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**Social and political life in Gostynin County
in the years 1945-1956**

Krzysztof Sobociński, MA

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Supervisor

Prof. dr hab. Romuald Turkowski

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The Gostynin region, with its rich historical heritage, is directly connected with the history of Gostynin County, whose origins as an administrative unit date back to the medieval period. Its beginnings can be traced to 1462, when the Gostynin area was incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland. At that time, Gostynin—the largest town in the region—became the seat of Gostynin County within the then Rawa Voivodeship. From that moment onward, the town assumed the role of a local administrative centre. Following the collapse of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and during the period of the partitions, the administrative structure underwent numerous reorganisations, particularly at the central level. Gostynin County was initially administered by the Prussian authorities and subsequently became part of the Duchy of Warsaw. After 1815, the Gostynin region formed part of the Kingdom of Poland under Russian rule until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

Following the restoration of Polish independence in 1918, Gostynin once again became the seat of a county administered by Poles. The County Office (*Starostwo Powiatowe*) in Gostynin functioned as an organ of state administration in the Second Polish Republic, carrying out responsibilities related to public security, economic affairs, education, and local self-government.

From September 1939 until January 1945, the Gostynin region remained under German occupation. Following the end of the Second World War, the County Office in Gostynin resumed its activities. During the years 1945–1950, it played a crucial role in county administration, being responsible for public security, the provision of supplies, economic reconstruction, agricultural development, and the supervision of local municipalities. As the new communist authorities gradually consolidated their power, the competences of the County Office were increasingly transferred to newly established national councils and the party apparatus. Its activities came to an end in 1950, when the central authorities introduced legislation abolishing both the office of county governor (*starosta*) and the institution of the County Office throughout Poland. Their responsibilities were assumed by the presidia of county national councils.

A subsequent administrative reform introduced in 1975 abolished the three-tier administrative division of the country (voivodeship–county–municipality) and replaced

it with a two-tier structure (voivodeship–municipality). This system remained in force until 31 December 1998. The local government reform of 1998 restored counties as administrative units from 1 January 1999. The County Office in Gostynin was consequently re-established and continues to function as a local administrative authority to the present day.

A particularly significant period in the history of western Mazovia and Gostynin County was the decade following the end of the Second World War, namely the years 1945–1956. In Polish historiography, this period is generally divided into two distinct phases. The years 1945–1948 are regarded as the period during which the foundations of the new political system were established, while the years 1949–1956 are commonly referred to as the era of Stalinisation, characterised by the adaptation of political, social, and economic life to models adopted from the Soviet Union.

Between 1945 and 1948, both central and local authorities undertook measures aimed at eliminating the most pressing social problems. To a large extent, the County Office, established by the provincial authorities, was responsible for addressing everyday difficulties. Urgent tasks included the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure and the reorganisation of social life. The immediate post-war period was especially difficult because of the extensive destruction of homes, public buildings, and administrative facilities. These constituted some of the most serious challenges facing the reconstruction of Polish administration after the Second World War.

Additional burdens arose from the costs associated with the presence and movement of Soviet and Polish military forces advancing westward in early 1945 and later returning eastward after May 1945. Following the end of German occupation, political parties and various social organisations that had existed before the outbreak of the war began to re-emerge. At the same time, profound changes were taking place in the political system of the new state. In 1946, a national referendum was organised to determine the future political order of post-war Poland. The following year witnessed the first parliamentary elections. The manipulation of both the referendum and electoral processes by the communist authorities generated growing social resistance. The armed independence underground was reactivated and also operated within Gostynin County.

During the years 1949–1956, a process of integrating youth organisations and political parties was initiated, often against the wishes of their members. In December 1948, the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) merged with a transformed and politically weakened Polish Socialist Party (PPS). This union resulted in the creation of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), which remained the ruling party in Poland for the next four decades after the end of the Second

World War. The year 1949 brought a further consolidation of political organisations and marked the intensification of Stalinist policies throughout the count

The political transformation that took place in Poland after 1989, including the abolition of censorship and broader access to archival records, enabled scholars to undertake a more objective assessment of the history of the Polish People's Republic, including the period from 1945 to 1956. Since 1989, numerous studies and scholarly articles have been published concerning the communist apparatus of repression and the post-war independence movement. Considerable academic attention has also been devoted to the German population that had previously inhabited these territories. Researchers have examined issues related to population movements, forced resettlements, and the presence of the Red Army on Polish soil. In preparation for this study, an extensive review of the existing scholarship concerning political parties, youth organisations, and various aspects of social and economic life between 1945 and 1956 was conducted.

The analysis of the collected materials made it possible to investigate the mechanisms that directly contributed to the establishment and consolidation of the new state authority dependent upon the Soviet Union. This approach has also allowed for the reconstruction numerous aspects of everyday life among the inhabitants of the Gostynin region. Examination of the available sources leads to the conclusion that the process of establishing the new political order in Gostynin County displayed a number of distinctive characteristics. This specificity stemmed from the re-emergence, following the end of German occupation, of political structures rooted in strong pre-war political traditions and active social movements. The Polish peasant movement proved to be among the last political forces to submit to the new authorities.

The new pro-Soviet government sought to increase support for its communist programme through the use of a repressive apparatus that had been constructed from the very beginning of the Soviet military occupation of Polish territories. The consequences of the Second World War and several years of German occupation brought profound changes to the ethnic and religious composition of the county. Demographic transformations, including the almost complete destruction of the pre-war Jewish community and the post-war expulsion of the German population, significantly altered the national structure of the region. After 1945, new settlers arrived and were likewise compelled to adapt rapidly to the new reality, a particularly difficult challenge in an atmosphere marked by political terror.

Gostynin County was predominantly an agricultural region characterised by a highly developed farming sector. Before the war, only a small number of industrial enterprises

and several cooperatives operated within its boundaries; consequently, it was essentially an agrarian county. The agrarian reform introduced after 1945 was therefore of particular importance for local inhabitants. This flagship propaganda initiative of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) significantly facilitated the acquisition of political support for the new authorities. Equally important was the effectiveness of local PPR activists and security-service agents, who gradually eliminated both political and independence-oriented opposition. Opposition figures were removed not only from rival political organisations but also from within the PPR itself and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS).

The nationwide referendum and the elections to the Legislative Sejm played a major role in shaping the new socio-political order. In the view of the authorities, these events contributed not only to the defeat of the opposition but also to the pacification of politically unaffiliated segments of society. Nor can one overlook the role of the independence-oriented units of the Resistance Army of the Polish Home Army (ROAK), which actively participated in both the referendum campaign and the parliamentary election campaign. For many inhabitants of the county, subsequent collectivisation measures introduced in rural areas proved equally significant. Agricultural production cooperatives were established in a determined and often coercive manner, with local communities being pressured to create such entities in larger villages and administrative clusters throughout the county. Only the political thaw that followed October 1956 brought about the gradual dissolution of Soviet-style cooperatives and a return to family-based farming.

The principal objective of this dissertation is to present the process through which post-war socio-political life was reconstructed and transformed in Gostynin County between 1945 and 1956.

The dissertation has been organised both thematically and chronologically, with the material divided into ten chapters.

The first chapter presents the geographical and administrative characteristics of Gostynin County. It examines the county's administrative structure and discusses the consequences of wartime destruction resulting from both the German occupation and military operations conducted in 1939 and 1945. It further analyses the costs and consequences associated with the presence of Soviet military forces in the region. Particular attention is devoted to losses in agricultural livestock, damage to buildings, and other forms of destruction caused by the stationing of Red Army units. Criminal incidents, including thefts and homicides, are likewise examined. Drawing upon available sources, the chapter provides demographic estimates of losses suffered by the county's population between 1 September 1939

and January 1945. It summarises losses sustained by Polish citizens as well as casualties among other national groups. German occupation resulted in the greatest losses among the Polish and Jewish populations, virtually annihilating the latter. One section discusses the fate of the German population after the war and the policies adopted toward it by the new authorities. The chapter also addresses the repatriation of Poles and its significant impact on both individual lives and the broader socio-political situation within the county.

The second chapter examines the process of constructing the post-war apparatus of power. Initially, authority was exercised by military commanders, who gradually transferred power to newly appointed civilian representatives of the Polish administration. The chapter analyses not only the formation of civilian governance but also the establishment of institutions responsible for public security. These included the County Office of Public Security (Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego – PUBP), the Citizens' Militia (Milicja Obywatelska – MO), and the Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia (Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej – ORMO). From the moment of their creation, these institutions concentrated primarily on combating independence-oriented organisations and underground resistance movements. Their activities were especially visible in Gostynin County, whose extensive forested areas provided favourable conditions for underground operations.

The third chapter analyses the activities of political parties and youth organisations. It traces the development of the structures of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) in connection with the formation of county-level administration and local government institutions. Particular attention is devoted to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and its role within the local system of government. Special emphasis is placed upon the peasant movement. Despite the political advantage enjoyed by communist organisations owing to support from Moscow, a significant portion of the local population continued to place its trust in pre-war peasant activists. The Polish Peasant Party (PSL), the only legal opposition party during this period, steadily expanded its influence throughout the county. The chapter also examines the political organisations operating in the region together with their youth branches. One subsection is devoted to the principal auxiliary organisations associated with the major political movements. It discusses the establishment of local structures of the Union of Fighting Youth (Związek Walki Młodych – ZWM), the Youth Organisation of the Society of the Workers' University (OM TUR), which was linked to the PPR, and the Rural Youth Union of the Republic of Poland "Wici" (ZMW RP „Wici”), associated with the PSL.

The fifth chapter focuses on the most important aspects of social and economic life in the Gostynin region during the post-war years. It presents the situation of the healthcare

system after 1945, which was exceptionally difficult. Wartime destruction, shortages of medical personnel, and damage to sanitary infrastructure necessitated the almost complete reconstruction of the healthcare system. The County Hospital in Gostynin remained the most important medical institution, gradually resuming its operations. At the same time, health centres, sanitary stations, and outpatient clinics were established in the larger localities of the county. Another issue discussed in the chapter is the reconstruction of industrial infrastructure in the region. Although the county was predominantly agricultural in character, efforts were undertaken during the first post-war years to revive and rebuild the local economy and commercial sector. A key element of reconstruction was the restoration of primary and secondary education, which had been unable to function normally during the German occupation. Primary schools were established primarily in rural areas, while secondary schools were concentrated in urban centres. In Gostynin, both the grammar school and the general secondary school resumed their activities, continuing pre-war educational traditions. Measures aimed at developing secondary and vocational education were also undertaken in Gąbin. Despite difficult economic conditions, efforts to revive cultural life began almost immediately after the war. Public libraries, village community centres, and cultural institutions were established and soon played a significant role in the cultural life of local communities. The final issue discussed in a separate subsection concerns the emergence of social organisations and associations, including units of the Volunteer Fire Brigade (Ochotnicza Straż Pożarna – OSP). These organisations were important because they brought together individuals with common interests. Particular attention is devoted to the Volunteer Fire Brigades, which operated in nearly every municipality and in many villages throughout the region. At that time, OSP units were involved not only in fire protection but also in organising social and cultural activities within their local communities.

The sixth chapter examines the various forms of opposition to communist rule. The principal legal opposition during this period was organised within the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), led by Deputy Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk. As a predominantly agricultural area, Gostynin County provided particularly favourable conditions for the development of the PSL. Officers of the County Office of Public Security (PUBP) continuously monitored PSL members, analysed party structures, and expanded networks of informants within rural communities. Repression intensified especially during the 1946 national referendum and the parliamentary election campaign of 1947. PSL activists were arrested, restrictions were imposed on political meetings, and campaign materials were confiscated. During this period, clandestine “death squads” operated with the aim of eliminating inconvenient representatives

of the peasant movement. The chapter also discusses the activities of the underground independence movement that continued to operate after 1945. Particular attention is devoted to the struggle between the communist security apparatus and the units of the Resistance Army of the Home Army (ROAK), which were the only underground formations active within the county. Their organisational structures and operational activities are analysed in detail.

The seventh chapter focuses on the national referendum and the first parliamentary elections. It presents the positions of the two fundamentally opposed political camps operating during this period. The communist authorities regarded the referendum as a test of public support for their political programme and promoted the slogan “Three Times Yes” (3 x TAK). In contrast, the PSL, with the approval of its leader Stanisław Mikołajczyk, encouraged voters to support the formula “One No, Two Yeses” (1 x NIE, 2 x TAK). For the following forty years, the actual results achieved by the PSL remained concealed, as the referendum outcomes had been systematically falsified. The second part of the chapter discusses the political situation preceding the even more significant parliamentary elections. The brutality of the electoral campaign in the county was directed primarily against members of the peasant movement. As in the case of the referendum, the parliamentary elections were also extensively manipulated and falsified by the communist authorities.

The eighth chapter demonstrates the complete consolidation of communist power throughout Poland, including in Gostynin County. One subsection examines the situation of the PSL, showing how the falsified parliamentary elections of January 1947 initiated a systematic process of eliminating the independent peasant movement. Another issue addressed is the verification of members of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the gradual reduction of its political influence. Within the broader process of monopolising political power, the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) was established in December 1948 through the merger of the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). At the county level, structures of the County Committee of the PZPR were created and soon became the principal decision-making centres of local authority. In practice, the formal institutions of state administration became subordinate to party decisions. The process of monopolising power was completed through new legislation discussed in this chapter, which abolished the traditional three-tier administrative system and replaced it with a two-tier structure modelled on the Soviet system.

The ninth chapter examines developments during the years 1949–1956, when the system of Stalinist repression introduced by the communist authorities was fully implemented in Poland. During this period, the state authorities sought to exercise comprehensive control

over the social, economic, and cultural life of Polish citizens. A central element of economic policy was the so-called “Battle for Trade” (*bitwa o handel*), whose objective was the elimination of the private sector in commerce and services. This campaign, combined with the forced collectivisation of agriculture in the Gostynin region, became a traumatic experience for both urban and rural inhabitants. Another important issue addressed in the chapter is the struggle against the Catholic Church, which remained the last independent centre of social influence outside the direct control of the communist state.

The tenth chapter focuses on the indoctrination of the younger generation of Poles. The primary objective of these policies was to shape a society fully subordinated to the communist authorities. The state sought to educate young people in a spirit of loyalty to the Polish People’s Republic. At the same time, efforts were made to eliminate the influence of independent religious organisations and pre-war social traditions. The chapter discusses the activities of the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej – ZMP) and the Universal Organisation “Service to Poland” (Powszechna Organizacja „Służba Polsce” – PO SP), whose structures within secondary schools enabled the systematic ideological indoctrination of young people in Gostynin County. Within this context, the attitudes and behaviour of teachers during the Stalinist period are also analysed.

The research methodology adopted in this dissertation was based upon both general and specialised methods tailored to the nature of the source material and the issues under investigation. An inductive method was employed to formulate conclusions derived from the collected primary sources, while a deductive approach was applied through in-depth analytical interpretation. Both methods constituted essential components of the research process. In numerous cases, it proved necessary to employ more detailed comparative methods. Comparative analysis of archival and library materials made it possible to identify both similarities and differences between particular historical contexts. The dissertation also makes use of quantitative methods, including the compilation and interpretation of statistical data revealing demographic and social changes. Such data encompass population losses, voting results, and the national composition of the county’s inhabitants.

The dissertation is based upon a broad range of archival materials, printed sources, periodicals, and personal consultations. Archival materials were classified according to both their place of origin and their thematic content. The majority of documentation concerning Gostynin County after 1945 is preserved in the State Archive in Płock. During the archival research, extensive use was made of the records of the County National Council and the Presidium of the County National Council. Additional searches were conducted among

the records of the municipal councils of Gostynin and Gąbin, as well as among documents produced by individual municipalities within the county.

The collections of the Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) contain documents related to political organisations active in the region, including the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), established through the merger of the former two organisations. These collections also include valuable documentation concerning both the national referendum and parliamentary elections. Important materials were likewise obtained from the State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw. These records concern the repatriation of populations arriving from territories incorporated into the Soviet Union as well as the resettlement of inhabitants from the Recovered Territories. In the branch archive located in Milanówek, documentation relating to the county-level structures of both the PPS and the PPR was examined. The collections preserved there include records concerning the establishment and operation of agricultural production cooperatives during the period under study, making it possible to reconstruct the stages of collectivisation in the Gostynin countryside and the nationalisation of small-scale trade and services.

Archival research was also conducted within the holdings of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in both Łódź and Warsaw. The collections contain documents relating to members of underground organisations operating within the county after 1945. These materials provide information on security-service operations aimed at identifying and dismantling underground networks, as well as on subsequent judicial proceedings following arrests. The documentation reveals not only the identities of those subjected to persecution but also those of security-service personnel and representatives of the communist authorities responsible for repressive actions. Additional valuable materials were discovered in the Archives of the History of the Peasant Movement, including records relating to the activities of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the Peasant Party (SL) in Gostynin County.

Contemporary newspapers and periodicals also constitute an important source base. Particularly valuable are local and regional publications issued during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1954, the periodical *Echo Gostynina* was published, although only two issues appeared; these contained information concerning the progress of collectivisation in the countryside. The newspaper *Życie Mazowieckie* carried reports on sporting events in the region in 1948. National newspapers such as *Trybuna Ludu* and *Sztandar Młodych* provide information on major political developments, including elections and the national referendum.

An additional strength of the research lies in the opportunity to obtain information directly from individuals connected with the events discussed in this dissertation. In 2016, the author had the opportunity to meet Second Lieutenant (ppor.) Wiktor Sumiński, known by the nom de guerre “Kropidło.” This meeting with the now deceased veteran made it possible to gain first-hand insight into the realities of anti-communist resistance after 1945 and into the circumstances surrounding his family’s migration from the Gostynin region to Western Pomerania. In 2026, the author met Leokadia, daughter of Second Lieutenant (ppor.) Leon Koprowicz, known by the alias “Gwiazda.” Several years earlier, the author also had the opportunity to speak personally with Tadeusz Szafraniec, a soldier-miner sentenced to labour in military mining battalions because of his father’s membership in the Polish Peasant Party. As Mr. Szafraniec recalled, “my brother and I were regarded as sons of a kulak,” owing to the large agricultural holding owned by their parents. Valuable information was also obtained from Norbert Finke, a forester from Szczawin, who provided details concerning the exhumation of individuals of German origin buried in January 1945.

The attempt undertaken in this dissertation to present the socio-political life of Gostynin County in the years 1945–1956 will hopefully encourage further scholarly research devoted both to this subject and to other aspects of contemporary Polish history. Particular attention should continue to be devoted to Gostynin County, whose history as an administrative unit spans more than 560 years, as well as to the broader historical heritage of the Gostynin region.