hidden their crops; tellingly, the mayor "was not embarrassed to tell me [i.e. the teacher] this in front of the gendarme".[872] Such observations ran with the grain of Czech national mythology. Egalitarian social relations

[872] Kronika obce Mladějovice, 128.

and the plebeian character of national elites were key components of the Czech and, later, Czechoslovak self-image, promoted for both domestic and international consumption and likely internalised by many Czechs.[873] When a 1935 cable from the Czechoslovak Consulate in Kraków quoted a Galician peasant who recalled how, prior to the May Coup, "the policeman was not [yet] an absolute lord in the village and the district governor…even shook the peasants' hands", the implied contrast was not just between Poland in its authoritarian and democratic stages but between state-society relations in Poland and Czechoslovakia.[874] Such impressions of cultural-political difference between the two societies were echoed by various Polish visitors. For instance, whilst attending 1937's Dorost parade through Prague, Wincenty Witos was struck by the total absence of "lordliness and grandiosity" in the attitudes of various state dignitaries and townspeople towards the peasant youth.[875]

Comparatively good relations with officials likely impeded rural alienation from the Czechoslovak state. Also militating against such alienation was the relative absence of concerns around the village's place in national memory and culture. In 1930s Poland the history taught in schools, military units and as part of civic military training overwhelmingly focused on medieval knights, great Polish leaders, the insurrectionary struggle against the partitioning powers and the Polish Legions during World War I.[876] Its dominant flavour was heroic, at times elitist, rather than popular. In this context the

[873] A. Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (Oxford/New York, 2011); Sayer, *Coasts of Bohemia*, 155-157.
[874] AZHRL, SL-59, Q3 1935 report sent by the Czechoslovak Consulate in Kraków.
[875] Witos, *Moja tułaczka*, 413.
[876] J. Kęsik, "Wojsko Polskie a społeczeństwo w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, 1918-1939", in J. Żarnowski (ed.), *Metamorfozy społeczne: państwo i społeczeństwo w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2014), 132; A. Rogozin, *Tradycja powstań narodowych i oręża polskiego (1794–1864) w polityce pamięci Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2021), 17.

peasant-centred history promoted by the Populist movement could plausibly claim for itself a counter-cultural quality. No equivalent tension between mainstream national narratives and Agrarian ones existed in the interwar Czech Lands. As already argued, the Czech National Revival had placed the peasantry at the centre of the national self-image. After 1918 rural themes lost salience in official representations of the Czech lands,[877] but this did not generate any visible anxiety in rural politics. Even as they grounded their economic demands in a narrative of peasant mistreatment by socialist-dominated cities, the Agrarians did not seek to foster grievances around cultural marginalisation. On the contrary, during the 1930s' greatest spectacle of peasant power – the 1937 Dorost convention in Prague – Agrarian intellectuals appeared confident that the village had retained its privileged position in the nation's symbolic hierarchy. On the first night of the convention peasant youths were welcomed to the capital with a performance of Antonín Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* – one of the best-known and, crucially, folk-inspired works of Czech music – by the Czech Philharmonic at the resplendent Municipal House – itself a symbol of Czechness. At the following night's performance of Bedřich Smetana's rurally themed opera *The Bartered Bride* – this time at the National Theatre – the musical correspondent for the Agrarian *Venkov* daily, Otakar Šourek, lauded the Czech musical tradition for "demonstrating long ago its appreciation for the vigour and character of village life and folk art".[878] Absent from such declarations about the primacy of the rural

[877] At international fairs, for instance, rurality was only foregrounded in representations of Czechoslovakia's Slovak east. M. Filipová, "'Highly Civilized, yet Very Simple': Images of the Czechoslovak State and Nation at Interwar World's Fairs", *Nationalities Papers*, 50/1 (2022), 145-165.
[878] "Kultura a sjezd", *Venkov* (25.05.1937).

within national culture was any hint of insecurity or antagonism towards rival social groups.

The same was true of Agrarian nationalism generally. Unlike in Poland Agrarian enthusiasm for performative nationalist displays did not wane in the interwar period. And whilst they continued to inflect their nationalism with peasantist characteristics, the tone of this nationalism was – in contrast to the SL's – celebratory rather than contestatory. Despite its subversive potential, for instance, the centrepiece of Dorost's ceremonial calendar of 1930 – the 250th anniversary of the 1680 peasant rebellion – was bereft of any critique of the national mainstream. All throughout Bohemia and Moravia these anniversary celebrations were combined with harvest festivities, at which tributes were made to the Agrarian party and unambiguous displays of loyalty offered to the nation-state.[879]

The South Bohemian village and its political representatives also displayed a positive attitude towards national symbols that were not directly connected to rurality. Peasant Cavalries, for instance, tirelessly mobilised their members to celebrate a wide range of national anniversaries and festivities.[880] In part, this was a function of the *relative* consensus around national memory that characterised much of Czech political life. In Poland the politics of memory became increasingly polarised around class-based political cleavages in the 1930s. On the one hand, the peasant movement continued to give pride of place to Tadeusz Kościuszko and the peasant-soldiers he had rallied in the 1794 anti-Russian rebellion. On the other, the *Sanacja* government quietly downgraded

[879] *MV* (12.09.1930), 6-8.
[880] E.g., NAČR, f. 392, k. 3, Milevsko: kníha zápisů; see also Jiráček, "Místo", 80.

Kościuszko in the pantheon of national heroes and directed its own commemorative energy towards the 1863 January Uprising[881] – an event that Populists, in turn, increasingly disdained for its political folly and elitist nature.[882] By contrast, the dominant conflict around historical memory in Czech politics was configured along religious rather than class lines.[883] As Cynthia Paces has shown, after 1918 Czech Catholics sought to fashion a new Catholic-inflected national mythology in opposition to the mainstream nationalist tradition which from the early 19th century had focused its celebratory efforts on the 15th-century religious reformer Jan Hus and the military leader of the most radical Hussite faction, Jan Žižka.[884] In rural South Bohemia, however, there was little trace of this conflict in local politics or village life. Unlike in the Moravian and Slovak parts of Czechoslovakia, here political Catholicism was a relatively insignificant force.[885] Instead, all the principal players who operated in the South Bohemian countryside actively embraced and drew upon Hussite national mythology. Agrarian Peasant Cavalries, for instance, adopted the hymn *Ye Who Are Warriors of God*, formerly sung by the most radical Hussite faction – the Taborites – during the Hussite Wars, as their anthem.[886] Left-wing parties in the interwar period also styled themselves as heirs to the Taborites much as they had done before 1914.[887] When the Communist Party set out to drive a wedge

[881] Rogozin, *Tradycja*.
[882] Jakubowska, *Ruch*, 203-204.
[883] National minorities also rejected Czech historical narratives, but these conflicts fall outside the scope of the present study.
[884] C.J. Paces, "'The Czech Nation Must Be Catholic!' An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism during the First Republic", *Nationalities Papers*, 27/3 (1999), 407-428.
[885] In the 1935 National Assembly election the Catholic Populist party won only 7.81% of the rural/small-town vote in South Bohemia and 6.58% of the rural/small-town vote in Bohemia as a whole. *Volby do poslanecké sněmovny v 1935*, 16-17.
[886] SDA Strakonice, Okresní selská jizda v Blatné, f. 1-61, sheet 60.
[887] J. Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism: Czech and German Social Democracy in Habsburg Austria, 1890-1918* (Oxford, 2017), 163-169; J. Kořalka, "Pojetí dějin husitství v ideologicko-politické argumentaci

between Agrarian elites and their base in 1936, the Communists' national leadership advised local-level activists to hold speeches and meetings "in places [that were] historically significant at the time of peasant rebellions, the *Hussite struggles* etc." (emphasis mine).[888] Fascist efforts to mobilise the South Bohemian countryside also invoked the Taborite precedent: in the early 1930s Fascist leader Rudolf Gajda painted himself as a new Žižka leading the peasants in a march on Prague, all the whilst distancing himself from the Hussites' religious heresy that stood to alienate Catholic opinion.[889]

Such appeals to Hussite mythology likely fell on receptive ground. What evidence there is suggests public opinion in rural South Bohemia welcomed the cult of Hus without any vocal resistance. In the village of Čížkov (Pelhřimov district) during the interwar years some *deputatník* families chose to decorate their cottages with prints of Hus before the Council of Constance and Žižka riding into Prague in lieu of more conventional religious images.[890] Upon attending the festivities for the 1935 anniversary of Hus' martyrdom – a state holiday since 1925 – in an unknown Bohemian village, Wincenty Witos was struck, above all, by the high levels of participation.[891] In South Bohemia – the historical heartland of the Taborite movement – villages with a historical connection to the

československých komunistů v letech 1934-1936", *Husitský Tábor: sborník husitkého muzea*, 1 (1978), 79-98.

[888] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 1144/36, 21.09.1936 letter from Communist leadership to provincial and district KSČ secretariats.

[889] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 21-23.

[890] Tausch, "Deputátníci", 29.

[891] Witos, *Moja tułaczka*, 193.

Taborites also appeared keen to cement this connection after 1918 with monuments to Hussite heroes.[892]

The same general acceptance of mainstream national and statist symbols was also apparent in the countryside's attitude towards President Tomáš Masaryk. Masaryk was the object of an extensive and carefully engineered political cult throughout the interwar period.[893] Nevertheless, popular reverence for Masaryk was far from guaranteed in rural South Bohemia. The Fascist movement that gained mass support in the region during the early 1930s vigorously opposed itself to the Hrad, the informal power network centred around the president.[894] According to one observer, rumours about Masaryk's dealings with the Jews and jokes about the Hrad were a key part of the discursive context in which Fascism gained ground, radiating out from the taverns of Prague into the South Bohemian countryside during the early years of the economic crisis.[895] In the same period the Agrarian right, which itself dallied with the Fascist movement, was also increasingly conflicted with the Hrad.

And yet, despite this conflict, municipal chronicles – to the extent these were representative of rural public opinion – offer no evidence of villagers questioning the legitimacy of presidential authority. On the contrary, they reveal a seemingly universal willingness to participate in the outward forms of the Masaryk cult – in clear contrast with

[892] Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany, 7; Kronika obce Čejetice, 23;, Kronika obce Mladějovice, 191.
[893] A. Orzoff, "The Husbandman: Tomáš Masaryk's Leader Cult in Interwar Czechoslovakia", *Austrian History Yearbook*, 39 (2008), 121-137; D. Hajková, "'Doáud clovek jí klobásy, tak neumre': Oslavy narozenin T. G. Masaryka," in D. Hájková, V. Luboš et al. (eds), *Historik nad šachovnicí dejin: K petasedmdesátinám Jana Galandauera* (Prague, 2011), 218-235.
[894] Kárník, *České země*, ii, 144.
[895] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 22-23.

rural Galicia where the cult of Józef Piłsudski never won supra-partisan legitimacy.[896] In 1930, for instance, chroniclers throughout South Bohemia reported how village schools were celebrating Masaryk's 80th birthday. No social opposition was mentioned. In Mladějovice the entire village reportedly attended the play that was staged for the occasion.[897] Five years later the chronicler of Chrášťany – a principally Agrarian-voting village with a sizeable right-wing nationalist minority – confidently asserted that the "entire nation greeted the fortunate decision [to elect Edvard Beneš president] with gratitude" without any reference to the right's botched contestation of Beneš's election.[898] Following Masaryk's death in 1937, "all loyal citizens were saddened" in the principally Agrarian village of Hlavatce.[899] Notably, the same chronicler who reported this – though himself almost certainly an Agrarian – made no mention of the death of Agrarian leader Antonín Švehla in his entry for 1933. It can be inferred that his loyalty to the state took precedence over partisan considerations: Švehla's death – in contrast to Masaryk's – had likely been deemed an event of partisan, rather than community-wide, significance and thus unworthy of the village chronicle. State was also placed before partisan divisions in the otherwise politically divided village of Doubrava which celebrated President Beneš's birthday with fanfare in 1937 and, again, in 1938.[900]

[896] E.g., Borkowski, *Postawa*, 232, 243; A. Burda, *Lata walki i nadziei* (Kraków, 1970), 69-70. For more on the Piłsudski cult see H. Hein-Kircher, *Kult Piłsudskiego i jego znaczenie dla panstwa polskiego, 1926-1939* (Warsaw, 2008).
[897] Kronika obce Mladějovice, 221. The Agrarians, too, actively encouraged participation in Masaryk's 1930 birthday celebrations. Jiráček, "Místo", 80.
[898] In the 1935 parliamentary election Fascist and *fascisant* parties won 16% of the Chrášťany vote compared to the Agrarians' 37%. Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany, 86-88.
[899] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 76.
[900] Pamětní kniha obce Doubravy, 42.

Thus, largely positive relations between state officials and peasants, combined with the relative absence of conflict over national memory, symbols and peasants' place in the nation, served to minimise rural alienation from the Czechoslovak state during the 1930s. Just as important, however, were the forces that served to silence potential alienation and channel it towards different targets.

First, even if anti-national or anti-state attitudes did arise, powerful political taboos inhibited their public articulation through the language of national disenchantment and post-Habsburg nostalgia.[901] These taboos were arguably even stronger than those operative in Poland. Where Polish independence had been secured through the collapse of three partitioning powers, Czechoslovakia emerged out of the embers of the Habsburg Empire alone. Fears of Habsburg revanchism periodically shook the Czechoslovak public sphere,[902] even filtering down to the local level in South Bohemia.[903] Following Austria's repeal of the Habsburg Law in 1935, the possibility of a Habsburg return to Central Europe dominated the typically agriculture-centred front page of the *Domovina* weekly for a fortnight.[904] Given such geopolitical insecurity, it is unsurprising that anti-Austrianism assumed a more central role in Czechoslovak national identity than in Poland.[905] After 1918 the representation of Austrian rule as 300 years of relentless socio-

[901] At a vernacular level some degree of nostalgia was likely common. For a complaint in the veterans' journal *Kamarádství* about many Czechs' habit of continually comparing life under Czechoslovak and Austrian rule, see L. Hájek, "Legionář – domácí voják", *Kamarádství* (October 1932), 1.
[902] For the immediate postwar period see C. Morelon, "State Legitimacy and Continuity between the Habsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia: The 1918 Transition in Prague", in P. Miller-Melamed and C. Morelon (eds.) *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (New York, 2019), 51.
[903] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 1/22, sheet 41; Pamětní kniha obce Chrášťany, 66.
[904] "Nejen Rakousko, ale také Maďaři chtějí Habsburky zpátky", *Domovina* (19.07.1935), 1; "Celá Malá dohoda proti nastolení Habsburků", *Domovina Domkářů a Malorolníků* (2.08.1935), 1.
[905] E.g., M. Jarząbek, *Legioniści i inni. Pamięć zbiorowa weteranów I wojny światowej w Polsce i Czechosłowacji okresu międzywojennego* (Kraków, 2017), 226.

national oppression became a political imperative for all mainstream Czechoslovak forces. Thus, even though they had publicly supported the Austro-Hungarian war effort and pledged allegiance to the Habsburgs until relatively late in the war,[906] after independence the Agrarians embraced this dominant narrative of Austrian rule practically without reservations.[907]

Another barrier against anti-state sentiment lay in Czechoslovakia's democratic political system. Besides increasing state legitimacy, inter-party competition tended to orient social discontent away from the state. Many of the claims about corrupt governance, wasteful spending and state capture levelled at the Polish *Sanacja* government were also frequently heard in interwar Czechoslovakia. However, instead of directing such charges against the government, officialdom or the ruling class as a whole, political actors tended to aim them at rival political parties.

The rhetorical functions of the automobile offer an example of this difference. As we have seen, in Polish oppositional discourse – as well as the broader rural imaginary – the automobile became fixed as a symbol of wantonness and aloofness in the state apparatus. Even though car ownership was much higher in Czechoslovakia (the Agrarians even established their own automobile club in 1935), in its political discourse the automobile often acquired similar connotations. By and large, however, this trope was deployed not to attack the ruling apparatus but to delegitimise a much wider array of political actors. In the hands of the left, for instance, automobiles became yet another symbol of the Agrarian establishment's estrangement from its roots. The Communist

[906] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 39.
[907] E.g., F. Mašata, "K desátému výročí domovinářského hnutí", *Domovina* (18.01.1929), 1.

Rudé Právo mordantly noted that Agrarian leaders who claimed to smell of manure and slurry were more likely to sit "on the seat cushions of six-cylinder automobiles" than on the perch behind a horse.[908] Conversely, Agrarians used the same trope to emphasise their own rivals' ineligibility to represent the village. In the lead-up to the 1935 election, Dorost signalled its and the Agrarians' rural authenticity by proclaiming itself "ready [to] defend our villages against the incursions of motorised agitators".[909] Fascist demagogues in South Bohemia, in turn, invoked the automobile as a symbol of metropolitan parasitism, claiming that: "out of laziness no one there [in the cities] wants to take a step, they all travel by car, by tram…with our money".[910]

It was not, however, just individual parties and social groups that became the target of political delegitimization in lieu of the state. Much of the discontent that emerged in the 1930s was directed against political parties in general. This anti-partisan sentiment was closely connected to how power was distributed and exercised. Czechoslovak democracy was consociational in nature: grand multi-party coalition governments were a constant, with little change in the make-up of governments from one parliamentary term to the next.[911] By guaranteeing different societal segments a seat in government and thus a constant trickle of patronage and policy wins, the consociational model kept in check societal alienation from the state. On the flip side, the absence of political alternation that was at the heart of this stability placed the entire system's legitimacy at risk. In a situation where government coalitions could never de facto be voted out, the

[908] "Prorok diktatury finančního kapitálu", *Rudé Právo* (11.05.1929).
[909] "Nový rok republikanského dorostu", *Venkov* (1.01.1935).
[910] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 27-28.
[911] P.J. Howe, T.A. Loman and D.E. Miller, "The Creation of the Conditions for Consociational Democracy and Its Development in Interwar Czechoslovakia", *Bohemia*, 56/2 (2016), 362-380.

ballot box offered voters limited power to register their dissatisfaction in a politically consequential way. In the absence of alternation, different ministries were transformed into the semi-permanent fiefdoms of political parties, encouraging nepotism and lending credence to accusations of corruption. High politics' lack of democratic accountability was further compounded by the power of party executives. In the Czechoslovak parliament seats belonged to parties rather than deputies, forcing the latter to toe party lines on pain of losing their seats.[912] As governmental policy was hashed out in closed-door negotiations between political leaders, the National Assembly was reduced to a de facto rubber stamp. The authoritarianism that reigned at the top of political parties also trickled into their internal cultures. Most strikingly, as both contemporaries and subsequent historians have observed, political parties were highly gerontocratic, leaving little space for younger generations to assume positions of responsibility.[913]

These deficiencies of Czechoslovak democracy produced widespread anti-political sentiment in the 1930s.[914] Its symptoms were visible both within party structures and at a wider societal level. Within political parties, youth wings frequently expressed frustration with the state of political life.[915] Demands that young people be admitted to public life and positions of influence within the Agrarian movement were a salient feature of 1929's national Dorost congress.[916] A few months earlier the Dorost weekly *Mladý*

[912] P. Bugge, "Czech Democracy 1918-1938 - Paragon or Parody?", *Bohemia*, 47/1 (2007), 11.
[913] Idem, 16; for contemporary complaints about gerontocracy see "Ztracená generace", *České Slovo* (22.11.1932).
[914] E.g., M. Kopeček, "Czechoslovak Interwar Democracy and Its Critical Introspections", *Journal of Modern European History*, 17/1 (2019), 11-12.
[915] "Co má dělat mládež", *Národní Osvobození* (6.01.1933).
[916] "Dorost projevuje oddanost straně a vděčnost vůdcům", *MV* (10.05.1929), 1.

Venkov lamented the inertia of provincial politics where Agrarian party organisations were condemned to dormancy for most of the year.[917]

Such internal criticisms of party life, nevertheless, paled beside the cynicism and vehemence of anti-political sentiment that circulated in broader society during the early 1930s. According to various observers of the countryside, public trust in politicians – both at the local and national level – collapsed under the weight of economic crisis.[918] In the analysis of Václav Cháb, a left-leaning journalist reporting from South Bohemia, anti-political sentiment was initially directed against the very political groups which had hitherto represented the peasants: the Agrarians and the Catholic Populists. Argued Cháb:

> Prior to the great agricultural crisis…the story about economic matters that [the Agrarians] spun and took to the village was very simple: the sound prosperity of the peasant economy directly depends on the sound organisation of the peasant party.[919]

The economic crash had shown this to be untrue, discrediting the Agrarians' primarily transactional – rather than ideological – contract with their base. Further exacerbating the peasantry's loss of trust were suspicions of political corruption. To quote Cháb once again:

> the peasants have started looking back to see how much property [certain people] had before the war and how much they have now, [and] what the position is of the friends and relatives of the deputy elected in their district…[920]

Likewise, according to Agrarian intellectual František Kutnar, rural leaders' "change of lifestyle" – a change that "rural public opinion is exceptionally sensitive to and that it

[917] "Místní organisace", *MV* (25.01.1929), 1.
[918] F. Kutnar, "Vesnice rebelující", *Brázda*, 13/4 (1932), 50-51.; J. Škramovský, "Vesnice v neklidu dneška", *Brázda*, 13/13 (1932), 194-196; Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 16-17.
[919] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 15.
[920] Idem, 16-17.

judges severely" – nourished the suspicion that these leaders "had been enslaved by the city".[921]

Despite being directed against Agrarian leaders, with its frequently anti-urban and pro-austerity overtones anti-political sentiment bore the clear imprint of anti-socialist Agrarian propaganda. Not fortuitously, its principal beneficiary in rural South Bohemia ended up being to the Agrarians' right. In the spring of 1931, Fascist leader Rudolf Gajda toured the South Bohemian countryside and enthralled much of its population. According to a correspondent of the moderate Agrarian journal *Brázda*, the countryside became the site of a bidding war between Agrarians and Fascists – "the newest saviours of the village and of agriculture" – with each trying to outdo the other in demagoguery.[922] In Cháb's estimation, the only "islets" to remain unruffled by the Fascist storm were the readers of socialist newspapers.[923] Fascism's appeal amongst former Agrarians is borne out by some municipal elections. In Mladějovice, for instance, where the Fascist vote soared to 57.4% (135 votes out of 233) in the 1931 municipal election, five of the eight Fascist councillors elected had, in previous elections, run successfully as Agrarian or Domovina candidates.[924] Meanwhile, according to one observer of rural Fascism in Central Bohemia, many of Fascism's recruits did not even feel compelled to give up their membership of the Agrarian or Small Tradespeople's parties.[925]

[921] F. Kutnar, "Vesnice rebelující", *Brázda*, 13/4 (1932), 50-51.
[922] Škramovský, "Vesnice v neklidu dneška" *Brázda*, 13/13 (1932), 194-196.
[923] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 40.
[924] Kronika obce Mladějovice, 221.
[925] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 30-31.

Czech Fascism was an overwhelmingly rural phenomenon[926] and anti-politics was central to the Fascists' rural appeal. In Cháb's telling, Rudolf Gajda furnished rural discontent with "its first primitive general formulation: all political parties are organisations [composed] of bad elements that have usurped power over the people…grown rich at your expense and allowed for you to become beggars".[927] Supposed Jewish influence on Czechoslovak politics was another recurrent and resonant theme.[928] In his evocation of the many political meetings held by Gajda in South Bohemian taverns, Cháb emphasised, above all, their obsessive focus on corrupt party leaders. Indeed, the unofficial programme espoused at such meetings centred around "a revision of all politicians' wealth" – a first step towards social redistribution and ending the crisis.[929] Anger over newfound rural inequalities was also channelled in an anti-political rather than class-centred direction when Fascists framed the wealth of politically connected village elites – many of them supposedly poor before 1914 – as the outcome of partisan corruption.[930] And even though such rural elites were for the most part Agrarian, particular animus was reserved for "socialist leaders who have enriched themselves".[931]

[926] Two-thirds of the Fascists' 21,400 members in 1932 were employed in agriculture. Kárník, *České země*, ii, 145.
[927] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 17.
[928] E.g., "Pro a proti", *Lidové Noviny* (13.08.1935).
[929] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 21. Cháb's account made no reference to the corporatist model that Gajda promoted as an alternative to parliamentary democracy, suggesting this may not have been a salient feature of his appeal amongst the peasants. For the centrality of corporatism to Czech Fascism see R. Gajda, *Ideologie čsl. fašismu* (Prague, 1931) and R. Gajda, *Stavovská demokracie národního státu* (Prague, 1933).
[930] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 26.
[931] Idem, 45.

A further hint of anti-politics' centrality to rural Fascism is offered by the Mladějovice village chronicle. Though there is no evidence the chronicler was himself a Fascist, the Fascists' consistently impressive electoral score in Mladějovice make it likely he was influenced by this general mood. Indeed, in one of the few passages where the chronicler expressed an active political stance, his thinking echoed multiple Fascist talking points. Unsurprisingly, the target of his uncharacteristic rant was the Czechoslovak political system. The salaries attached to parliamentary seats, the chronicler complained, had turned them into lucrative cash cows and encouraged parties to put up "spiritually unsuitable" candidates who simply craved financial security. The parliamentary system, meanwhile, had been hijacked as a cover for party rule, meaning Czechoslovakia was governed by "an oligarchy of executive committees instead of democracy" – a clear echo of Fascist objections to the power of party executives over parliamentary deputies.[932] "Political partisanship" had also proved expansive, invading "our entire life, indeed even the state administration…" and warping official procedures and decisions. The result was widespread "moral [and] material corruption", leading to citizens' loss of faith in the state. For this reason, the chronicler contended – in a likely riposte to Agrarians' arguments about the international origins of the economic depression – it was misleading to treat the crisis of the 1930s as the outgrowth of "a global economic crisis"; its real roots lay in the "management of political parties".[933] In this anti-political reading, the problem with Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy was, in a sense, that it was not

[932] E.g., Gajda, *Ideologie*, 5-6. So central was this theme to Czech Fascism that the earliest Fascist organisation to contest an election (1929) was called the League against Closed Lists (*Liga proti vázaným kandidátním listinám*).
[933] Kronika obce Mladějovice, 237.

parliamentary or democratic enough, having been subordinated to the dictatorial, corrupt elitism of political parties.

The democratic component of vernacular Fascist anti-politics is further borne out by the anti-partisan critique developed by village mayor, František Udržal of Rozhovice (Chrudim district), in an article for *Brázda*. Whilst not openly Fascist, Udržal – like the Mladějovice chronicler – echoed many of the Fascist attack lines on political parties. Crucially, these criticisms were articulated in a pro-democratic idiom and drew on experiences of arbitrary power exercised by political parties. Much like Rudolf Gajda, Udržal complained that "[whilst] in theory we are democrats, in practice we are controlled by the diktat of parties – or, rather, the diktat of party secretaries". To illustrate his point, Udržal recounted how in 1931 he had published an article in a provincial Agrarian newspaper criticising exorbitant road tolls and thirteenth salaries – as end-of-year bonuses were called – for state employees at a time of belt-tightening for "productive strata". In response, a state employee published an ad hominem attack on Udržal and, following orders from above, the newspaper editors forbade Udržal from replying. Udržal mused bitterly:

> They say democracy is discussion and yet here a peasant [*sedlák*] was silenced in a discussion. His own party, which after all was called the Agrarian party, gave another man the right to discuss but did not allow a farmer to defend himself.[934]

The success of rural Fascism proved ephemeral. Over-dependent on Gajda's demagogical appeal and lacking entrenched organisational structures, the movement was vulnerable to small fluctuations in the public mood – an outcome that Cháb had

[934] F. Udržal, "Jak žijeme a myslíme na vesnici", *Brázda*, 14/10 (1933), 159.

himself predicted in 1931.[935] The Fascist movement's fractiousness, financial problems and refusal to form a single electoral bloc with other nationalist forces further hobbled its electoral prospects.[936] Despite Fascist attacks on the political system, pro-systemic parties retained their overall dominance in 1935's parliamentary election. In South Bohemia (České Budějovice electoral district) Fascists won 8.47% of the non-minority vote in in municipalities with fewer than 5000 voters. In Bohemia as a whole they won 3.83% of the equivalent vote.[937] While extremely high by national standards, the Fascist vote in South Bohemia thus remained relatively confined, even in one of its major geographical strongholds. And yet, despite its underwhelming electoral performance, the significance of rural Fascism should not be underestimated, as it overwhelmingly has been in the historiography of Czechoslovakia. Its electrifying spread in the early 1930s had exposed widespread disillusionment with the socio-political order in the South Bohemian countryside. This disillusionment could not have been articulated through an anti-state, class-oriented discourse like that which dominated in rural Galicia: just as entrenched rural anti-socialism precluded any broader leftward turn, so the relatively high legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state prohibited an anti-state one. Instead, rural disillusionment was directed against the political realm: the failure of the peasants' political representatives to defend their interests. Fascism, in turn, helped transform this intra-Agrarian crisis into a crisis of legitimacy for the political system in general, shifting rural voters' attention towards the corruption of all political parties and the deficiencies

[935] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 29. By way of example, in one South Bohemian village Fascists were able to win 50.8% in the National Assembly election of 1935 but in the following year's municipal election did not even present a list. Kronika obce Čejetice, 2.
[936] Kárník, *České země*, ii, 282-283; A. Klimek and P. Hofman, *Vítěz, který prohrál: generál Radola Gajda* (Prague, 1995), 262.
[937] *Volby do poslanecké sněmovny v květnu 1935*, 16-17.

of Czechoslovak partocracy. Even after Fascism dwindled, such anti-political sentiment is likely to have lingered. When the Communists launched a renewed offensive to split the Agrarians in 1936, they expressly targeted the seats of Agrarian notables as if they expected disillusionment with political representatives here to be highest.[938] As the next section will show, this enduring vernacular anti-politics may even have conditioned the increasingly non-partisan self-styling of the Agrarian party over the course of the 1930s, reinforcing the broader anti-political tendencies in Czechoslovak politics that culminated in the abolition of political parties under the Second Czechoslovak Republic.

iv. Agrarians and the State in the 1930s

This section will examine how the Agrarians sought to manage anti-systemic sentiment in the 1930s countryside as well as their broader relationship to the nation-state. Whilst not obviously linked, it will be argued that these questions were, in fact, intimately connected. On the one hand, the Agrarians' status as a party of government deeply integrated into the state constrained their ability to foment and capitalise on social discontent. On the other, this status also allowed them to leverage access to state resources in order both to moderate and repress subversive tendencies in the village. This was part of a broader Agrarian effort to depoliticise the countryside in the name of rural unity – an anti-political strategy that dovetailed with authoritarian and anti-partisan tendencies across the Czechoslovak right. As part of this anti-political thrust and in order to win over new urban constituencies, the Agrarians increasingly recast themselves as a

[938] SDA Písek, OkÚP, Relace, sign. 1144/36, 21.09.1936 letter from Communist leadership to provincial and district KSČ secretariats.

state-nationalist – rather than strictly estate-based – organisation that was capable of transcending party politics and uniting both the countryside and the nation. This state-nationalist turn symbolised the triumph of the solidaristic tendency in Agrarian nationalism and lay the ground both for the dissolution of the Agrarian party and the authoritarian turn that occurred after the Munich Conference.

As has already been argued, much of the Agrarians' social legitimacy was tied up with their effective defence of rural interests and ability to deliver material benefits to their various constituencies. Due to their economic and political power – and perhaps also the relative weakness of what they could offer in terms of identity – the Agrarians actively encouraged this understanding of their social contract with the countryside. Success narratives permeated the party's internal culture. In a typical example, Rudolf Beran began his 1929 New Year's address to Domovina by requesting his audience join him in "surveying what was achieved last year and what was achieved over the ten years that our independent state has been in existence".[939] The surviving minutes of a Domovina circle from one South Bohemian village show that annual meetings at the local level also invariably began with a list of what the circle had achieved that year.[940] In another village whose Domovina records were preserved the Domovina circle appeared to function primarily as a conveyor belt for patronage, allowing villagers to petition the Agrarian party for subventions to purchase fertiliser and agricultural machinery.[941] The Agrarian party took great pride in such petitions, reporting the volume of mail it received at each

[939] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina* (4.01.1929), 1.
[940] SDA Písek, Místní Domovina Jehdnědno (hereinafter MDJ), Zapísník o schůzích.
[941] SDA Strakonice, Místní Domovina Všechlapy (hereinafter MDV), Zapísník o schůzích (1930-1936), 6.01.1931 and 31.01.1932 entries.

congress as proof of its important contributions to rural life.[942] This image of the Agrarians as rural benefactors was given material expression in harvest day rituals where an Agrarian functionary or deputy was frequently cast as the "host" – a role formerly reserved for the village lord – to whom thanks and good wishes were offered.[943]

Given their relentless emphasis on material benefits, the Agrarians were particularly threatened by the economic crisis of the early 1930s. As a party of government their discursive room for manoeuvre was further reduced. Unlike the SL, the Agrarians were limited in how far they could blame the powers-that-be or play on popular anger without delegitimising themselves. These constraints were apparent in how the Agrarians tried to explain the crisis to their base and, in the process, neutralise its discontent. Besides channelling discontent towards the political fight for protectionist tariffs and against socialist opposition, Agrarian propaganda routinely sought to defuse social anger by framing Czechoslovak economic conditions as part of a larger international crisis which lay beyond the government's control.[944]

The expectations of the Agrarian base were also managed down by emphasising the difficult political conditions in which Agrarians were forced to operate. A lecture on the world crisis given by a district-level functionary to the Domovina association in Všechlapy, for instance, stressed the constraints of coalition government, which limited what the Agrarians could achieve for agriculture, as well as the resistance from Czechoslovakia's powerful industrial sector to any kind of protectionist measure that

[942] Miller, *Forging Political Compromise*, 90.
[943] Jiráček, "Místo", 112.
[944] "Celostátní domovinářské sněmování", *Venkov* (27.05.1930); "Valná hromada Ustřední jednoty: významné projevy ministra Bradáče a senátora Kroihera", *Venkov* (27.05.1930).

might relieve farmers' pain.[945] In a more incendiary version of the same discursive tactic, the Agrarian right routinely accused the Agrarians' coalition partners of maliciously obstructing agricultural interests, thereby fostering a siege mentality amongst the Agrarian base.[946]

Another technique for demobilizing discontent lay in the invocation of historical peasant suffering. This was the opposite of what similar references – be it to serfdom or peasants' unrequited sacrifices for the nation – were meant to achieve in Poland, where Populists used them to embolden present-day demands and feelings of injustice. In the Czech context, by contrast, grisly evocations of life under serfdom were easily integrated into whiggish narratives of socio-national emancipation whose primary psychological effect was to promote gratitude for the present. This narrative could potentially assume a disciplinary purpose, allowing those in power to trivialise or delegitimize present-day grievances by placing them in historical perspective. Some municipal chronicles offer a snapshot of how rural notables, often associated with the Agrarian party, may have used past suffering to shame rural discontent into silence. Writing around 1928, the Doubrava chronicler prefaced his historical account of life under serfdom with an ironic request for "today's peasant, who likes to rage against the republic, to imagine the peasant estate in the halcyon days of serfdom".[947] A similarly quietistic instrumentalization of the past appeared in *Mladý Venkov* a few weeks after the 1930 anniversary celebrations of the 1680 peasant rebellion. *Mladý Venkov* advised readers to draw inspiration from the

[945] SDA Strakonice, MDV, Zapísník, 31.01.1932 entry.
[946] "Rozvratná práce agrárního tisku", *Lidové Listy* (31.12.1936).
[947] Pamětní kniha obce Doubravy, 12; see also Kronika obce Mladějovice, 49.

rebellious peasants of the past. Far from encouraging subversive indignation, however, the lesson these rebels taught was one of patient optimism in the face of adversity.[948]

As these examples have shown, the Agrarians' ability to play on anti-systemic moods was constrained by their status as a party of government. At the same time, this status afforded them much greater possibilities to forestall and repress such moods. Most obviously, by shaping government policy and claiming credit for measures that served agricultural interests, the Agrarians had some power to restore the social contract with their base that the economic crisis had undermined.

But proximity to the state's resources and power structure also gave the Agrarians the means to intervene in rural political life in a more coercive manner. Largely overlooked in historiography is how the Agrarians used their economic and administrative leverage to block oppositional activity and subdue and cajole insubordinate groups at the local level. In the 1930s this was a frequent complaint amongst the Agrarians' opponents on the left and in the Catholic camp.

Agrarian attempts at social control took various forms. First, by capturing public resources and reserving them for their own supporters, the Agrarians exerted economic pressure towards political conformity. In a letter to the Communist *Obrana Lidu*, one South Bohemian Domovina member complained that priority access to his village's municipal bull was always given to Agrarian party members at the expense of many smaller farmers.[949] In another instance a teacher who joined the Communist Party was

[948] J. Kublák, "Více důvěry!", *MV* (26.09.1930), 4.
[949] "Agrárníci ničí chov dobytka u malých zemědělců", *OL* (23.10.1936).

denied employment in his Agrarian-controlled district.[950] Pressure tactics were also possible thanks to Agrarian influence in certain state industries where labourers could be corralled into Agrarian unions with various incentives and threats.[951]

The Agrarians also used their influence in local government and the Interior Ministry to repress the activities of political adversaries. Following the establishment of a new conservative party by former Agrarian minister Karel Prášek in the lead-up to the 1925 election, gendarmerie stations were instructed to monitor Prášek's supporters whilst local authorities set up various procedural obstacles to cripple the new party's campaign.[952] Similar tricks were used against the Communists in the 1930s. According to the leading South Bohemian Communist Josef Nepomucký, district authorities in Strakonice district – Rudolf Beran's political stronghold – clamped down on "every sign of disagreement with Beran's politics", locking up local rebels – especially Communists – "as a matter of course".[953] Communist meetings, both private and public, were regularly banned by the Agrarian-controlled district and police authorities under the pretext of protecting public order.[954]

Besides directly enlisting the repressive arm of the state, Agrarians also mobilised their own supporters and clients to clamp down on opposition. In village-level political struggles Dorost circles were mobilised as the Agrarians' "slingshot": indeed, in their

[950] The local Agrarian leadership also prevented him from accessing credit and insurance through Agrarian-controlled loan facilities. *Bojovali*, 164-166.
[951] Fr. Herain, "Učiňte přitrž štvanicím!", *ZD* (31.01.1931), 3; "Různé zprávy: k čemu agrárníkům slouží státní peníze?", *ZD* (31.03.1931), 3; "Obrovská manifestace v Uher. Brode' proti agrárnímu zneužívání státní moci", *Lidové Listy* (18.03.1937).
[952] Uhlíř, "Dva směry", 133-134.
[953] *Bojovali*,141.
[954] J. Nepomucký, "Pobouření malorolníků proti agrárnímu teroru na Strakonicku", *OL* (27.03.1936).

opponents' eyes Dorost could seem like no more than a posse of armed thugs used to break up Catholic and left-wing activities.[955] Crucially, such violent interventions may even have enjoyed the tacit consent of local authorities, much like attacks by the pro-governmental Riflemen's Association on Wici in the Polish context. In his post-war recollections Josef Nepomucký recalled how the Pelhřimov district authorities deliberately authorised a Communist meeting because the village where it was due to be held was a stronghold of the Agrarian estate-owner and senator Václav Donát: as such, they expected the meeting would end in a fiasco and the Communists would get their noses bloodied.[956]

The Agrarians' efforts to reduce political contestation with the help of state resources and their own muscle were at least partially successful. The practical hindrances to oppositional activity generated by these efforts were significant. According to one Communist activist from Písek district, it became practically impossible for Communists to organise electoral meetings in the 1930s after publicans gave in to Agrarian pressure and refused to rent them their inns.[957] Campaigning aside, even the simple articulation of radical views could become costly for those villagers whose livelihoods and access to municipal resources depended on Agrarian-affiliated employers and authorities. There is some evidence that the Agrarians' stranglehold over various aspects of rural life drove radical sentiments underground, transforming them into a "hidden transcript".[958] When in the 1925 parliamentary elections six out of 135 votes in Hlavatce were cast for the

[955] *Bojovali*, 141; "Když jsem býval chalupnikem", *Lidové Listy* (22.01.1929).
[956] *Bojovali*, 140-141.
[957] Idem, 94.
[958] Idem, 141.

Communists, the Hlavatce chronicler expressed surprise, for "before the elections no one had been aware of [Communists in the village]".[959] Notably, when reporting on mounting anger in the Bohemian countryside of the early 1930s, Agrarian intellectual Kutnar assumed that:

> the countryside's fundamental views are unknown to our politicians, because they do not manifest themselves at meetings [and] consultations [or] in administrative offices and public resolutions; [instead] they dwell secretly amongst the people, passing from mouth to mouth – our [country]man does not dare to expose them, he is able to nod along in official and wider society even when he disagrees.[960]

Perhaps the ultimate proof of Agrarian success in suppressing open dissent was the frequency with which villages decided against holding competitive municipal elections, preferring to present a single list of candidates instead. That such lists tended to be Agrarian-dominated can be inferred from the gloating reactions of the Agrarian press, which celebrated such electoral cancellations as expressions of rural unity.[961] A very different interpretation was offered by *Obrana Lidu* when it stated that in Strakonice district

> there are many villages where previously there were as many as five parties but where through terror and economic oppression it has been ensured that only one candidates' list – an Agrarian one – is put forward.[962]

The Agrarians' desire to reduce political contestation also left its mark on their internal culture. As if to forestall potentially disruptive disagreements, ideological questions were largely de-emphasized relative to bread-and-butter ties in the party's relationship to its base. Political scientist Andreas Schedler has defined one kind of anti-politics, in Habermasian terms, as any attempt to replace "the communicative rationality of

[959] Kronika obce Hlavatce, 33.
[960] F. Kutnar, "Vesnice rebelující", *Brázda*, 13/4 (1932), 50-51.
[961] E.g., "Na Českobudějovicku 60% obcí a osad již odvolilo", *Pošumavský Kraj* (14.05.1936), 6.
[962] "'Zelená' demokracie", *OL* (27.11.1936).

politics" with alternative logics and forms of action: aesthetic spectacle, moralism or the instrumental rationality of technocracy.[963] In this perspective, even as it expanded as a *political* organisation, the Agrarian party undertook to *depoliticise* rural life, substituting folklorist display and economic improvement for debate at the local level. The minute books of rural associations are undoubtedly an imperfect guide to the atmosphere of rural politics: firstly, because their quality depended greatly on the variable assiduity of individual minute-keepers and, secondly, because few have survived. It is nevertheless striking how the surviving minutes of Domovina, Peasant Cavalry and Dorost associations fail to indicate any systematic effort to foster an internal culture of discussion. In the case of Domovina, meetings were sporadic, usually taking place no more than once or twice a year.[964] The tenor of all associations' meetings, meanwhile, was humdrum and practical, focused on upcoming events and immediate tasks, such as the procurement of equipment or organising a dance. While lectures aimed at explaining the political situation were occasionally given by Agrarian officials, these were not usually followed by discussions.[965]

The contrast with Wici's internal culture is striking. Discussions around various political and ethical questions were central to the Polish peasant youth movement in the 1930s, deeply impressing many of its members. Abundant "ego-documents" in the Polish case certainly make it easier to uncover the texture of associational life. Nevertheless, the relative vibrancy of its discussion culture was not a mere optical illusion generated by

[963] A. Schedler, "Introduction: Antipolitics – Closing and Colonizing the Public Sphere", in Eadem (ed.), *The End of Politics?: Explorations into Modern Antipolitics* (Basingstoke, 1997), 12-13.
[964] SDA Strakonice, MDV, Zapísník; SDA Písek, MDJ, Zapísník.
[965] E.g., SDA Pisek, OSRD Mirovice, sign. I/2, Kniha organisační komise OSRD Mirovice.

source availability. Awakening the peasantry's intellectual agency was an explicit goal for the Wici movement.[966] No equivalent emphasis can be found in Dorost's or other Agrarian associations' proclamations. Instead, economics and action were regularly foregrounded over ideology and discussion.[967] In the case of Domovina, this was apparent in its newspaper's orientation towards economic, especially agricultural, questions – an orientation which encouraged a narrowly interest-driven approach to life and politics.

The ideological poverty of the Agrarians' offer was also noted by outsiders. According to Cháb, the reason many of Fascism's recruits could remain part of the Agrarian party without any sense of contradiction was that "the…party…never bothered much with political education".[968] Following the 1937 Dorost procession, the left-wing *Národní Osvobození* contrasted the impressive energy and mobilizational power that the Agrarians had demonstrated with their ideological deficiencies. To win over rural youth, *Národní Osvobození* argued, the Agrarians deployed a broad array of weapons: "folklore, the Peasant Cavalry, stirring demonstrations and the incorporation of young people into communal and especially cooperative politics and work". A notable absence in this arsenal, however, was the role of ideas.[969]

Increasingly, the Agrarians themselves celebrated the demotion of discursive politics, elevating in its place ideals of economic improvement and organic rural unity. With this rhetorical strategy Agrarians sublimated their claim to uncontested control of rural life

[966] AZHRL, Kolekcja o Ignacym Solarzu 1, I. Solarz, "Szyce w ruchu ludowym" (*Wici*, 1929).
[967] E.g., SDA Písek, RSZML – OO Milevsko, sign. II B/2, circular no. 2 to Republican Party district secretaries, 2.
[968] Cháb, *Jihočeský selský vůdce*, 30-31.
[969] "V Praze a v Košicích", *Národní Osvobození* (25.05.1937).

whilst simultaneously tapping into the very anti-political sentiment that stood to threaten them. In this discursive frame the verbosity and divisiveness of politics was contrasted with the productivity and solidarity of economic "work". Villagers were thereby discouraged from wasting their energies on political squabbling: far better to pursue non-political material improvements within the confines of Agrarian hegemony. In his 1929 New Year address to Domovina, for instance, Rudolf Beran instructed Domovina members "to work more economically than up till now, [for] wild politicking will not help us". Beran illustrated this with the image of an unknown, external "demagogue" – his only known quality being his "gift of the gab" – coming to the village and turning its various strata against one another.[970] In a similar vein, in 1938 the main Agrarian daily celebrated those Bohemian and Moravian villages that were able to agree a single (implicitly Agrarian-dominated) candidates' list and thereby eschew municipal elections despite the divisive pressures of various agitators: this was proof of villagers' commitment to rural as well as national unity and of their reluctance to waste municipal funds on "elections and printing candidate lists" when this money could be spent on municipalities themselves.[971]

The rhetorical devaluation of politics was not exclusive to the Agrarians in the 1930s. Rather, the same trend could be observed across the Czechoslovak right. One of its main drivers was the already mentioned frustration with "partocracy" that percolated throughout Czechoslovak society during the economic crisis. Its weaponisation by the emergent Fascist movement created additional pressure on established right-wing

[970] R. Beran, "Semknutím šiků našich – do nového roku", *Domovina* (4.01.1929), 1.
[971] "Česká vesnice dokázala jednotu", *Venkov* (15.05.1938).

parties to appease anti-partisan sentiment. Anti-partisan ideas, however, were not just a threat to such parties. Rather, they also exerted genuine appeal amongst their elites. Czechoslovakia's worsening security situation after 1933 stoked fears about the debilitating effects of political fragmentation in the face of Nazi Germany and an increasingly radical and united Sudeten German minority. In practically every political camp there was talk of merging parties into larger political blocs.[972] Simultaneously, the rise and dazzling success of far-right regimes around Europe bolstered the appeal of authoritarian, frequently anti-political ideas on the Czechoslovak right. In 1934 the National Democrats sought to merge their party with the Fascists and various conservative groups into a deliberately non-partisan-sounding party: National Unification. In the Catholic Populist camp corporatist ideas were explicitly framed as a means to cleanse a Czechoslovak "party culture" (*stranictví*) in which the *raison d'état* was too often clouded by economic interests.[973] And whilst the Agrarian leadership officially distanced itself from the Fascist movement and periodically reaffirmed its commitment to democracy,[974] radical Agrarian factions actively dallied with the Fascists, even organising a joint rally in October 1932 to pressure Agrarian ministers into a more aggressively anti-socialist position.[975] This Fascist influence also translated into growing scepticism towards the Czechoslovak political system: according to various reports, even a longstanding moderate like Antonín Švehla was by 1933 advocating the consolidation of political parties into larger blocs or even an outright authoritarian turn.[976]

[972] E.g., "Co přinesou mladí politicky?", *Lidové Noviny* (23.02.1936).
[973] "Mládí ukazuje cesty k obnově národa", *Lidové Listy* (8.04.1934).
[974] Kárník, *České země*, ii, 267.
[975] Idem, 78.
[976] E. Broklová, "Agrární strana a demokracie", in Broklová et al., *Agrárníci* 52-55.

It was in this increasingly anti-political, nationalistic and occasionally anti-democratic context that the Agrarians began to dilute their self-image as a party of the countryside and foreground their credentials as a supra-partisan voice for the interests of the nation-state. This quest to seek legitimacy in the nation-state went far beyond the nationalist and etatist self-representations of the Polish peasant movement. In the SL, references to the nation-state never came close to eclipsing peasantism; further, such references were often instrumental, serving above all to advance the peasantry's class interests. By contrast, in the Agrarian discourse of the late 1930s, class- and estate-based themes were downgraded and invocations of agrarian ideology appeared increasingly hollow. Examples of this discursive tendency are easy to find. In 1936 Dorost replaced its longstanding logo – the green four-leaf clover used by peasant and agrarian parties across East-Central Europe – with a clover in the colours of the Czechoslovak flag.[977] When the Agrarian executive committee met in January 1935, agricultural questions played second fiddle to the meeting's dominant theme: the need for a strong state and for national consolidation in the context of international insecurity. The accompanying headline in the Agrarian press declared: "Out of the idea of the national soil emerges the effective unification of all strata around solidary work for a strong state".[978] The only word that still signalled some ideological nexus to agrarianism was "soil"; even it, however, appeared in a metaphorical phrase where the soil's agricultural significance was rendered invisible.[979]

[977] "Čtyrlístek v polí státních barev – opožděné přiznání k nacionalismu", *Lidové Listy* (3.04.1936).
[978] "Z idey národní půdy roste skutečné sjednocení všech vrstev k solidární práci pro silný stat.", *Venkov* (31.01.1935).
[979] Meanwhile, the speeches given at this meeting contained practically none of the usual self-congratulation about the peasants' unique contribution to the nation's survival.

There were various reasons for the Agrarians' state-nationalist turn. To some extent it simply reflected their position: the Agrarians could identify closely with the state because of their power within it. This self-representation as a state-building actor could also prove helpful in the Czechoslovak political game. In a fragmented electoral landscape, there was a premium for any party capable of representing itself as the centre and, thus, an effective linchpin for a grand coalition. Whilst coveted by most parties, it was the Agrarians who most resolutely claimed this mantle for themselves.[980] And crucially, their etatism – a willingness to subordinate sectional interests to those of the nation-state and the democratic system that defined it – was at the heart of their claim. At the same time, etatism assuaged the pain of political horse-trading: concessions to coalition partners could be sublimated as expressions of etatist responsibility rather than betrayals of the Agrarians' rural clientele.

The state-nationalist turn, however, did not just stem from the Agrarians' governmental role. Rather, it was also part of their negotiation with the electorate. In many ways a state-nationalist self-representation dovetailed with the Agrarians' local-level anti-politics. By becoming the party of the nation-state, the Agrarians disguised themselves as a supra-partisan force, making it possible to play upon anti-partisan sentiment whilst remaining immune to its corrosive effects. State-nationalist discourse also offered the Agrarians a tool with which to justify their uncontested control of the countryside: political debate could be condemned for weakening the nation-state whilst adherence to the Agrarian party – valorised as an expression of national unity. State-nationalism was, in short, yet

[980] According to the Catholic Populist deputy Václav Knotek, for instance, "…every political party except for the Social Democrats has wanted to be the party of the centre". V. Knotek, "O stranu středu", *Lidové Listy* (28.11.1928).

another part of the Agrarians' defence strategy against the crisis of legitimacy that engulfed the party system during the Great Depression.

These instrumental functions of state-nationalist discourse were especially apparent in the twilight years of the First Republic. As the threat from Nazi Germany mounted, "the unity of the countryside for the unity of the nation" became the watchword of the Agrarian press. Though seemingly non-political, this unity was clearly intended to retain the Agrarian party as its organisational umbrella. At the same time, a deliberate ambiguity was cultivated around the Agrarians' partisan vs supra-partisan status. In June 1938, for instance, war-readiness demonstrations were held under Agrarian auspices in provincial towns across the country in order to express "outrage against attacks" by the Agrarians' domestic opponents as well as "enthusiastic militancy" against foreign aggression. Threats to the Agrarian party were thereby conflated with threats to the nation-state. In a sign of the demonstrations' partisan character, Agrarian functionaries who were in attendance "spontaneously" offered pledges of "unlimited trust in the party" and its leaders, alongside declarations of rural-cum-national unity.[981] And yet the Agrarian *Venkov* vehemently denied charges that "these so-called public meetings" were only open to party members, insisting that they were more than partisan affairs.[982]

Besides buttressing the Agrarians' claim to leadership of the countryside and the nation, state-nationalism was also central to their strategy of electoral expansion. Faced with a declining agricultural population, the Agrarians were compelled – in order to retain their political dominance – to seek out new clienteles. Where earlier expansionist drives had

[981] "30.000 činovníků Republikánské strany v aktivní pohotovosti", *Venkov* (8.06.1938).
[982] "Nezarazíte vítěžný pochod jednoty venkova pro jednotu národa", *Venkov* (10.06.1938).

mainly focused on rural groups (e.g. cottagers, schoolteachers, agricultural labourers), in the 1930s Agrarian attention increasingly turned to the towns. Industrial workers, especially in the arms industry, were encouraged to join the Agrarian trade union and reminded of their rural roots.[983] The mid-1930s decline in anti-worker rhetoric reflected this electoral pivot, as Agrarians sought to reframe themselves as a "pan-national party of the countryside and the towns", a political home for "the working people of the towns and the countryside".[984] At the same time overtures were made to urban elites. In the run-up to the 1935 parliamentary election, *Venkov* printed a letter from a public employee which celebrated the Agrarian party as "the last bastion of civil morality and of [citizens'] ideals" in an "age of mounting radicalisms on the left and the right"; this civil quality was bound to win "for the peasants…the sympathy of the urban citizenry".[985] Crucially, the epithet *civil* was a coded reference in Czech political language to the middle class. Meanwhile, according to one technocratic journal, the run-up to the 1935 elections saw the Agrarians reconstitute themselves as the voice of the agricultural and industrial bourgeoisie in its totality – of "the interests of production, be it agricultural or non-agricultural".[986] After the elections, rumours rumbled on about various Agrarian initiatives to oversee a political consolidation of different economic elites and even to merge with the National Democrats into one "conservative party".[987] Even at the local level there were signs of expansionist thinking amongst ordinary Agrarian functionaries.

[983] E.g, J. Králíček, "Co nám píše dělník?", *Venkov* (9.10.1934); "Agrární strana přichází všestavovství na chut", *Lidové Listy* (7.06.1934).
[984] V. Lednický, "Agrární strana si už připravuje hlavní volební heslo", *Lidové Listy* (14.10.1934).
[985] "Dopis veřejného zaměstnance: Není program jako program", *Venkov* (15.05.1935).
[986] "Na předělu doby", *Hospodářská politika* (16.02.1935).
[987] "Agrární strana zakládá organisace průmyslníků?", *Rudé Právo* (24.01.1936); "Stoupal–Hodáč–Ježek–Preiss?", *Národní Osvobození* (24.01.1936).

In 1932 the head of the Peasant Cavalry in deeply rural Mirovice district gave a speech insisting that the Cavalry's "mission was to protect not just all landowners but all other Czechs and Slovaks" and that Peasant Cavalries were open to non-landowning, even urban-dwelling, members.[988]

A state-nationalist self-representation was crucial to this "catch-all" turn,[989] providing a language that could appeal to groups with at best tepid sentimental or genetic ties to the countryside. By way of example, one steelworker's exhortatory account of why industrial workers were rallying to the Agrarians could only point to their patriotic credentials – juxtaposed with the Social Democrats' one-time Austrianism – as a reason for workers to jump ship.[990] In many ways, then, the "nation" played an analogous role in the expansionist drive of the 1930s to that performed by "the agricultural estate" in earlier such efforts. Both provided a prestigious macro-category with which different interests could identify themselves and within which they could putatively be reconciled without losing their specificity.

Predictably, the "catch-all" turn produced strains in the Agrarians' relationship with their original clientele. These strains shone through in the reassurances that were routinely incanted at Agrarian meetings in the late 1930s about the party's enduringly rural and agricultural priorities. Following the party congress in early 1936, the youth journal *Brázda* stated unambiguously that, whilst non-agricultural strata – most notably industrial workers – were welcome to join the Agrarian movement, "they cannot expect

[988] NAČR, Selské jízdy, f. 392, k. 3, Mirovice: kníha zápisů, 07.02.1932 entry.
[989] For more on the "catch-all" transformation of agrarian parties see D. Arter, *From Farmyard to City Square?: The Electoral Adaptation of the Nordic Agrarian Parties* (Aldershot, 2001).
[990] J. Králíček, "Co nám píše dělník?", *Venkov* (9.10.1934).

[the party to] unmoor itself from the peasant folk" who guaranteed the "even-mindedness" that was the Agrarians' core feature.[991] At a 1936 conference of the national Domovina leadership, Rudolf Beran affirmed that "all undertakings must be conducted…to the benefit of the millions of people who labour in agriculture" and that "we cannot forget that our movement is above all agricultural".[992] Such anxieties around Agrarian loyalties, however, were not enough to halt the general drift towards state-nationalism, which in any case did not so much threaten agricultural interests – minoritarian as they were in an increasingly urbanised state – as allow them to punch above their weight.

In late 1938, in the aftermath of the Munich conference and Nazi Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland, the political system in what remained of the Czechoslovak state underwent a drastic overhaul. Democracy was curtailed and existing political parties dissolved. A new, simplified system composed of two parties – the governing Party of National Unity, formed from the right-wing and centrist parties of the First Republic, and a docile opposition made up primarily of former Social Democrats – was brought to life and proclaimed an "authoritarian democracy". In reality, its direction of travel was more authoritarian than democratic. Significant pressure was placed on the oppositional National Party of Work to dissolve on grounds of national unity – an outcome that was only avoided when Nazi Germany snuffed out the Second Republic and, with it, both parties in March 1939.[993]

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[991] "Agrárníci zůstanou selskou stranou?", *Národní Osvobození* (9.02.1936).
[992] "Valná hromada Čs. Ústř. Domoviny: Každé vitežství republikánské strany přinese dobro zemědělství a štěstí státu", *Venkov* (19.05.1936).
[993] J. Holzer, "Stranický system Druhé Republiky", in Marek and Malíř, *Politické strany,* ii, 1043-1044.

According to historian Jan Rataj, the quick unravelling of Czechoslovak democracy after Munich owed much to the ideological groundwork laid by right-wing parties during the First Republic. Whilst the Czech Fascist movement failed to win over Czechoslovak society, authoritarian, anti-liberal ideas had nevertheless established themselves in the political mainstream, gaining leverage over the Agrarian leadership and the youth wings of all major non-socialist parties during the 1930s.[994] Rataj's argument about the continuity between the First and Second Republics was, in turn, rejected by historian Eva Broklová as teleological. In reality, Broklová countered, authoritarian currents were marginal in the Catholic Populist, National Democrat and Agrarian parties throughout the 1930s despite the polemical and thus unreliable charges of Fascism levelled against them by their left-wing opponents.[995]

This chapter's findings, however, are more consistent with Rataj's than Broklová's position. It has been shown that anti-pluralism was a consistent characteristic of Agrarian state-nationalist discourse and anti-political practice for much of the mid-to-late 1930s, long before the fall of the First Republic. This does not mean that democracy was openly disavowed by the party mainstream. Democracy had been elevated to an ethnic shibboleth in Czechoslovak politics[996] and was similarly enshrined in Agrarian identity throughout the First Republic. Abandoning it would have been costly indeed. Explicitly authoritarian fantasies were thus largely confined to the party margins.[997]

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[994] J. Rataj, *O autoritativní národní stát : ideologické proměny české politiky v druhé republice 1938-1939* (Prague, 1997), 230.
[995] Broklová et al., *Agrárníci*.
[996] P. Bugge, "A Nation Allied with History: Czech Ideas of Democracy, 1890–1948", in J. Kurunmäki et al. (eds.), *Democracy in Modern Europe: A Conceptual History* (New York/Oxford, 2018), 208-230.
[997] For more on these authoritarian dalliances see "Agrární plány k ovládnutí celého státu?", *Národní Listy* (26.02.1935); "O mocenský monopol strany agrární nad Československou republikou", *Lidové Listy* (26.02.1935). It has also been argued that the Agrarians could afford to resist authoritarian temptations

Nevertheless, in the Agrarian party of the late 1930s, "democracy" generally functioned as a floating signifier, a mere cipher for national identity and state loyalty. Little attention was paid to its content, organisation or potential incompatibility with the much-proclaimed desire for national unity. Exemplary in this regard was a propagandistic flyer from the late 1930s demanding anti-pluralistic consolidation around a single party – the Agrarians – in the name of "strong democracy".[998] In light of this disinterest in the content of democracy, it is unsurprising that the commitment to it proved easy to shed for much of the Agrarian elite after the shock of Munich.

Rataj's argument is further buttressed by the discursive continuities between the Agrarians' anti-political state-nationalism, as discussed in this chapter, and the language with which the Second Republic was inaugurated. The slogans of consolidated democracy and national unity under whose ensign the Second Republic was designed had long been present in the Agrarian party and, more generally, on the Czech right. The anti-political spirit of 1930s Agrarianism – with its emphasis on efficient work and contempt for debate and partisanship – also came to suffuse the post-Munich state: "a democracy of action, not words", as it proclaimed itself, not to mention a democracy without parties.[999] And whilst all partisan and social divisions were nominally erased in the Party of National Unity, some of its Agrarian architects – like the *Venkov* editor Rudolf Halík – continued to envisage the agricultural folk as the core of this new national order.[1000] Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of Munich, the Agrarian elite was the main

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because the interests of their most powerful clienteles could still be secured within the democratic political system. Harna and Lacina, "Základní problémy", 115.

[998] SDA Písek, RSZML – OO Milevsko, sign. II B/2, "Všem občanum!"

[999] E.g., "Nástup Národní jednoty", *Domovina* (25.11.1938), 1.

[1000] J. Kuklík, "Strana národní jednoty", in Marek and Malíř, *Politické strany,* ii, 1059.

force presiding over the overhaul of the Czechoslovak political system. Whilst some have considered it a paradox that the First Republic's dominant party – the Agrarians – should also have been the gravedigger of its consociational system, the paradox is demystified when we consider the state-nationalist and anti-political tenor of much Agrarian language in the preceding decade.[1001]

In sum, even as social discontent festered during the economic crisis of the 1930s, amongst Czech speakers in rural South Bohemia the Czechoslovak state showed little sign of losing legitimacy. Unlike in Galicia tensions between peasants and officials did not emerge in this period. Nor did rural people or their political representatives express alienation from national culture. Mainstream symbols of Czechoslovak statehood and narratives about Czech history were the objects of considerable political consensus and, lacking elitist connotations, did not elicit resistance amongst ordinary villagers. Even if it had emerged, post-Austrian nostalgia remained politically inexpressible.

The continued legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state was also safeguarded by its democratic system of rule. This, however, was not cost-free. Whilst shielding the state from delegitimization, Czechoslovakia's consociational model of government redirected anti-systemic feeling against political parties and the party system as a whole. In South Bohemia this anti-political sentiment was primarily right-wing in flavour, reflecting the influence of Agrarian anti-urbanism and anti-socialism, even as the Agrarians themselves became its target. So strong was the anti-political mood that it largely fuelled

[1001] Holzer, "Stranický system", 1041-1042.

the rise of the Fascist movement, whose appeal was inseparable from its critique of political corruption and of political parties' authoritarianism.

With their credibility threatened by this crisis of political trust, the Agrarians fell back on various techniques to retain their control of the countryside and protect the interests of their clienteles. Besides managing the expectations of their base, the Agrarians exploited their power within the state and the rural economy to suppress political challenges and incentivise conformity at the village level. At the same time, they cultivated an anti-politics of their own, encouraging villagers to devote themselves primarily to economic work, depreciating discursive politics and increasingly representing themselves as a supra-partisan force. With this the Agrarians sought simultaneously to adapt to the anti-political mood of their electorate and to protect their power against it by diminishing the space for meaningful political contestation. The state-nationalist self-image that the Agrarian party adopted in the late 1930s was a further plank in this anti-political strategy: besides helping win over new urban constituencies, state-nationalism allowed the Agrarians to sublimate their anti-pluralistic tendencies as an expression of national unity. With this state-nationalist, anti-political rhetoric the Agrarians paved the way to the authoritarianism of the Second Republic, of which they were in large part the architects.

As this chapter has shown, interwar agrarian populist movements were bound by entrenched, at times competing, ideological commitments: to nation, to democratic state-building and to their social class/estate. Though unable to jettison any one of these bonds, during the 1930s the Czechoslovak Agrarians and Polish Populists nevertheless arrived at very different equilibria between them. The Populists' rejection by and of the

Sanacja state spurred their drive to seek refuge in a counter-hegemonic class culture. Commitments to state, democracy and nation were still loudly proclaimed but increasingly subordinated to class. The result was a blend of class-based "isolation and national integration", comparable to that which characterised Social Democrats in Imperial Germany.[1002] By contrast, in the late 1930s the Agrarians increasingly prioritised state-nationalism over estate-based rhetoric whilst still aggressively protecting the socioeconomic interests of their clienteles. And whilst their commitment to democracy was officially maintained, de facto an increasingly anti-pluralistic course was taken.

This difference in outcome was primarily dependent on two interconnected variables. One was the degree of a movement's proximity to state power. Access to the state's economic and coercive resources at a time of widespread anti-political sentiment presented the Agrarians with a tempting alternative to the pursuit of democratic legitimation: an anti-political, even semi-authoritarian, path to bolster their own political and economic positions. For a minoritarian actor like the Agrarians who could never win more than around 15% of the vote, this path was more easily pursued under a generic state-nationalist banner than a more particularist one of agricultural defence. Evidently, the same route was not open to the SL, whose near-total exclusion from the state precluded political strategies based on delivering economic benefits to clients, the repression of rivals or self-identification with state structures. Instead, the Populists' continued political relevance demanded a strong oppositional and non-etatist identity, be it nation- or class-based. Thus, differing levels of proximity to state power shaped the

[1002] G. Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, N.J, 1963).

political options available to agrarian populist movements. They did not, however, determine which options were chosen. Such choices were, in turn, largely dependent upon another variable, this time "from below", namely the attitudes of each party's clientele and potential clienteles towards the nation, the state and class identity. In the case of Central Galicia, conflict between the peasantry and multiple rungs of state authority during the 1930s produced widespread hostility towards the state and, to some extent, disenchantment with the national project, thus increasing the appeal of a more class-centred than nation-centred politics amongst Polish-speaking peasants.[1003] By contrast, in 1930s South Bohemia alienation from the nation-state was low. As a result, the anger unleashed by the economic crisis was not directed against the state as a whole. Nor was it, thanks in part to Agrarian ideological influence, principally directed against economic elites. Instead, much of its focus was on political parties. In a context where the social legitimacy of the nation-state was high and that of the political sphere low, there was an additional incentive for the Agrarians to adopt an anti-political, state-nationalist image, both in response to rural moods and in an attempt to win new urban clienteles.

[1003] Amongst Ukrainian-speaking peasants in East Galicia, in turn, conflict with the *Sanacja* state could just as easily stimulate nationalist as well as class-based radicalism.

Conclusion

Largely shunning the labels “left” and “right”, agrarian populist movements in interwar Europe professed to offer a “third way” – an alternative to liberal capitalism, socialist collectivism and, increasingly in the 1930s, fascist authoritarianism. The “third way”, however, was a path that could curve both to the left and the right. This dissertation has sought to illuminate how and why two such movements developed in frequently opposing directions, against a backdrop of protracted agricultural crisis in the 1930s. Various aspects of their political cultures have been discussed and situated in both local and national contexts.

First, I considered the linguistic categories with which agrarian populists sought to constitute their socio-political subjects, and what these revealed about each movement’s agendas, constraints and composition. It was argued that in the early 20th century the Czech Agrarians increasingly switched from peasantist to more generic, vocational and less class-specific linguistic categories. This reflected the pressure generated by urbanization and democratization to build a broader electoral coalition extending to all rural strata – a task that peasantist language most likely obstructed because of its continued association with the wealthy peasants who had constituted Czech agrarianism's original constituency. Meanwhile, the political language of Polish Populism evolved in the opposite direction during the interwar period. Operating in a less urbanized context and thus free from comparable demographic constraints, Galician Populists were able to foreground peasantist categories, which in Poland enjoyed broader social appeal, with all village groups and not just landed farmers. In the 1930s

conflict with and estrangement from the state and social elites intensified this peasantist tendency – this was peasantness as a desire for social apartness. Thus, the political languages of Czech Agrarians and Polish Populists betrayed opposing orientations: one towards greater class-like separatism, the other towards sectoral unity and de-emphasizing class.

Next, I considered the problems that intra-village conflicts posed for agrarian populists' projects of rural/peasant unity. It was shown that in both South Bohemia and Central Galicia post-1918 village life was beset with hierarchy and conflict, but that many antagonisms declined during the interwar period – through land reform and rural depopulation in South Bohemia; through collective immiseration and estrangement from the *Sanacja* regime in Central Galicia. Agrarian populists also played an active role in reducing rural conflict, whether by discursively erasing tensions, exhorting better treatment of poorer villagers, using folklorism to instantiate village unity or, in the Agrarians' case, building up separate organisations to segregate and accommodate a plurality of rural interests. In South Bohemia such measures proved only partially successful. Whilst poorer rural strata were largely persuaded to join the Agrarian coalition, their loyalty frequently stayed transactional and lukewarm, as class divisions continued to undermine Agrarian unity and the Agrarians' image as a party of the rural rich persisted. By contrast, shared experiences of economic immiseration and political marginalization, combined with the Populist efforts' to enact peasant solidarity, produced a strong affective attachment to peasantness and ideals of peasant unity amongst many in 1930s Central Galicia. Here, the radicalization of poorer strata was largely channelled into the peasant movement rather than threatening to break it.

Also considered were each movement's conflicts with societal Others. Whilst they drew on existing animosities in rural life, what ultimately dictated the prioritization of certain antagonisms was each movement's political goals, informed in turn by the economic interests of major constituencies. At the same time, antagonistic discourses had significant material effects in social life, lending salience to some conflicts over others and thereby shaping the form and direction that social discontent assumed in the 1930s. Thus, peasant hostility towards landowners – though doubtless active in early 20th-century rural Galicia – would likely have lost more of its intensity if Populists had not mobilised anti-nobilist sentiment in their class-building efforts and fight for social justice. By contrast, anti-landowner sentiment in rural Bohemia was allowed to decline by an Agrarian movement that was unwilling to deepen class-based rural antagonisms and that preferred to redeploy anti-nobilist language against its principal interwar adversary, the socialist left. Dictated by the clash between Agrarian and socialist visions of fiscal and tariff policy (and more implicitly by their competition for the loyalties of poorer rural strata), Agrarian anti-socialism not only mobilized existing anti-socialist feelings in the countryside – feelings rooted in World War I, the exodus of rural labour, rural class conflict, and anti-cottager labour discrimination – but elevated them to a shibboleth of Agrarian identity. This was the opposite of the Populists' growing stylistic affinity with the left. Though some of the same anti-worker sentiments were operative in the Galician countryside, they remained for the most part politically inactive in the 1930s, as the Populists pursued an alliance with the PPS, did not impart an anti-socialist tenor to their own anti-urbanism and did nothing to discourage the increasingly pro-worker sentiments of many impoverished Galician peasants.

Finally, this dissertation compared rural attitudes towards the state and their relationship to how each movement responded to and sought to channel anti-systemic sentiment in the 1930s. It was argued that in 1930s Central Galicia increasingly widespread state-peasant conflict fostered societal alienation from the state, deepening tendencies towards class-based separatism and, in many cases, national disenchantment. As a party to the state-peasant conflict, the Populist movement frequently nourished these tendencies. Though it maintained a state-nationalist posture, this posture became heavily inflected with peasant radicalism. By contrast, in rural South Bohemia state legitimacy remained high throughout the 1930s thanks to seemingly positive relations between peasants and officials, a widely accepted national symbolic culture and Czechoslovakia's democratic system of rule. Here, anti-systemic impulses during the 1930s took political parties as their target, briefly feeding the popularity of a deeply anti-political Fascist movement. In contrast to the SL, as a party of government, the Agrarians were limited in their ability to foment anti-systemic tendencies. Instead, they leveraged their power within the state to repress and defuse political challenges whilst also cultivating their own anti-political rhetoric in what may partly have been an attempt to rework anti-political sentiments to their own advantage. Further, as part of this anti-political turn, the Agrarians increasingly represented themselves as a state-nationalist rather than party-political actor – a move that not only eased the acquisition of new urban clienteles but that legitimised an ever more anti-pluralistic approach to politics.

In analysing the divergence between the Polish and Czechoslovak movements, several key causal variables have come to the fore. First were the movements' differing levels of

access to state power, especially after 1926. Exclusion from the state and its patronage channels severely limited the Polish Populists' ability to shore up support with non-ideological incentives (e.g. material benefits for supporters, coercive measures against rivals). This made it politically imperative to bind supporters with emotional and ideological ties. As a result, it was in the SL's political interest to cultivate its own class-based counter-hegemony, exploiting a powerful sense of group identity and hostility towards the state and social elites in order to maintain peasant support. By contrast, as a permanent party of government, the Agrarians could afford to operate with a less compelling social identity and ideology. Access to power granted the Agrarians a much broader range of political tools with which to retain loyalty, at least in its outward form: material benefits delivered through legislative influence, economic patronage for client groups, political repression and state-nationalist strategies of self-legitimation.

Another important variable was the relative demographic weight and political-economic position of the agricultural sector. In a more urbanized democracy like Czechoslovakia exclusive reliance on peasants and peasantness was an inadequate strategy for political expansion, encouraging the Agrarians' embrace of broader electoral coalitions, of the entire "agricultural estate" and ultimately of state-nationalist rhetoric. Conversely, Poland's overwhelming rurality and, after 1926, its authoritarianism freed the Populists of similar demographic or, indeed, electoral pressures to dilute their peasantism.[1004] Secondly, Czechoslovakia's greater industrialization created a structural potential for conflict between workers' and agriculturalists' interests that in Poland was much less

[1004] For an analogous argument about the impact of electoralism on socialist parties see G. Marks, H.A.D. Mbaye, and H.M. Kim, "Radicalism or Reformism? Socialist Parties before World War I", *American Sociological Review* 74/4 (2009), 617-618.

apparent. This was, firstly, because Czech industrial growth spurred rural outmigration, thereby creating a labour shortage in agriculture, and secondly because the export-orientation of much Czech industry clashed with the interest of internationally uncompetitive branches of Czechoslovak agriculture (especially cereal production) in protectionist measures. By contrast, Polish agriculture faced an excess, rather than a shortage, of labour and did not stand to gain from protectionist measures that would harm urban consumers. These factors in themselves did not render Agrarian-socialist conflict or a Populist-Socialist rapprochement inevitable but nevertheless increased the probability of the former whilst removing an obstacle to the latter.

Ultimately, however, the structural variable that most directly caused agrarian populist movements to diverge rather than simply enabling divergence was their class composition and that of the rural contexts they navigated. Without so broad a coalition, for instance, the Agrarians would not have had to appeal to an all-encompassing "agricultural estate". Equally, it was the socioeconomic disparities within the Agrarian coalition that compelled the party to build an extensive associational apparatus to accommodate its constituent interests. Conversely, the Populists' appeals to "peasantness" were premised both on the appeal of this language with all village groups and on the comparatively limited sociocultural distance between them. The Populists' relative success in spreading peasant group consciousness and in unifying the peasantry during the 1930s was also greatly facilitated by processes of socioeconomic convergence as well as the growing leverage of poorer peasants within the SL. By contrast, the Agrarians' failure to instil poorer rural groups with a strong sense of Agrarian

identity, despite their best and frequently successful efforts to mitigate social conflicts, was directly related to wealthy farmers' enduring dominance within the party.

Each movement's class composition was also central to its choice of antagonists and, thereby, to the countryside's ideological orientation. It was, for instance, the leverage of wealthy farmers and adjacent capitalist interests in the Agrarian party that precluded policy alternatives to agricultural protectionism, thereby orienting the party towards conflict with urban consumers and the left. Likewise, the centrality of anti-socialism and, connectedly, of property to Agrarian identity cannot be understood without considering their instrumental uses in unifying an otherwise unstable, cross-class rural coalition whose unity of interests might be contested absent a relentless focus on what separated them from workers. Even the rise of rural Fascism can partly be considered "downstream" of wealthy farmers' dominance in the Agrarian movement: by entrenching anti-socialist attitudes in the countryside, Agrarian elites ensured that the dominant anti-systemic response to the economic crisis of the 1930s could not come from the left. Conversely, as widespread immiseration in the Galician countryside encouraged a more positive attitude towards workers, the declining importance of wealthy farmers in the Populist movement meant this more positive attitude – and an increasingly left-wing posture – could flourish largely unchallenged. Equally, it was the absence of landowning interests within the Populist movement that made possible its enduring anti-seigneurialism as well as its essentially class-based critique of the *Sanacja* regime. Meanwhile, the Agrarians' inability to formulate a similarly anti-elitist response to the 1930s crisis, due to their own positions within the political and economic establishment, likely accelerated their turn to state-nationalist forms of self-legitimation.

Whilst this analysis foregrounds the primacy of large structural factors over social actors' agency and experience in determining the course of rural politics, it does not follow that the latter did not matter. Structural factors set the parameters of how rural politics could develop. Nevertheless, the effect of structural pressures depended on the responses of social actors. For example, even if it was underpinned by the interests of Agrarian elites, Agrarian anti-socialism could only succeed insofar as it harnessed existing anti-socialist animosities and experiences of peasant-socialist conflict. Thus, a cultural approach and focus on the local level were central to the construction of this dissertation's arguments. Indeed, many of the themes discussed have been overlooked in existing historiography and could only be identified by paying attention to political discourse, village-level politics and underused source types (e.g., ego-documents, associational minute books, village chronicles). Such hitherto overlooked themes include the discursive centrality of anti-socialism, state-nationalism and anti-politics to the Agrarian party at both local and national levels; the scale of rural Fascism in South Bohemia; national disenchantment amongst the Polish-speaking peasantry; the discursive functions and adaptability of anti-seigneurialism; social conflicts between different village strata in both countries; and differences between the linguistic categories employed by agrarian populist movements.

A comparative history involving two case studies cannot by itself establish the main determinants of rural politics in interwar Europe as a whole. Nevertheless, it can draw attention to variables that were likely relevant in other contexts and whose investigation could enable a more integrated understanding of the causes of right-wing/left-wing developments in European peasant politics. Above all, this study highlights the need to

consider rural movements' class character and thereby avoid the "neo-populist" error of ignoring politically consequential class differences within the village.[1005] Despite belonging to the same political family, the agrarian populist movements of Poland and Czechoslovakia produced political cultures that diverged in multiple ways, frequently as a first- or second-order consequence of their different social compositions. Though the agrarian populist movements of East-Central Europe are frequently lumped together for reasons of geography and because of the ideological ties among them, this study suggests that alternative, class-sensitive categorizations might be more useful. On this basis, for instance, the Czechoslovak Agrarians might be more helpfully classified alongside the agrarian parties of Nordic and Baltic states, in which more propertied farmers played a leading role, than with the more smallholder-centred parties of Poland and Bulgaria.

As this dissertation has shown, one way to better understand the agendas, constraints and class character of interwar rural movements is to examine the linguistic categories by which they interpellated their social subjects. Virtually no work has been done on this, even though it is known that in various states rural movements of different political orientations employed different terms for the peasantry in their political nomenclature (e.g. the Independent Smallholders', Agrarian Workers' and Civic Party vs the National Peasant Party in Hungary; the National Peasant Party vs the Ploughmen's Front in Romania; the Farmers' Party vs the Lithuanian Popular Peasant Union in Lithuania) and that various agrarian populist parties flirted with more "catch-all" language in this period.

[1005] For a critique of "neo-populism", see T. Brass, "Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements, and the (Re-) Emergence of a (Post-) Modernized (Middle) Peasant", *JPS*, 18/2 (1991), 173–205.

Also deserving of further research are social conflicts within the peasantry and their relationship to broader political developments in interwar Europe. In those states where small peasants and land reform beneficiaries formed parties of their own instead of joining the agrarian parties of wealthier farmers (e.g. Estonia, Latvia, Finland),[1006] were intra-village conflicts more severe than in the Czech Lands and, if not, why did these nations' agrarian parties fail to incorporate small peasants where the Czechoslovak Agrarians succeeded, however imperfectly? Conversely, did all East-Central European regions afflicted by rural overpopulation witness socioeconomic convergence between different peasant strata and a concomitant strengthening of peasant class consciousness during the 1930s, or was Galicia an exceptional region in this regard?

Another set of questions concerns the social antagonisms pursued by agrarian populist movements. How prevalent were anti-seigneurialism and anti-socialism in this political family during the 1930s and how far was this determined by the class character of individual movements?

Finally, there are questions about agrarian populists' relationship with the nation-state. Was the national *disenchantment* displayed by many Polish-speaking peasants in Galicia an exception, or can similar attitudes be uncovered amongst the peasants of other *titular* nations in 1930s East-Central Europe? Given that conflict with state authority was also a core feature of *right-wing* peasant mobilizations in interwar Europe (e.g. Dorgères' Green Shirts, the *Landvolksbewegung*), can the more left-wing quality of

[1006] Weiss, "Bauernparteien", 213-215; Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien", 186; J. v. Hehn, "Die politische Bedeutung des Bauerntums in der unabhängigen Republik Lettland 1918-1940", in Gollwitzer, *Europäische Bauernparteien*, 233-237.

Populist anti-statism chiefly be explained by its class character or were other variables causally relevant to these divergent outcomes? Equally, can the social roots of the Czechoslovak Agrarians' state-nationalist and anti-political turn teach us anything about similar turns in Estonia and Latvia, whose farmers' party leaders went even further than the Agrarians, carrying out coups in 1934, dissolving all political parties in the name of state-national unity and proceeding to govern with the support and in the interest of their erstwhile rural clienteles, albeit without their parties?[1007]

This final question has potentially broader implications for understandings of interwar democracy and authoritarianism. Many theories of democratic breakdown during this period have emphasized the role of rural class relations, the most influential amongst them arguing for a causal connection between the enduring socio-political power of traditional landowning elites and authoritarian outcomes.[1008] In some variants of this hypothesis, a central mechanism through which landowners prevented democratic stabilization was by transmitting anti-democratic and anti-socialist ideas to the peasantry, which in turn drew peasants into coalitions with ruling-class blocs and thwarted the possibility of a pro-democratic alliance between peasants and workers.[1009] Conversely, where smallholders were mobilised by parties of their own and not subject to landowners' ideological hegemony, they were supposedly more likely to remain immune to the pull of authoritarianism, as demonstrated by the defeat of fascist

[1007] J.T. Kuck, "The Dictator without a Uniform: Kārlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia" (PhD diss., University of Tennessee – Knoxville, 2014); Weiss, "Bauernparteien", 218-219.
[1008] E.g., A. Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Los Angeles, 1943); B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1966).
[1009] D. Rueschemeyer, E. Huber and J.D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy (*Cambridge, 1992), 100.

challengers and successful establishment of democratic farmer-worker governments in 1930s Fennoscandia.[1010]

My point here is not to question landowners' role in creating the ideological climate that pushed peasants to the authoritarian right in certain countries. It is rather to highlight how the anti-socialist, even authoritarian tendencies of largely *plebeian-led* agrarian parties in countries such as Czechoslovakia militate against a binary division between smallholder-led and landlord-led agrarian blocs and, perhaps, against an exaggeration of landowners' centrality to the latter's authoritarianism. The differences between the Polish and Czechoslovak agrarian populist movements analysed here suggest an additional distinction is in order, namely a distinction between truly smallholder-dominated (and indeed worker-friendly) parties like the SL and those like the Agrarians where a more landed elite of peasant farmers – with economic interests arguably no less inimical to socialism than in the case of landowners – steered peasants, if not always to the right, away from the left. Ironically, this latter category included parties that entered coalition governments with socialists, like the Czechoslovak and Swedish agrarians. Nevertheless, as has been shown here, such coalitions did not necessarily bespeak a particular fondness for workers or pluralism on the part of agrarian parties.[1011] Further, in certain contexts, such as 1934 Latvia/Estonia or the 1938 Czecho-Slovak Republic, agrarian parties even became the handmaidens of authoritarianism. Thus, the question that needs to be asked is not how the absence of landowners made farmers' politics

[1010] Idem, 114; for a more longue durée variation of this argument, see E. Bengtsson, "The Swedish Sonderweg in Question: Democratization and Inequality in Comparative Perspective, c. 1750–1920", *Past & Present*, 244/1 (2019), 127-129.
[1011] For a similar argument re. Sweden, see idem, 154-155.

more democratic but under what circumstances farmers' parties contributed either to democratic or authoritarian outcomes in 1930s Europe.

Besides indicating new research questions for the study of interwar Europe, this dissertation also has implications for our understanding of later developments in Poland and Czechoslovakia. After 1939 Nazi occupation and subsequent Soviet domination violently ended or distorted endogenous political tendencies in both countries. However, even under the constraints that foreign domination imposed, pre-1939 trends identified in this dissertation would mould the histories of each country's peasant politics and rural development for decades to come.

In Poland the conflicts and ideological tendencies of the 1930s continued to set the tone for the peasant movement during the war. After 1939 much of the peasantry continued its leftward march; even the patriotism which, by various accounts, engulfed the countryside under Nazi occupation retained its anti-nobilist, class-inflected and contestatory contours.[1012] It was the enduring hostility between the Populists, on the one hand, and former *Sanacja* elements in what would later become the Home Army – the official armed wing of the Polish government-in-exile – that largely motivated the former to establish their own semi-independent armed resistance organisation: the Peasant Guard, renamed the Peasant Battalions in 1941. At the local level relations between the Home Army and the Peasant Battalions were often hostile, even violent. Given the prominence of landowners in the rural Home Army, this antagonism was as much a

[1012] K. Przybysz, *W konspiracji: polski ruch ludowy 1939-1945* (Warsaw, 2010), 34, 37-38.

continuation of the old conflict between peasants and landowning elites as a wartime factional struggle.[1013]

Much less is known about rural life and politics in the Czech Lands after 1938. Here too, however, the political trends of the interwar period continued to resonate. After the Munich Agreement former Agrarians readily interpreted the fall of the First Czechoslovak Republic as a direct consequence of excessive urbanism and overweening socialist power, thereby vindicating their own anti-socialism and invigorating a conservative ruralist agenda for the Second Republic.[1014] Following the Nazi occupation, this ruralist ambition was maintained in the propaganda of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In 1942, for instance, a weekly newspaper titled "Bohemian-Moravian Peasant" (*Českomoravský Rolník*) was established, promising to revive the ideal of "peasantness" and re-elevate the "peasant" to the core of the nation.[1015] The ideological and institutional (dis)continuities between this Nazified ruralism and its interwar precedents remain unresearched.

Following the Soviet liberation, Communist-led "people's democracies" were instituted across East-Central Europe. Parties perceived to have avoided collaboration with the Nazis were allowed to re-emerge and pressured to enter unity bloc governments with the

[1013] J. Mazurek, "'Szlacheckie wojsko kontra chłopska armia'. Antagonizmy między AK a BCh na terenie powiatu opatowskiego", in J. Gmitruk and A. Indraszczyk (eds.), *Wieś i ruch ludowy w Polsce i Europie* (2 vols, Warsaw, 2012), i, 443-444.
[1014] E.g., W. Dresler, "Młodzież czeskiej wsi na nowych torach", *Wieś i Państwo*, 2/1 (1939), 38; "Dvacet let byli popelkou", *Večerník Práva Lidu* (12.11.1938).
[1015] A. Hrubý, "Sedláci a půda jsou víc než jen zboží a peníze", *Českomoravský Rolník* (30.07.1942), 1; J. Váha, "Selství noví doby", *Českomoravský Rolník* (13.08.1942), 1.

Communists.[1016] Once again, the pre-war histories of each country's peasant movement had fundamental and largely unstudied implications for their fate in this new system.

In the spring of 1945 representatives of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and the Communist Party agreed a programme for the reborn Czechoslovak state which delegalized the Agrarian party on the grounds of alleged collaborationism. As leading Communist Antonín Zapotocký later admitted, the dissolution of the Agrarians removed a major obstacle to the Communist-driven socialization of the countryside.[1017] It would be misleading, however, to read their dissolution as part of a premeditated, exogenous process of Sovietization.[1018] That the interwar state's largest mass political machine could be peacefully abolished was only possible thanks to the conflicts and attitudes fostered within Czechoslovak society during preceding decades. Crucially, for instance, the ban on the Agrarian party faced little to no opposition from the remaining socialist and Catholic parties, even though they did not share the Communists' totalitarian designs. The memory of socialist-Agrarian conflict in the interwar years, however, had likely eroded other parties' sympathy for what President Edvard Beneš now referred to – in an echo of the interwar left's neo-feudal framing of the Agrarians – as the "agrarian barons".[1019] Likewise, the memory of the Agrarians' dalliance with Fascism and authoritarian etatism in the 1930s likely lent credibility to charges of collaboration. Nor did the Agrarians' dissolution produce much social outcry. Amongst some urban

[1016] A.J. Rieber, "Popular Democracy: An Illusion?", in V. Tismaneanu (ed.), *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* (Budapest, 2009), 118.
[1017] J. Rokoský, "Cesta k Únoru 1948 – zákaz agrární strany a perzekuce jejích představitelů", *Securitas Imperii*, 42-43 (2023), 279.
[1018] Indeed, Czechoslovak Communists only committed to forced agricultural collectivisation under Soviet pressure in 1948. J. Pernes, "Proměny myšlenky kolektivizace zemědělství v politice KSČ po únoru 1948", in J. Rokoský and L. Svoboda (eds.), *Kolektivizace v Československu* (Prague, 2013), 33-46.
[1019] Broklová, "Agrární strana", 66.

demographics anti-peasant and anti-Agrarian attitudes fostered during the First World War were likely reinvigorated during the Second.[1020] Communists disparagingly referred to the interwar period as the "agrarian era".[1021] More broadly, the anti-political sentiment that had both threatened Agrarian positions and pushed them in a more authoritarian direction during the 1930s served to legitimise the coercive abolition of political parties after 1945.[1022] Even in the countryside objections to the Agrarians' abolition were relatively muted.[1023] Indeed, in a sign of how superficial the affective bonds between the party and many of its supporters may have been, the Agrarians were quickly replaced as the foremost rural political force by the Communists who won mass support by simply repeating the Agrarians' own political trick: claiming credit for the postwar land reform.[1024]

Whilst no less hostile towards political agrarianism than their Czechoslovak counterparts, Polish Communists were in no position to replicate their methods. This was not just due to the Populists' huge popularity and the Communists' lack thereof. The Populists were a progressive force that could not be easily dismissed as fascist – the Communists themselves had courted the SL to join a Popular Front after 1935 – and, as such, a space had to be carved out for them in the post-war "people's democracy".

[1020] In her post-1968 memoir the Holocaust survivor Heda Margolius Kovály depicted a post-war peasantry engorged on nefarious wartime profits, its farmhouses stuffed with "oriental carpets…and original paintings" – a direct echo of the anti-peasant rumours that had circulated in Prague during World War I. H. Margolius Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968* (New York, 1997), 46-47; Morelon, "Threat", 334.
[1021] L. Slezák, "KSČ v boji za uskutečnění první etapy poválečné pozemkové reformy v českých zemích", *ČSČH*, 24 (1976), 167.
[1022] B. Abrams, "Hope died last: the Czechoslovak Road to Stalinism", in Tismaneanu, *Stalinism*, 347.
[1023] J. Rokoský, "'Nebyli jsme zrádci ani zbabělci'. Představitelé agrární strany v politické kultuře třetí republiky", in J. Randák and P. Koura, *Hrdinství a zbabělost v české politické kultuře 19. a 20. století* (Prague, 2008), 340-363.
[1024] Slezák, "KSČ", 176-177.

Instead, Polish Communists employed the same strategy as did Romanian and Hungarian Communists, establishing their own subordinate peasant party in an effort to weaken the independent Populists.[1025] This strategy initially failed. The independent Populist movement quickly outgrew the pro-Communist Populists and – despite extensive harassment by the state security apparatus – became, like peasant parties in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, the main opposition force to the Communists.[1026] Only with the Stalinist turn of 1948 was the Populist movement definitively subjugated. Even then, however, Polish Communists did not feel confident enough to abolish the peasant parties as Hungarian Communists would do in 1949. Instead, the rump of the independent Populists was forcibly merged with the pro-Communist SL to form the United Popular Party (henceforth ZSL) – a neutered "transmission belt" for Communist ideology to the countryside.

Just as interwar conflicts shaped the divergent postwar fates of agrarian populist movements, so these divergent fates would have longstanding consequences for each country's rural history. Officially, under Stalinism the Polish ZSL was obliged to recant its earlier agrarianism and embrace the Marxist-Leninist view of rural development. In practice, however, its continued existence hindered rather than facilitating collectivisation, offering the Polish peasantry an institutional lever with which to slow the tempo of reform during the early 1950s.[1027] The ZSL's preservation became even more consequential during the Thaw of the second half of the decade. From 1955 and

[1025] S. Radu, "The Political Organisation of the Peasantry in Communist Romania: The Ploughmen's Front (1945–1953)", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1-2 (2013), 79-101.
[1026] S. Stępień, "Partie robotnicze a partie ludowe w latach 1944-1949", in Jachymek, *Sojusznicy*, 212.
[1027] J. Gmitruk, *Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe, 1949-1989* (Warsaw, 2004), 37.

especially after the Polish October, the ZSL launched a forceful effort to recover its autonomous identity, rehabilitate the Populists' pre-1945 heritage and increase the peasants' influence within the state.[1028] At the same time the ruling PZPR largely abandoned its plans to complete agricultural collectivization. From the early 1960s the PZPR clamped down on the ZSL's growing autonomy.[1029] Even then, however, the ZSL was able to exploit the periodic crises of legitimacy that shook the Communist regime to advance the interests of private farming. This culminated in the immediate aftermath of the Solidarity crisis when the ZSL secured a constitutional guarantee of the inviolability of private peasant property, thereby definitively slaying the spectre of collectivization.[1030] After 1989 the ZSL provided the institutional basis for a new "decommunized" Populist movement that has repeatedly played a kingmaker role in Polish politics ever since.

By contrast, when the Czechoslovak Communists set about collectivising agriculture in 1949, no major rural institution equivalent to the Polish ZSL or Roman Catholic Church existed to soften its course. As recent studies have shown, peasant resistance during the first, most draconian phase of collectivization was widespread but uncoordinated and ultimately inconsequential.[1031] Further, when collectivization was slowed and partially rolled back after 1953, the absence of a peasant party meant there was no force capable of capitalising on and stabilising this reversal. Collectivisation was resumed – albeit on a less coercive basis – in 1958 and all but completed by 1960. By the time of the Prague

[1028] Idem, 43-44.
[1029] T. Doroszuk, "Relacje między ZSL i PZPR (1949-1989)", in Jachymek, *Sojusznicy*, 232-233.
[1030] Gmitruk, *Zjednoczone Stronnictwo*, 60.
[1031] J. Rokoský, "Mezi hrdosti a zoufalstvím. Odpor proti násilné kolektivizaci", in Rokoský and Svoboda, *Kolektivizace*, 181-204.

Spring the question had lost its relevance: no attempts to reverse collectivization or improve the standing of private farming were made in 1968.[1032]

It would doubtless be an exaggeration to consider the ZSL as the primary determinant of the failure of collectivization in Poland or the Agrarians' abolition as the precondition of Czechoslovak collectivization's success. In the even more rural states of Bulgaria and Romania collectivization faced stiffer and more violent resistance – including from many activists of the Bulgarian peasant party – but local Communists still saw the policy through to its end.[1033] This, however, does not negate the fact that the ZSL influenced the course of rural history to a remarkable degree both before and after 1956. It is doubtful whether a peasant movement without its left-leaning pre-war trajectory would have been conceded as much power by the Communist regime. Existing literature on collectivization in East-Central Europe has, however, tended altogether to ignore the role of peasant parties and interwar legacies in the post-1945 period, even dismissing the ZSL as an inconsequential Communist satellite.[1034] However, as this brief overview has shown, the pre-war histories of peasant movements continued to inform wartime and post-war rural history in ways that a focus on exogenous processes obscures and that warrant further research.

[1032] J. Rychlík, "Collectivization in Czechoslovakia in Comparative Perspective, 1949-1960" in C. Iordachi and A. Bauerkämper (ed.), *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements* (Budapest/New York, 2014), 200-201.
[1033] V. Migev, "The Bulgarian Peasants' Resistance to Collectivization (1948-1958)", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1 (1997), 53-71**;** G.R. Witkowski, "Collectivization at the Grass Roots Level: State Planning and Popular Reactions in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and the GDR, 1948–1960", in Iordachi and Bauerkämper, *Collectivization,* 476-477.
[1034] E.g., D. Jarosz, "The Collectivization of Agriculture in Poland: Causes of Defeat", in Iordachi and Bauerkämper, *Collectivization*, 113-146.

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