

Opracowania

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“Toruń, as a fortress city, with its army masses, was more exposed to provisioning difficulties than other cities. So it became more and more difficult to get enough bread [...], it was getting worse with meat and fat. When once my sister, with great difficulty, got a piece of meat which turned out to be neither beef, nor pork or mutton, but looked very suspicious, and which we naturally did not touch, I said to myself, “It’s high time to get out of Toruń”, as Józef Dembiński, a vicar

at the church of St. Jacob during the First World War recalled years later¹. Life in the city was getting harder and harder. The rationing of bread introduced in 1915 over the course of the subsequent war months extended to almost all food products and a majority of basic necessities. The ration stamps issued by the local government, at top-down-fixed prices, could be used to buy smaller and smaller quantities of goods². From 1917, the inhabitants were entitled to only 1.4 kg of bread, 1.5 kg of potatoes and 150 g of meat a week per capita. At the beginning of the last year of the war, the latter was reduced to 125 grams, so-called meatless weeks having been introduced in the summer months³. In the autumn of 1918, due to the relatively favourable harvest, the bread ration for Toruń inhabitants was increased to 2100 grams per week⁴. The quality of food also deteriorated along with the reduction in quantity. Various substitutes were widely used. The symbols of those times were fruit marmalade, which is a mixture of apple pulp with a systematically increasing addition of sugar beets, carrots, etc., and so-called war bread with a large addition of potatoes, with sawdust often used for its production⁵. The prices of products available on the market, despite being controlled by the state system, were very high and exceeded their pre-war versions manifold. For example, the price of a large head of white cabbage at a street market in October 1918 reached 6 marks per item, which in comparison with the twenty-mark monthly child support received by the wife of a conscripted soldier was an astronomical amount⁶. At the turn of 1917 and 1918, it became more and more difficult for the city's residents to complement

¹ J. Dembiński, *Radości mało – goryczy dużo. Pamiętnik Pomorzana z lat 1879-1920*, edit. A. Bukowski, Warszawa 1985, 295.

² M. Stachowitz, *Thorn im Kriege*, Thorner Heimatbund. Jahrbuch 1931, Berlin 1931, p. 17.

³ K. Wajda, *Gospodarka wojenna Prus Zachodnich (1914-1918)*, [in:] *Społeczeństwo polskie na ziemiach zachodnich pod panowaniem pruskim w okresie I wojny światowej*, edit. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 1996, pp. 40, 43.

⁴ *Erhöhung der Brotration*, Die Presse, no. 234, 5 X 1918.

⁵ Cf. T. Krzemiński, *K-Brot, marmolada i ziemniaki. Pożywienie mieszkańców Prus Zachodnich w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, *Zapiski Historyczne*, vol. 79: 2014, issue 2, pp. 57-59.

⁶ Cf. *Thorner Wochenmarkt*, Die Presse, no. 234, 5 X 1918.

their wardrobe. The quality of textiles was poor and the lack of leather (needed to produce military equipment) made it impossible to buy new shoes or have old ones repaired. "If the war lasts another year, which is by all means possible, only soldiers will wear shoes and the rest will create barefoot clubs," as "Gazeta Toruńska" (The Toruń Gazette) commented on the provisioning situation in the autumn of 1917. In the summer of 1918 in its pages, as part of its column: "Cheerful Corner", the following joke, full of bitterness and irony, was published, perfectly illustrating the reality of that period,

- Will you walk in clogs?
- No!
- Are you ashamed?
- Nah...
- Then why do you not want to wear them?
- Well, you see, with wood in my stomach every day I don't really feel like having some on my feet as well...⁷.

The deterioration of the Toruń residents' standard of living was also influenced by decreasing coal supplies or even the temporary cessation of coal delivery. For this reason, in the autumn and winter periods, homes in Toruń were cold. As "Gazeta Toruńska" advised, "Because of a great shortage of coal, the newspapers urge people to heat only one room everywhere, and insist that neighbours use one heated room together"⁸. The production of gas and electricity was also drastically reduced, and this had an impact on the practical elimination of street lighting, prolonged interruptions in gas supplies to flats and limitation of tram traffic. Coal shortages paralysed the work of bakeries, mills and other small enterprises as there was a lot of downtime⁹.

⁷ *Dwa grzyby w barszcz*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 105, 8 V 1918.

⁸ *Z powodu braku węgla*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 59, 14 III 1917.

⁹ *Kein Gas mehr!*, Thorner Zeitung, no. 224, 25 IX 1917; *Das Versagen des Gases*, Thorner Zeitung, no. 225, 26 IX 1917; O. Wachs, *Die Arbeit der Orstkohlenstelle*, Thorner Heimatbund. Jahrbuch 1935, Berlin 1935, pp. 21-22. More on the situation of Toruń and its inhabitants during the war: T. Krzemiński, *Codziennosc mieszkańców Torunia w latach pierwszej wojny światowej*, Rocznik Toruński, 2014, vol. 41, pp. 39-63.

The four-year war also affected the social structure of the population of Toruń. The city was systematically abandoned by men of working age, who fed the ranks of the Prussian army fighting on the fronts. Many of them never returned (on each day of the war the Polish and German press of Toruń published several obituaries of those of Polish, German or Jewish nationalities who were killed or died from wounds). In workshops, factories or offices their place was occupied by young people, pensioners, prisoners of war and women¹⁰. Despite the fact that before 1914 Toruń was a rather middle-size industrial centre, during the war it became a place where people (mostly women) came in search of employment in factories working for the army. Working in such enterprises guaranteed earnings that could fund a certain standard of living. The influx of people caused difficulties on the housing market, mainly a lack of low-cost rental flats. Construction work, due to the lack of hands and materials, froze and could not provide new accommodation. The population of Western, industrialised zones of Germany, mainly the families of officers serving in the fortress, also flocked to Toruń, looking for easier access to food in the agricultural East.

During the war, women became particularly active in various social endeavours. In particular, ladies associated with the Toruń political and economic elite, such as the wives of well-known local government activists and entrepreneurs, increasingly involved themselves in charity work. Frida Hasse (wife of the high mayor) and Margarete Stachowitz (wife of the deputy mayor) headed organisations and committees for helping wounded soldiers or assisting the poor and children¹¹. The Polish women proved themselves equal to their German counterparts. At one of the post-war rallies for women, Helena Steinborn reminded the audience of this fact: “During the war, when the men were gone and the others were given dual and triple duties – did our national and social life cease? Almost everywhere, major life-

¹⁰ *Kobiety zamiast mężczyzn w rzemiośle*, Gazeta Toruńska, no. 176, 5 VIII 1915; M. Stachowitz, *Thorn im Kriege*, p. 18.

¹¹ Cf. W. Stachowitz, *Thorn im Kriege*, p. 16; M. Stachowitz, *Kriegsarbeit Thorer Frauen*, Thorer Heimatbund. Jahrbuch 1931, Berlin 1931, pp. 22-23.

saving operations for the homeless fell into the hands of women, who carried them out with incredible devotion”¹².

The poor situation regarding provisions and progressive changes in social relations caused an increase in various types of criminal activity. Despite the measures taken by the state and local authorities, a black market flourished for the basic necessities. Avoiding the police and military stations, people tried to get food from the surrounding villages on their own. In the city and in the area, there were traders specialised in the illegal transfer of goods to Berlin and other German cities, where, especially from the winter of 1916/1917, hunger became a reality. Among others, a mill in nearby Lubicz became a place of illegal trade, from where flour was transferred to the West, using a network of informal contacts among railwaymen, officials and traders, and even Countess Margarethe v. Gernsdorf from Charlottenburg profited from the illicit transactions; she was fined 12 000 marks for this type of activity¹³.

Thefts and burglaries proliferated in the city, especially after dark. Young people deprived of proper parental care were particularly active in this matter. Widespread prostitution was such a challenge for the police and the health service that it became a social problem. The location of Toruń and its status as a fortress meant that thousands of soldiers flowed through the city, often seeking entertainment and consolation in the company of women practicing prostitution. This resulted in an increase in the number of sexually transmitted diseases among both the prostitutes and soldiers. In the spring of 1918, a special hospital ward was opened in Toruń for those suffering from STD¹⁴. Dr. Otton Steinborn was a doctor involved in monitoring the prostitution.

¹² Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu (The State Archives in Toruń) (referred to as: APT), Polska Rada Ludowa w Toruniu (Polish People’s Council in Toruń) (referred to as: PRLT), ref. no. 9, c. 44-45.

¹³ *Die Mehlschiebung von Leibitz nach Berlin vor Gericht*, Westpreußisches Volksblatt, no. 100, 1 V 1918.

¹⁴ APT, Akta miasta Torunia (The Files of the City of Toruń) (referred to as: AmT), ref. no. C 18775; *Beratungsstellen für Geschlechtskranke*, Die Presse, no. 85, 12 IV 1918.

He carried out research, cured infected women and was well aware of the scale of the phenomenon and its threat to public health.

The moods among the population of Toruń, both Poles and Germans, in the last year of the war, were minor. The deepening economic and provisioning difficulties led to discouragement and apathy towards reality. Peace and change were awaited. Politically and nationally aware Poles became more and more convinced of the favourable geopolitical situation for them. They sensed the approaching crisis and the victory of the Coalition, which guaranteed that the lands of the Prussian district would be connected to Poland, which was being reborn behind the cordon of the partitioners. The integration of the Polish population was aided by cultural initiatives undertaken by representatives of the Polish intelligentsia (Helena Piśkorska, Helena Steinborn, Wanda Szuman and others), one of the most important events being the organisation of the commemoration of the centenary of Tadeusz Kościuszko's death in the autumn of 1917¹⁵.

The mood of the Germans, especially in the second half of 1918, was pessimistic. They also felt that a time of change was coming and they were anxious about the possibility of connecting Western Prussia with Toruń to Poland¹⁶.

Nevertheless, the most common feeling among all social strata of the city, regardless of political beliefs, national or religious divisions, was fatigue with the prolonged conflict and despondency regarding the dire economic situation. In the late summer and autumn of 1918, the sense of hopelessness was intensified by subsequent waves of a flu epidemic, which hit organisms weakened by malnutrition and depression with unrelenting force. The death toll was the highest among children, young or middle-aged people¹⁷. Daily newspapers, which brought news about the political situation and commencing truce nego-

¹⁵ M. Wojciechowski, *Toruń w latach 1914-1918*, [in:] *Historia Torunia*, ed. M. Biskup, vol. 3, pt 1: *W czasach zaboru pruskiego (1793-1920)*, Toruń 2003, p. 447. More in: T. Zakrzewski, *Życie polskie Torunia w ostatnich latach zaboru pruskiego (1916-1920)*, Toruń 1985, p. 46.

¹⁶ *Der Protest Thorns*, *Die Presse*, no. 257, 1 XI 1918.

¹⁷ *Die "spanische Krankheit", eine Weltkrankheit*, *Westpreußisches Volksblatt*, no. 151, 4 VII 1918; *Die Grippe-Epidemie*, *Die Presse*, no. 233, 4 X 1918.

tiations with each November day, also announced, typically on the last pages – in the local and obituary sections – the sad consequences of the “Spanish flu”.

The revolution, which began in Toruń, just like in Berlin, on 9 November 1918, progressed quietly, although it did not go without incidents that were dangerous for public safety. In the general confusion and temporary paralysis of the authorities, some military warehouses were robbed. Supplies of tobacco, bread and uniforms fell into the hands of the rebellious crowds¹⁸. The target of the crowd's onslaught, mainly soldiers, was also the city's slaughterhouse. Within a few minutes, the entire stock of pig carcasses kept there in order to be distributed among the civil population of Toruń disappeared from its cold storage. However, a quick intervention by High Mayor Arnold Hasse at the Soldiers' Council meant that the meat was returned, which ensured the continuity of deliveries and certainly calmed the mood of the city residents¹⁹.

The days of the revolutionary breakthrough rapidly enlivened the situation in Toruń, frozen in war apathy. The German state, obliged in Compiègne to carry out rapid demobilisation, allocated all free resources of the rail rolling stock for the transport of soldiers. This led to serious difficulties in railway traffic as after the signing of the Brest Treaty on 9 February 1918, masses of prisoners and forced labourers from the former Russian Empire passed through Toruń. The revolution in Germany and chaos of the military and civilian administration made this movement virtually uncontrolled. When there were no carriages to transport those people through the nearby border into Poland, which was free from 11 November 1918, hundreds of refugees were stuck at the Toruń suburban station. They camped there, deprived of any cash or food. The residents of the city rushed to help the people tormented by the prolonged stoppage. Poles and Germans joined hands, and the appeal calling for such support was signed jointly by, among others, High Mayor Arnold Hasse (regarded by the Poles as a leading repre-

¹⁸ Cf. M. Wojciechowski, *Toruń w latach*, p. 453.

¹⁹ F. Hasse, *Frauen-Arbeitsbataillon. Im Arbeiterrat*, Thorner Heimatbund. Jahrbuch 1935, Berlin 1935, p. 24.

sentative of the German Eastern Marches Society) and Dr. Władysław Szuman (the head of the Polish People's Council, a local lawyer and activist of the Polish national movement)²⁰. Toruń's leaders appealed: "Thousands of emigrants who return to the Kingdom of Poland, Russia, Ukraine, etc. pass every day through our city. They are mostly workers with entire families who worked in industrial districts in the West and have now suddenly been expelled from work. Apart from Poles, they include Russian POWs and civilian prisoners who are returning home from exile. The law of humanity requires that these people are given a spoonful of warm food and accommodation here. Therefore, we kindly ask the inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area of Toruń to support our care committee for those returning, either with cash or food products"²¹. At the same time, demobilised soldiers began arriving in the city. They not only lacked work, but also accommodation and therefore constituted a possible source of social unrest. As a countermeasure, the state and local-government authorities as well as the Soldier's Council and Polish People's Council cooperating with each other in enabling the continuity of provisioning and maintaining public safety, ensured peace and continuous rationing of food, despite the difficult general situation and transport chaos. Despite these efforts, the population was still threatened by hunger, the more so because the chaos caused by the political breakthrough entailed a delay in the harvest of root crops – the basis of the food crisis. Carl Schilling, the president of the Regency District, a clerk who had held his position continuously since the pre-war period, appealed to the inhabitants of the Pomeranian towns, including Toruń: "Turnips and potatoes are often still in the ground. Other supplies and vegetables are still in the fields. If everything is not harvested, the food supply will be in the greatest danger. General famine is inevitable in this case. The greatest duty of agricultural workers is to go to the countryside with help, to harvest the crops as quickly as possible, be-

²⁰ K. Przybyszewski, *Wyzwolenie i pierwsze lata Torunia w niepodległej Polsce*, Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici 1978, vol. 14, p. 96.

²¹ *Chleba dajcie głodnym!! Mleka i odzieży niemowlętom!*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no 271, 24 XI 1918.

fore frost that may destroy everything. Stuff of everyday value is being destroyed and cannot be replaced”²².

Despite the difficulties in food supply, the real perspective of famine and the raging flu epidemic, the inhabitants and temporary residents of Toruń (primarily the soldiers stationed there) perceived the end of the war and the change in political relations as a good prognosis for the future. Their *joie de vivre* was manifest through long parties in numerous gastronomic establishments of the “fortified stronghold”, although that enthusiasm was limited by the still-enforced curfew time set at 11 pm. “Toruń dances, dances, dances all days”, the local “Die Presse” reported in the middle of December, pointing out that there was a golden harvest for musicians and restaurateurs²³. The atmosphere of omnipresent hope and positive attitude was reflected more and more often in the pages of Polish and German magazines by personal ads most often posted by soldiers who survived the war. “A bachelor of 35 years, free from military, intelligent and musical, in a good position and possessing property worth 20 000 marks, wishes to make the acquaintance of a young girl or a young widow with the right assets in order to marry. Gracious applications are to be sent with full confidence to »Gazeta Toruńska« at No. 4607” – this announcement could be read in the issue of the newspaper reporting the abdication of Wilhelm II and the fall of the numerous royal houses in the principalities of the revolutionised Reich²⁴.

The return of demobilised men, however, generated new social problems. The hunger for accommodation was even more visible than during the war. “Meanwhile, the soldiers who have come back and want to get married cannot find a room”, the problem was vividly characterised by “Gazeta Toruńska”²⁵. However, the more serious distress for the municipal and state authorities was the issue of their employment. Toruń industry, oriented toward military production, had

²² *Robotnicy i robotnice na wieś!*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 275, 29 XI 1918.

²³ *Das tanzende Thorn*, Die Presse, no. 249, 15 XII 1918.

²⁴ *Kawaler 35 lat*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 260, 10 XI 1918.

²⁵ *Brak mieszkań*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 16, 21 I 1919.

to adapt to a situation changed by the truce. The impoverishment of the population excluded optimistic hope about an immediate return to the economic conditions of pre-1914. Craft workshops and construction or trade enterprises, even after resuming their activity, could not count on lucrative orders. At the end of November 1918, "Gazeta Toruńska" wrote, "The Soldiers' Council receives a lot of requests every day to be directed to work in the Soldiers' Council itself, in offices or privately. With such requests, one must apply not to the Soldiers' Council but to the municipal register of jobs"²⁶. In the press, there were also appeals to report every demand to the municipal employment agency located in the town hall building²⁷. Demobilised soldiers, deprived of jobs, were a serious threat and were prone to the influence of radical social slogans.

The revolution also brought transformations in the form of employment, introducing an obligatory eight-hour working day and an increase in earnings. With the decreed changes, employers faced the serious problem of introducing new rules instead of the existing ways of work organisation and the model of employee remuneration²⁸. A move aimed at preventing the onset of civil unrest was to dismiss women employed in posts filled by men before the war. In Toruń, this operation, supervised by the special central office of the Commissioner for Demobilisation, was to be carried out by the local-government authorities. A demobilisation department of the magistrate was appointed for this purpose with the presiding high mayor at its head. In spite of the rigid time frame imposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the dismissal operation took an evolutionary course, which in principle compensated for the shock felt by women deprived of work and their previous sources of income²⁹. The arbitrary resolution of the problem, however, faced opposition from both employees and their

²⁶ *Obwieszczenie*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 275, 29 XI 1918.

²⁷ *Obwieszczenie*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 275, 29 XI 1918; *Bekanntmachung*, Die Presse, no. 280, 29 XI 1918.

²⁸ *Antrag der Elektrizitätswerke Thorn auf weitere Erhöhung der Tarife*, Thorn 1919, p. 2.

²⁹ APT, AmT, sygn., C 8978, c. 1, A letter from the president of the regency district in Kwidzyn to the high mayor of Toruń, 29 XI 1918.

employers. Many women, mainly office staff representatives, carried out the tasks entrusted to them perfectly and the implementation of new work forces made up of former soldiers who were not used to routine activities was difficult and expensive. For many employees, a sudden farewell to a full-time job was synonymous with a financial downgrade. Despite reporting such reservations and protests, among others by the Toruń branch of the German Association of Female Office Workers, regency and central authorities pushed for a quick and effective reduction of “women’s forces”. This was done under pressure from veteran communities, demanding jobs for former soldiers, often disabled, in order to ensure themselves and their families a source of income. Members of the Toruń circle of the Association of Victims of the War and their relatives (*Vereinigung der Kriegsbäldegarten* and *Hinterbleiben*) demanded that the city authorities force their former female staff to surrender their jobs to veterans or war orphans and widows³⁰. In order to counteract the side effects of unemployment, municipal and state authorities tried to organise intervention work financed from the municipal budget, including calling for the urban population to undertake field work harvesting root crops, but due to the lack of financial resources, they were not able to give job to everyone in need. People who were unemployed, both redundant women and men seeking employment, were also paid benefits of 1 mark per day³¹. At the turn of 1918 and 1919, over half a thousand inhabitants of Toruń were permanently out of work (in January, for example, 459 men and 107 women)³². In February, the number totalled about 1400 people, which was a very dangerous phenomenon³³. The problem was difficult to resolve due to the constantly increasing prices of food and basic necessities. In terms of food rationing, restrictive

³⁰ Ibid., Association of Victims of the War to the City Council of Toruń, 23 X 1919.

³¹ Ibid., German Association of Office Workers, Local Group in Toruń to the Ministry of Labor of the Reich in Berlin, September 1919.

³² *Sprawozdanie tygodniowe z parytetycznego biura wskazywania pracy i wydziału opieki nad bezrobotnymi*, *Gazeta Toruńska* (*Gazeta Codzienna*), no. 34, 13 II, 21 I 1919; *Sprawozdanie tygodniowe z parytetycznego biura wskazywania pracy i wydziału opieki nad bezrobotnymi*, *Gazeta Toruńska* (*Gazeta Codzienna*) nr 34, 13 II 1919.

³³ M. Wojciechowski, *Toruń w latach*, p. 461.

regulations from the war period were still in force. Food, clothing or cleaning products were distributed in exchange for ration stamps, at peak prices set top-down. In the winter of 1918 to 1919 and in early spring, every Toruń resident was entitled to, inter alia, 125 g flour a week and the same amount of peas and noodles, as well as roasted coffee. Moreover, multi-fruit marmalade, well-known from the war period, was also distributed in the amount of 250 g as well as equally small amounts of sugar and artificial honey³⁴. Compared to the period before the ceasefire in November 1918, the situation slightly improved. The city was supplied with flour and food (tinned meat) from abroad (including the United States). Without the ration stamps it was possible to buy salt, some spices, some substitutes familiar from the war time, for example, stock cubes, and meat jelly, as long as they were available. However, this did not have a significant impact on the continued functioning of the illegal food trade and the existence of the black market known from before November 1918.

The fall of the monarchy, which at that time was associated with remarkable stability, aroused fears, especially among the representatives of the more affluent social strata regarding personal security and respect for property. The revolution in Toruń, however, took a mild course. The previous administration (the state and local government) as well as the new authorities (the Military Council and the Polish People's Council) wanted to ensure internal peace within the city, which was largely successful. Criminal activity remained at the same level as during the World War. In spite of the fact that Toruń faced passing waves of refugees coming back to the East or the return of significant numbers of demobilised soldiers, there were no major disturbances to public peace. However, the Military Council and the Magistrate issued regulations severely punishing this kind of behaviour. The problem, just like before the ceasefire, was theft, especially of food. A new phenomenon was the plunder of military depots in order to obtain uniforms and military equipment, which obviously

³⁴ *Angabe von Marmelade*, Die Presse, no. 285, 5 XII 1918; *Oddanie środków żywnościowych*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 67, 23 III 1919.

found numerous buyers among the urban population³⁵. A burning social issue inherited from the war was prostitution. Nearly 100 women were involved, who were under the supervision of the police and sanitary authorities³⁶. Demobilisation measures, and above all dismissals of female workers increased the risk of this practice being more commonplace among girls and women without sources of income. The municipal authorities therefore paid special attention to securing women made redundant from the jobs, especially those from outside the city, and tried to prevent them from contacting the underworld, or former soldiers deprived of occupation. Not all such meetings, however, ended with a moral fall. There is the story of Marie Grenda, a prostitute who received a marriage proposition from a skipper from Toruń (most likely a demobilised soldier of the Great War), which had a happy ending. The man employed the lawyer's office of Szuman and Tempski in order to have the woman's name deleted from the official list of Toruń prostitutes³⁷. Breakthrough times characterised by relaxed social norms, however, favoured the development of prostitution and, consequently, the spread of venereal diseases. "The danger posed by sexually transmitted diseases is great because they are contagious and threatening even if there are no obvious symptoms", warned "Gazeta Toruńska" and appealed to undergo medical examinations funded by municipal authorities at the clinic of Dr. Hans Wittig, a medical adviser and the district doctor³⁸.

The mood of the breakthrough moment, symbolised by the red banner fluttering on the town hall tower³⁹, became familiar to young people, whose strict rules of upbringing had slackened during the war⁴⁰. Both boys and girls, mainly from high school, lively participated in various political meetings, and many of them could frequently be

³⁵ *Bekanntmachung*, Die Presse, no. 280, 29 XI 1918.

³⁶ Cf. APT, AmT, ref. no. D 3640, Report of the Investigative Branch of the Vice Squad of the Municipal Police Headquarters in Toruń, 23 V 1921.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, ref. no. C 18558, Lawyers Szuman and v. Tempski to the Police Board in Toruń, 21 I 1919.

³⁸ *Important!*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 45, 26 II 1919.

³⁹ *Eine rote Fahne*, Die Presse, no. 283, 3 XII 1918.

⁴⁰ Cf. T. Krzemiński, *Codziennosc*, p. 55.

found at Toruń railway station, where one could always witness something interesting⁴¹. The group to whom the revolutionary breakthrough times brought the possibility of full participation in public life were women. “We are not secondary beings, we do not want to be mere decoration and we must rightly demand that everything that has inhibited our mental development so far should be removed,” said Dr. Helen Steinborn, describing the social change of those moments at one of the meetings organised by the Polish People’s Council⁴². Both German and Polish women accepted this change with satisfaction and became involved in various charity, political and social campaigns. It was a time of numerous women’s meetings, during which current problems were discussed, and the announced elections to the German constituent (boycotted by Poles) were to be the first votes in the general election available to women⁴³. The solemn statements made at the rally by H. Steinborn referred to all women and were a testimony confirming the importance of the moment, “We are capable of civic work – apart from household and family duties. We can cooperate, though not in all branches of the state system at once, because we lack training. Equality combined with hectic work come to us as a gift of the times, and we, women, accept this gift with gratitude, fully aware of its importance”⁴⁴.

The outbreak of the anti-German uprising in the area of nearby Greater Poland was a blow to the city’s position in terms of both its political, national and economic situation. Toruń was consequently cut off from direct connection with the Silesian mines. This resulted in a lack of coal supplies in the winter. In addition, the Entente countries blocked the transport of this raw material by sea from the West German territories. Coal prices soared dramatically. During the war, its price per ton was twice as much as in the time of peace. At the beginning of 1918, the price of coal in Toruń was 42.04, and in January 1919, as much as 56.54 marks. In February, all Toruń schools, due to

⁴¹ *Verwilderung des Schuljugend*, Die Presse, no. 285, 5 XII 1918.

⁴² APT, PRLT, ref. no. 9, c. 44.

⁴³ *Frauenversammlung*, Die Presse, no. 297, 19 XII 1918.

⁴⁴ APT, PRLT, ref. no. 9, c. 48-49.

lack of heating, were closed for two weeks and the city was in danger of interruptions in gas and electricity supplies and stoppages in the tram traffic. Coldness, darkness and a shortage of gas necessary for cooking became a reality for many residents. Lack of coal also forced downtime in industrial production and higher rates of unemployment⁴⁵. Combined with persistent illegal trade in the basic necessities and a disproportion between official maximum prices and black market prices, the situation might have soon escalated to the outbreak of social unrest. All the more so as the mutual dislike among ethnically diverse populations, fuelled by false rumours about the changing political reality, grew. Thus, the Germans were afraid of the “Polish threat”, the occupation of the city by Polish military or insurgent troops, as well as unfavourable resolutions at the peace conference which began at the end of January 1919. At the same time, Poles felt the fear of possible pacification and mass arrests, especially when the news about the activities of the volunteer paramilitary formation of Grenzschutz spread⁴⁶. How difficult the position of the inhabitants of Toruń was in the pre-1919 period can be testified by the resolution made at a rally of Polish workers held at the premises of “Wiktoria” on 19 February, in which the assembly put forward a “firm appeal to the Council of Workers and Soldiers, the Magistrate in Toruń and the government in Berlin to try to immediately lower the prices of food and clothing, because the current prices cause indignation and dissatisfaction not only in workers’ circles, but in the entire population”⁴⁷. Increasing difficulties and uncertainty about the future of the Eastern provinces of the former Reich, whose membership after the Versailles peace treaty on 28 June 1919 was already certain, caused an outflow of the German population from the city. The scale of the exodus was so large that in Toruń there were no carts to transport the emigrants’ furniture⁴⁸. The German authorities also began exporting food, raw materials (includ-

⁴⁵ O. Wachs, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁶ M. Wojciechowski, *Toruń w latach*, pp. 463-464.

⁴⁷ *Wiec robotniczy w Toruniu*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 41, 21 II 1919.

⁴⁸ M. Wojciechowski, *Toruń w latach*, p. 472.

ing cereals and animal skins) and valuable equipment (primarily for the fortress). In the summer, a lot of illegal trade took place in Toruń that was to be traced and revealed by volunteers of the Polish People's Council⁴⁹. The state of ephemerality deepened in the autumn. Many unemployed former soldiers recruited from the working class walked and sat around in the streets, mainly in the vicinity of the Copernicus monument. They complained more and more about others, including women who kept their employment. Their behaviour aroused anxiety and representatives of the political and economic elites blamed them for lack of resourcefulness. Such opinions were expressed, for example, by Dr. Helmut Neumann, the assessor of the Magistrate, who in his correspondence published in "Thorner Zeitung" noted that "reluctance to work" most often occurs among "war victims", "members of the union of the ones standing near Copernicus". That exposed him to indignation and heated protests from veterans⁵⁰.

Despite the hardships experienced by the inhabitants of Toruń, November 1918 brought some normalisation of everyday relations. An excellent indicator of this was the content of small ads appearing in the local press. The return of men from the front, including many craftsmen or freelance workers, resulted in a series of announcements for reopening shops or offices, often having been closed for years. Marta Kissau, the owner of the hairdresser's at Szeroka street, informed all interested parties, "I kindly inform my esteemed clients that from today I have introduced electric massaging of the head with face lighting and a steam bath. My aspiration will be to make my honest clientele fully satisfied"⁵¹.

Despite the change of the political system and the perspective of profound geopolitical changes, cultural life did not disappear from Toruń. The city theatre continued its work, although offering its repertoire mainly to German audiences. In spite of the struggle with provisions, the culinary and entertainment programme was provided by

⁴⁹ APT, PRLT, ref. no. 10, c. 1, 5, 6, 7.

⁵⁰ APT, AmT, ref. no. C 8978, Association of Victims of the War to the City Council of Toruń, 6 XI 1919.

⁵¹ *Szanownej mej Klienteli donoszę*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 41, 21 II 1919.

Toruń's gastronomic venues, whose halls were also used for political meetings of groups of various colours. The cinemas that enjoyed great popularity at that time continued to operate, and the ruins of the Dybów castle even became a setting for a film production with a fantasy plot⁵². The Polish population, like the Germans, actively participated in the cultural life of their city, for instance, organising a number of cultural and educational projects in the halls of the Scientific Society, which became the focal point of Polish Toruń.

The oncoming inevitable fulfilment of the peace commitments and connecting Toruń to the Republic of Poland triggered active preparations for this very outcome by representatives of the Polish community and passive limbo among the Germans. An unpleasant incident was the disruption of a Christmas performance titled "Polish Bethlehem" by a group (7-8 people) of German soldiers, which occurred in the first days of January 1920. Despite the defiant behaviour of drunken soldiers and a partial demolition of the "Wiktoria" hall, where the performance took place, the incident bore no major consequences⁵³. The takeover took place in peace and from 18 January 1920 Toruń became a Polish city, the capital of the Pomeranian Voivodeship⁵⁴.

In the circles of the Polish population, the return of Poland to the Pomeranian region was greeted with enthusiasm and high hopes for economic stabilisation and social justice.

"Our fate is changing, the world will be free (...)
Do not let our homeless people die of hunger,
Let the nation gather strength, let our collective work
Rebuild all that has been destroyed, build the walls of huts (...)
Let Justice ascend her golden throne (...)
When the building is complete, Lord, give us the help of your hands,
To heal and forget the torment!"⁵⁵.

⁵² *Noc duchów, w ruinie „Dybów”*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 145, 11 VII 1919.

⁵³ *Napaść żołnierzy na Polaków*, Gazeta Toruńska (Gazeta Codzienna), no. 4, 6 I 1920.

⁵⁴ Cf. K. Przybyszewski, *Pierwsze dni niepodległego Torunia w 1920 r.*, Rocznik Toruński 1980, vol. 15, pp. 209-220.

⁵⁵ *Mottos*, [in:] *Już się nasi zbliżają, do Torunia wkraczają. Zbiór wierszy na przyjęcie wojsk polskich ułożyła Helena Bocheńska*, Toruń 1919, pp. 5-6.

The words of the poem from an occasional collection of poetry prepared for the entry of Polish soldiers into the capital of Pomerania illustrated the state of mind and mood with which the Polish inhabitants of the city faced the cold days of January 1920⁵⁶. The confrontation of idealised expectations with reality turned out to be extremely painful. Toruń, liberated from the Prussian yoke, did not cease struggling with the current provisioning problems and the crisis on the labour market. For those who came from behind a nearby cordon of soldiers and employees connected with the state administration, Toruń turned out to be a city much more abundant in all goods and food than Congress Poland, where they arrived from, which had been devastated by the war and occupation policy. A blow to the locals was introducing the Polish currency and equalising its value with the formerly used German mark. This caused newcomers from the East to purchase of all commodities available on the market en masse and resulted in clearing out shops and marketplaces. When it soon turned out that the purchasing power of the Polish currency was weaker than that of the German equivalent, there was a lot of bitterness among the population. The attitude of some Polish soldiers aroused disgust, “It came to the knowledge of the Front Command that officers and soldiers [...] of the Toruń Garrison [...] buy food and commodities in cities in quantities exceeding their own needs and take them to Congress Poland [...]. Incidents of this kind are not uncommon and as they are discussed in public civilian circles, they are a disrespect to the uniform of a Polish officer and undermine the confidence of the population in the army.” That is how the commander of the Pomeranian Front described the reprehensible behaviour of soldiers and officers at the beginning of 1920⁵⁷. There was a dramatic shortage of coal. In Toruń and in the

⁵⁶ Cf. J. Borzyszkowski, *Ideal państwa polskiego – marzenia Pomorzán a rzeczywistość 1920 roku*, [in:] *Pomorskie drogi do niepodległej*, edit. J. Borzyszkowski, C. Obracht-Prondzyński, Gdańsk 2018, p. 141.

⁵⁷ Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (Central Military Archives) (referred to as: CAW), Samodzielny Referat Informacyjny, Dowództwa Okręgu Korpusu nr VIII (Independent Department of Information, Corps District Command no. VIII) (referred to as: SRI DOK VIII), ref. no. 3, Officers’ Orders of the General Command of Pomerania – Inowrocław, 14 III 1920.

Toruń powiat, all steam-powered and electric mills stopped working. Furthermore, brickworks requiring considerable amounts of fuel were closed. Unemployment and growing problems with provisioning, a difficult to control increase in speculation and the ensuing rise in prices of basic goods were permanent elements of the first months of freedom. This caused frustration among the people, primarily the workers – the most affected by the bad economic situation. “Supply shortages and prices growing daily have the worst effect on the broad working class circles,” reported one of the officers of the Toruń garrison in May 1920⁵⁸. The following weeks and months did not bring any improvement in the economic situation to the residents of the city. In view of the shortages of the most necessary goods and raw materials, the new Polish administration was powerless. The shortages of Polish staff and the management of many newcomers from the central and southern areas of Poland, completely different from the Prussian practical attitude, did not fully correspond to the habits and expectations of the local population. The influx of speculators who kept clearing out the market of goods increased the reluctance towards the newcomers from behind the old cordon. Stories about dramatic commodity shortages, increasing prices, dissatisfaction with illegal speculation with both food and, in time, real estate (especially in the context of the departure of the former German owners who insisted on the rapid monetisation of their property) became permanent elements of the official reports of the Polish state, local-government and military authorities of the first few years of Toruń’s functioning within the reborn Polish Republic⁵⁹. When, at the beginning of 1921, “Słowo Pomorskie” (“Pomeranian Word”) appeared on the city’s newspaper market as the most opinion-forming local and regional journal related to the National Democracy, criticism of the economic and social reality that prevailed after 1920 did not ever leave its columns. “For some time, the black

⁵⁸ CAW, SRI DOK VIII I, ref. no. 371.8/A6.

⁵⁹ Cf. eg. Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy (The State Archives in Bydgoszcz) (referred to as: APB), Komenda Okręgowa Policji Państwowej w Toruniu, (District State Police Headquarters in Toruń) (referred to as: KOPP), ref. no. 312; *ibid.*, Urząd Wojewódzki Pomorski w Toruniu (Provincial Office of Pomerania in Toruń) (referred to as: UWPT), ref. no. 152.

market has grown to an enormous size, and the poorest people are suffering badly, unable to buy anything. These people also suffer from a lack of work, and the authorities do little to satisfy their needs,” as the newspaper cast the situation of Toruń residents in dark hues in one of its first issues⁶⁰.

The change in national status did not solve the most crucial social problems. Unemployment remained high. At the end of 1920, the number of people permanently out of work, to whom the municipal authorities offered intervention work, amounted to more than 800⁶¹. The earnings of those with employment were insufficient to cover basic life needs, which only intensified dissatisfaction and frustration. The crime rate soared, and was markedly brutal at the same time. In addition to common thefts, after 1920, the number of burglaries, robberies and muggings also increased, with several homicides reported as well⁶². Such crimes being committed by people in military uniforms was particularly shocking for the residents of Toruń. One of the victims of the servicemen’s violence was the personal secretary of the Pomeranian Voivode, Stanisław Jaszczyński. His flat was intruded by two drunken naval officers. The owner’s protests and pleas to leave fell on deaf ears and only resulted in more aggression. In the course of events the official fell on the floor bleeding and was kicked several times while lying on the ground. His wife stood in his defence but “she was brutally [...] pushed back so that a vase with a palm crashed and the palm was broken”⁶³.

The slow stabilisation of the general situation, the end of the struggles over the borders and the necessity to unify economically and socially diverse parts of the state forced the authorities to introduce some necessary reforms, although they were extremely difficult for the citizens of the Republic. One of the directives directly influencing the foundations of everyday life was the Free Trade Act, introduced in

⁶⁰ *Z Pomorza*, Słowo Pomorskie, no. 6, 9 I 1921.

⁶¹ APB, UWPT, ref. no. 23264.

⁶² *Napad rabunkowy na Mokrem-Toruń*, Słowo Pomorskie, no. 23, 30 I 1921; *Kradzieże*, Słowo Pomorskie, no. 40, 20 II 1921.

⁶³ APB, KOPP, ref. no. 381, c. 113, Police report on the attack on S. Jaszewski, 29 IX 1920.

June 1921. It abolished the system of maximum prices and rationing essential goods. It caused a dramatic rise in the prices of consumer goods. In a month food prices increased from 20 to 100% and the trend was upward⁶⁴.

Along with the officials visiting the new capital of Pomerania, soldiers and sailors forming one of the stronger garrisons in Western Poland, prostitutes also appeared in Toruń from other districts of the country⁶⁵. The personal writings of Dr. O. Steinborn, perfectly aware of the complexity of this phenomenon, include a statement that a solution to this matter that would be positive for public health was connected with “almost insuperable obstacles”⁶⁶.

In spite of many disadvantageous changes in the living conditions of the inhabitants resulting from the extremely difficult general situation arising from the turmoil of war and over a century of the country’s non-existence, after January 1920 Toruń slowly changed its previous face. From a border garrison-clerical city with a powiat status, it began transforming into a capital city for one of the most important regions of the reborn Polish Republic. The old German cultural and political elite fled, and Poles appeared in their place. Although initially disliked by their local compatriots, among whom, despite the clear anti-Germanism, the sentiment towards the pre-war prosperity persisted, it was the newcomers who created the new society of interwar Toruń and built its completely new image of a modern, well connected and rapidly developing city in terms of demographics, culture and also, despite many unfavourable conditions, of an economic metropolis opening a gateway to Polish Pomerania⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ R. Sudziński, *Życie gospodarcze*, [in:] *Historia Torunia*, edit. M. Biskup, vol. 3, pt 2: *W czasach Polski Odrodzonej i okupacji niemieckiej (1920-1945)*, Toruń 2006, p. 99.

⁶⁵ T. Krzemiński, *Prostytucja w międzywojennym Toruniu. Szkic zagadnienia*, *Rocznik Toruński* 2013, vol. 40, pp. 61-76.

⁶⁶ APT, Akta rodziny Steinbornów z Torunia (Files of the Steinborn family of Toruń), ref. no. 4, Dr. Dandelski’s letter to the Ministry of the former Prussian District and to the attention of Dr. O. Steinborn, 15 XII 1920.

⁶⁷ R. Sudziński, *Usytuowanie Torunia w podziale terytorialno-administracyjnym kraju*, [in:] *Historia Torunia*, vol. 3, pt 2, pp. 36-40.