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## **“Waiters’ Dictatorship...”. The Fight of Food Establishments in Warsaw and Lublin in 1919 in the Local Press**

The first years after Poland regained independence in 1918 were extremely difficult. On the one hand, the reborn state was riddled with internal conflicts caused by political and social problems, and on the other hand armed conflicts over the state borders were taking place<sup>1</sup>. Almost all areas of life, such as economy, industry, agriculture and transportation had been damaged to a smaller or larger degree<sup>2</sup>. During WWI, very many farms, workshops and factories were destroyed, lowering the of number of work-places. On the other hand, administrative changes in the state, which resulted from liquidating the borders of formerly partitioned Polish lands, led to an increase in the number of unemployed, which inevitably aggravated the economic crisis<sup>3</sup>. In the new post-war reality, problems caused by a shortage of food, clothing and housing as well as low salaries and wages had a negative effect on the state of mind prevailing in a society in the process of rebuilding itself<sup>4</sup>. The economic conditions effectively slowed down efforts aimed at achieving a cohesive social policy. The National

- 1 More on the problems of the Polish industry after WWI in A. Jezierski, S. Zawadzki, *Dwa wieki przemysłu w Polsce. Zarys dziejów*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 253–254.
- 2 Z. Landau, *Gospodarka polska w latach 1918–1939*, B. Zientara et al., *Dzieje gospodarcze Polski do roku 1939*, Warszawa 1988, p. 472.
- 3 Z. Landau, *Gospodarka polska...* op. cit, pp. 470–471.
- 4 W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1914–1939*, Gdańsk 1990, vol. II, pp. 180–185.

Democratic, Socialist and agrarian parties all had their own ideas of how to shape the Polish state. Efforts were made to introduce social reforms, which covered, among others, labour protection, healthcare, social insurance, establishing an eight-hour workday, and activities to counteract the growing unemployment<sup>5</sup>.

Additionally, the ongoing revolutionary activities in Europe, especially considering Poland's proximity to Russia where the October Revolution had broken out, had a significant influence on the socio-economic thought of Polish political parties<sup>6</sup>. We should note that the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland was inhabited by a labour force which was the most numerous and most experienced in fighting for the betterment of their living conditions<sup>7</sup>. It was also believed that success could only be achieved by means of fighting for political power. Thus over 100 Councils of Workers' Delegates were created in industrial centres in this area over a very short period of time<sup>8</sup>.

In Lublin, the newly appointed Council of Delegates representing the local factories, plants and trade unions had a session as early as 5 November 1918. The first objective was to initiate efforts to pass a decree on an eight-hour workday. From this moment on, the Lublin region experienced waves of strikes of various character. Some of them were successfully resolved over a short period; others lasted for weeks at a time<sup>9</sup>. Representatives of some occupations caused serious financial problems for a number of enterprises. One of the most interesting workers' protests at the time was the strike of the Trade Union of Waiters, which started in Warsaw, where the central office of the organisation was located. The association, already operating during WWI, was one of the trade unions, pursuing the idea of fighting for better working conditions and higher wages<sup>10</sup>.

5 P. Grata, *Założenia i priorytety polskiej polityki społecznej w latach 1918–1939*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo", vol. 10 (2012), pp. 32–33.

6 More on revolutionary activities in Russia in: M. Śliwa, *Polska myśl socjalistyczna (1918–1948)*, Wrocław 1988, pp. 59–62.

7 T. Nałęcz, *Odzyskana niepodległość*, in: H. Samsonowicz et al., *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 500–501.

8 M. Korniluk, *Skład i położenie klasy robotniczej w Polsce w latach 1918–1926*, in: L. Kieszczyński, M. Korniluk, *Ruch zawodowy w Polsce. Zarys dziejów (1918–1944)*, Warszawa 1980, vol. 2, p. 20.

9 S. Krzykała, *Lublin w okresie walk rewolucyjnych 1918–1920*, in: *Dzieje Lublina*, ed. S. Krzykały, vol. II, Lublin 1975, pp. 10–13.

10 *Stowarzyszenia zawodowe*, "Kalendarzyk polityczno-historyczny miasta stołecznego Warszawy na rok 1916", 1916, p. 209.

The first waiters' strike in Warsaw was a very well-thought out and organised project, as it was planned to start on 31 December 1918, with long-awaited New Year's Eve celebrations to take place in restaurants. Waiters did not arrive at work in the morning, which caused many places to close. In several smaller establishments, customers were served by the owners and their families. A very small number of restaurants did not participate in the strike, drawing in crowds of customers, who spent large sums of money on this special evening<sup>11</sup>. A few days before the year's end, the Trade Union of Waiters organised a meeting during which a number of demands were made of the owners, such as abolishing tips for serving meals and paying waiters 15% (in confectioneries and cafes) or 10% (in restaurants) of the daily sales. The restaurateurs did not agree to any negotiations, not expecting much resistance from the waiters. Only three confectioneries met the demands, although the prices of baked goods, coffee and tea, which were already very high, increased as a result. It was calculated that with the new rate, a waiter would earn 150 Polish mark as per day, and in larger establishments even more, which the owners of Warsaw's restaurants could not afford, fearing a backlash from their customers. The restaurateurs proposed replacing tips with a salary of 300 to 500 mark as per month, which was rejected by the waiters, who were holding out for their demand of a percentage of the sales<sup>12</sup>.

The editors of "Kurier Warszawski" ("Warsaw Daily") sided with the owners of restaurants and cafes, citing salaries earned by attorneys, judges or journalists, which amounted to approximately 1,000–1,500 markas monthly, and deeming the thought of a waiter earning 3,000 markas as unacceptable<sup>13</sup>. The waiters did not relent and a number of restaurants, especially in hotels, continued to be closed over the next days. Only a handful of establishments exclusively served hotel guests. In smaller places, where mainly the owners and their families waited on the customers, a large group of waiters took further, more radical steps. The strikers entered several restaurants, occupied all the tables in the dining rooms and made serving meals to customers difficult. There was also a case of some waiters pouring a reeking substance inside the entire establishment, which caused all the customers to leave in a hurry. The owner called the city police, but the offenders had

11 Sylwester [New Year's Eve], "Kurier Warszawski", 1 January 1919, no. 1, p. 17.

12 Sylwester i kelnerzy [New Year's Eve and Waiters], "Goniec Warszawski", 1 January 1919, no. 1, p. 4.

13 Ładne zarobki [Fine Salaries], "Kurier Warszawski", 1 January 1919, no. 1, p. 16.

escaped<sup>14</sup>. Such demonstrations took place in many places. In response to the waiters' attacks, an article was printed in "Goniec Warszawski" ("Warsaw Messenger"), which published information about the Association of Restaurateurs' new proposal. The new monthly salary for waiters would be 750–1,000 markas, and free lunches and dinners would be provided to them. If the waiters did not agree to the proposal, the situation would remain unchanged. Additionally, the impatient restaurateurs, unable to passively witness new acts of disruption on the part of the waiters, turned to the Ministry of Labour Protection and to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a request to investigate the matter and set the salary rate. The restaurant owners also applied to state unemployment offices for lists of unemployed men and women, and offered to provide new employees with a monthly income of 700–1,000 markas and free meals during working hours. It turned out that the number of unemployed people predisposed to taking these jobs was approximately 2,000<sup>15</sup>. The Association of Restaurateurs then organised a meeting during which a letter to the waiters was prepared, requesting them to come back to work. The employees replied that the salary rates published in the newspaper differed from the actual ones, since the earnings in larger companies reached up to 1,500 markas, in medium-sized ones 1,000 markas, and in the small ones only 700–800 markas<sup>16</sup>.

The waiters held their ground and exacerbated their situation even further by taking more and more bold actions. In the third week of the strike, explosives were thrown into some larger restaurants. None of the customers were injured, as the explosives were thrown into window displays or onto the roofs. The owners suffered high financial losses. However, none of the perpetrators were caught<sup>17</sup>. After these events, in one of the capital's newspapers the residents of Warsaw, who had so far stayed out of the conflict, responded very critically to the actions of the protesting waiters, and thus supported the position of the restaurant owners. They considered the "bombing incidents" to be an attack against the customers, not the

14 *Strajk kelnerów [Waiters' Strike]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 4 January 1919, no. 4, p. 5; *Terror kelnerów [Waiters' Terror]*, "Goniec Warszawski", 5 January 1919, no. 7, p. 3; *Terror kelnerów [Waiters' Terror]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 7 January 1919, nos 6–7, pp. 5–6.

15 *Bezrobocie kelnerów [Waiters' Unemployment]*, "Goniec Warszawski", 5 January 1919, no. 7, p. 3.

16 *Strajk kelnerów [Waiters' Strike]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 8 January 1919, no. 8, p. 3.

17 *Terror kelnerski [Waiters' Terror]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 18 January 1919, no. 18, p. 3.

restaurateurs. The new situation, which forced customers to self-serve, had the opposite effect, becoming a new big-city attraction, rather than discouraging customers from spending their time in restaurants<sup>18</sup>. Numerous mentions in the press illustrate the prevailing joy caused by the waiters' absence from the restaurants, which enabled the public to combine learning to self-serve with collecting money for charitable causes, such as donations to the Polish Army<sup>19</sup>. After twenty-five days, the strike ended. The owners of Warsaw food establishments met the demands of the protesters: abolishing tips, adding 10% to the bill, paying out a one-time benefit in the amount of 125 markas per person, paying trainees, and not dismissing employees as punishment for participating in the protest. In return, the waiters took responsibility for meeting the terms of the agreement, and those who continued to take tips would be fired without pay and expelled from the union<sup>20</sup>.

The owners of food service establishments while fighting the striking waiters, were also facing obstacles caused by the new Office to Combat Usury and Speculation (directly subordinate to the Minister for Supply), created by the Chief of State on 11 January 1919. The office was established in order to restrict the black market, which had become rampant during the war<sup>21</sup>. Before the change of name and powers, it was known as the Department to Combat Usury of Food, which did not deal closely with problems of food establishments<sup>22</sup>. It was ordered that in all restaurants, confectioneries and eateries the waiting staff should write down and then hand over the bill to the customer before payment. The exceptions were places with price lists displayed in a visible spot, e.g. in small menus on the tables or in large ones on the walls of the dining rooms. Each price list was to include information about food and drink prices, as well as the price of customer service. This

18 *Do publiczności warszawskiej [To the Warsaw Public]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 17 January 1919, no. 17, p.10

19 *Na Wojsko Polskie [For the Polish Army]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 24 January 1919, no 24, p. 11.

20 *Koniec strajku kelnerów [End of Waiter's Strike]*, "Kurier Warszawski", 24 January 1919, no. 24, p. 10

21 A. Jezierski, C. Leszczyńska, *Rzeczpospolita w latach 1918–1939*, in: A. Jezierski, C. Leszczyńska, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, Warszawa 2003, p. 264.

22 *Dekret z 11 stycznia 1919 r. w sprawie utworzenia Urzędu walki z lichwą i spekulacją przy Ministerstwie Apropowizacji [Decree of 11 January 1919 on Establishing the Office to Combat Usury and Speculation in the Ministry for Supply]*, "Dziennik Praw Państwa Polskiego" 1919, no. 7, item 109.

decree, which was first applied in the district of Warsaw, became binding on 20 August. The other districts were included in the act of 27 August<sup>23</sup>. It should be added that on 24 August a national congress of unions and associations of waiters took place in Warsaw. At this meeting it was decided unanimously that tips would be no longer added to customers' bills, and the current situation of waiters was discussed. The effective actions of the Office to Combat Usury and Speculation, which had started to look closely at food service establishments, were approved<sup>24</sup>. The resolution finally came into force on 8 September 1919<sup>25</sup>.

The first strike of the Trade Union of Waiters did not lead to a wave of demonstrations in other cities. However, the protesters' determination and their often illegal radical actions, which contributed to the success of their aims, were appreciated across the country. The restaurateurs did not enjoy peace and quiet for very long, as on 18 September the waiters started another strike. This time, their primary demand was an eight-hour workday. Additionally, they wanted a three-month notice termination period, as at that time it was only one month<sup>26</sup>. Another issue they raised was that of the busboy, the so-called *piccolo*, who should assist three waiters at the most. The boys should receive 150 kronen monthly, as well as all meals. The first step of the waiters' protest was to abandon their workplaces, such as the Polonia Restaurant<sup>27</sup>. On the same day, the newspaper "Ziemia Lubelska" ("Land of Lublin") published a discussion piece written by a confectioner from Lublin, who emphasised that the Trade Union of Waiters was one of the younger unions, established in 1916 during the Austrian occupation. He explained that for this reason, as any organisation which is developing, it made all sorts of mistakes, as evidenced by the enforcement of the resolution on speculation, concerning the percentage of sales for serving customers.

23 *Rozporządzenie w sprawie regulowania rachunków w restauracjach, cukierniach innych wszelkiego rodzaju jadłodajniach* [Resolution on Regulating Bills in Restaurants, Confectioneries and All Types of Eateries], "Monitor Polski Dziennik Urzędowy Republiki Polskiej", 9 August 1919, no. 178, p. 1–2.

24 *Jeszcze w sprawie kelnerów* [More on the Topic of Waiters], "Robotnik", 29 August 1919, no. 292, p. 5.

25 *Do ogółu społeczeństwa Polskiego* [To the Polish Public], "Robotnik", 6 September 1919, no. 300, p. 6.

26 *Epidemia strajków w Warszawie* [Strike Epidemic in Warsaw], "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny", 20 September 1919, no. 256, p. 4.

27 *Strajk kelnerów* [Waiters' Strike] [in Warsaw – A.J.], "Ziemia Lubelska", 19 September 1919, no. 381, pp. 2–3.

Moreover, the confectioners from Lublin claimed that the waiters demanded that the percentage be increased from 10 to 15% in restaurants and from 15 to 20% in confectioneries and cafes. In this situation, the owners asked the waiters on what basis they wanted to further increase the percentage, since they had already succeeded. The owners were afraid that the waiters' demands would prompt other staff to follow them, and they would be forced to increase prices, which would affect customers the most. Also, according to the employers, the waiters' job was not a difficult one, which was why they never agreed to pay such a high percentage of the sales. They assured the readers that they would not allow their employees to take advantage of customers in this way<sup>28</sup>. Soon afterwards, the waiters' response to the employers' accusations was printed. First of all, they explained the issue of increasing the percentage to 10 and 15%, which had been demanded by waiters throughout the country. It was also stated that the Lublin branch of the union was the only regional branch to negotiate with the restaurateurs, not wanting to cause chaos and exacerbate unemployment. The employees noted the fact that the restaurateurs still did not pay the owed percentage of the sales, while continuing to raise prices. It was also suggested that, since the daily sales in a large restaurant or confectionery was approximately 6,000 kronen, paying out 10 or 15% should not be a problem. As his final argument, the author of the article writes of the hardship waiters experienced by working on Saturdays and Sundays, when customers were the most numerous. In this way, they had practically no days off. The readers were also assured that the waiters would not demand tips if the restaurateurs and confectioners would agree to their terms<sup>29</sup>.

With no agreement between the sides, on Sunday 21 September the waiters from Lublin started their protest. At 9 o'clock in the evening, in restaurants full of customers, they demanded a percentage of the daily sales from their employers, which forced the customers to self-serve. In one of the restaurants the customers enjoyed this novelty so much that it was proposed that a percentage should still be collected for the served meal and the money should go the inhabitants of Upper Silesia<sup>30</sup>. The next day around

28 *Dyktatura kelnerów [Waiters' Dictatorship]*, "Ziemia Lubelska", 18 September 1919, no. 378, p. 2.

29 *W sprawie wynagrodzenia kelnerów [With Regard to Waiters' Earnings]*, "Ziemia Lubelska", 21 September 1919, no. 384, p. 2.

30 *Strajk kelnerów [Waiters' Strike]*, "Głos Lubelski", 22 September 1919, no. 234, p. 3.

noon, a group of waiters entered the restaurant of the Victoria Hotel and behaved aggressively towards the clerk for not joining the strikers. With all of this playing out in front of the customers, opinions about the waiters' inappropriate behaviour quickly reached the press. To the customers' surprise, law enforcement did not intervene<sup>31</sup>.

"Głos Lubelski" and "Ziemia Lubelska" published an article by the restaurateurs in which they turned to the readers to express their opinion on the demands of the waiters from Lublin, who negotiated the same terms as their colleagues from Warsaw during both strikes. In this way, the restaurateurs wanted to make the first move, taking the position of the aggrieved party before a wave of demonstrations started in Lublin, which was what they feared the most. They stated that they could not agree to the terms because restaurants mainly relied on the work of specialists, not the waiting staff. Meanwhile, the earnings of chefs and their assistants were much lower than those of waiters. Raising the wages of all staff would lead to higher prices, and customers would stop coming. The problem of collecting a percentage of sales was also contentious because the restaurateurs believed that customers were used to giving tips and would continue to give them despite the changes, and the waiters would not refuse them in order to avoid misunderstandings. The owners stated that the best solution would be to pay the staff a set monthly salary. Finally, they presented a comparison of chefs' earnings, which were up to 1,500 kronen, while waiters in large restaurants, usually operating in cabaret theatres, earned 2,500 to 3,500 kronen<sup>32</sup>.

It is interesting that many owners of first-rate restaurants, disregarding the new resolution, increased prices at their own discretion, without notifying the proper authorities or even applying for permission to change their price lists. The Office to Combat Usury and Speculation responded effectively, as it imposed fines in the amount of 160,000 markas on 42 restaurants over a very short period of time. Additionally, the office brought the case to the Ministry of Justice and Supply<sup>33</sup>.

31 *Terror pp. Kelnerów [Terror of Mess. Waiters]*, "Głos Lubelski", 23 September 1919, no. 235, p. 2.

32 *W sprawie strajków kelnerów [With Regard to Waiters' Strike]*, "Głos Lubelski", 23 September 1919, no. 235, pp. 2–3; *W sprawie strajków kelnerów [With Regard to Waiters' Strike]*, "Ziemia Lubelska", 23 September 1919, no. 386, pp. 2–3.

33 *Restauratorzy skazani na 160 000 mk kary [Restauranters Fined 160,000 Markas]*, "Ziemia Lubelska", 24 September 1919, no. 389, p. 2.

On 25 September, "Głos Lubelski" ("Voice of Lublin") daily printed a letter sent to the editors by the board of the Lublin branch of the Trade Union of Waiters, concerning the national congress of waiters which had taken place in Warsaw. The congress had passed a resolution and demanded that employers accept it in unchanged form. One of the conditions was to address waiters by their first or last name, not by using numbers, as had been the custom. It was also decided that a workday would last eight hours, and one day per week should be free. Additionally, the waiting staff would not work on religious and national holidays. The employer should pay 10 kronen for each hour of overtime. The free meals should be generous, and in establishments which did not have a kitchen the owners were to pay the waiters 200 kronen per month for lunches. The most important demand was the abolition of tips and introducing a wage based on a percentage of the daily sales. The waiters threatened that if the owners of Lublin's restaurants did not accept the terms, the case would be brought to the Labour Inspectorate in Lublin and then followed by an economic strike, which would last until the terms were accepted. The resolution also specified that no one could be dismissed for participating in the protests<sup>34</sup>.

At the same time "Ziemia Lubelska" published an article written by the waiters, in which they responded to the accusations made by the employers a few days earlier. The employees presented their version, believing that accusing them in a public forum was baseless and unnecessary, and apparently the result of anger. It was stated that 2,500 kronen were the highest earnings that a waiter could receive at that time. Another argument was the problem of uniforms, which were not provided by the establishment and cost at least 2,000 kronen. As they were often stained during work, suits had to be replaced every four months on average. The next point of contention was the problem of free meals provided during work hours. According to the work contract, employers in food service establishments were obligated to provide food, but they refused to comply. Additionally, the waiter, as a mediator between the customer and the owner, had to take responsibility for excessively long wait times, inadequate meals or poor quality of ingredients, often bearing the brunt of criticism from unhappy customers. The

34 *Do Panów Właściciele restauracji, cukierni, kawiarni i mleczarni w Lublinie* [To the Owners of Restaurants, Confectioneries, Cafes and Milk Shops in Lublin], "Głos Lubelski", 25 September 1919, no. 237, p. 4.

waiters also mentioned the problem of unfair pricing of produce, pointing out that fare was highly overpriced and that the owners earned a profit of 100% from selling alcohol<sup>35</sup>.

The employees abandoned the idea of arguing further with the employers in the local press and moved on to more effective actions. On 27 September at 12:00 noon, 40 waiters organised a demonstration in one of the most popular restaurants in Krakowskie Przedmieście street in Lublin, occupying all the free chairs in the room and, when there were no more empty seats, sitting on the tables. The sit-in lasted for three hours, preventing the customers from eating their meals<sup>36</sup>.

These radical steps did not move the employers, who categorically rejected the waiters' demands. The only solution to the problem on their part was to set a monthly salary of 800 to 1,200 kronen and free meals. During a meeting in the Viktoria Hotel, the Association of Restaurateurs and Confectioners declared that if the waiters did not return to their workplaces within a week on these terms, all the establishments would be registered as shareholding companies. If this promise was fulfilled, the situation in the establishments would change diametrically and the waiters would gain nothing<sup>37</sup>.

Observing how the dispute in the food service industry unfolded, the editors of one of the dailies published an opinion on the waiters' actions, emphasising in the introduction that their dealings were becoming a boring topic. They stressed the fact that such a strike in a quiet city like Lublin was the result of a wave of protests roaring across the country after regaining independence in 1918. Such demonstrations did not lead to economic losses, so the editors saw no reason to analyse them in great detail. It was, however, worth noting that the problem, discussed for many months, persisted. The resolution of 8 August 1919 led to the inevitable increase of meal prices, as a service fee was added. On the other hand, the Office to Combat Usury and Speculation regulated the prices of served meals, so the owners could not continuously raise prices. For this reason, the author of

35 *Artykuł dyskusyjny [Discussion piece]*, "Ziemia Lubelska", 25 September 1919, no. 390, p. 3.

36 *Demonstracyjne najście kelnerów [Waiters' Demonstrative Intrusion]*, "Głos Lubelski", 28 September 1919, no. 240, p. 2.

37 *W sprawie kelnerów [With Regard to Waiters]*, "Głos Lubelski", 28 September 1919, no. 240, p. 3.

the article concluded that the only correct solution would be a set monthly salary. This could result in decreasing meal prices, which would be welcomed by customers. However, the waiters did not want to agree to such a compromise, as they saw more profit in receiving a percentage of the employer's sales<sup>38</sup>.

It did not take long for the waiters to make another move, and on 3 October at 12:00 noon 30 men entered a smaller restaurant located at 3 Królewska St. They locked themselves inside, occupied all the tables and put up a notice on the door, which said "Closed due to death", ignoring the frightened owner, Mrs Zawada<sup>39</sup>.

Two days later the waiters responded to the previous article by the Association of Restaurateurs, explaining that they did not want an increase in meal prices, but to be paid a percentage of the sales. They also cited the example of the waiters in Warsaw, where the protestors' demands were accepted, and stated that both the waiters and the customers were happy with the compromise. Furthermore, the employers would not suffer financial losses, because the percentage, which so far was added to the bill, would be included in the meal prices. They also wrote that the allegedly "high" earnings were not so excessive from the point of view of an employee who worked on some holidays and had seven days off per month. Additionally, the pay did not exceed the average salary of a qualified person<sup>40</sup>.

In the next article about the dispute, the representatives of the Association of Restaurants and Confectionaries wrote that only precisely fixed monthly salaries would be able to bring the job of a waiter to the same level as average employees. They also noted the news from Warsaw, which came from restaurant customers, who claimed that the waiters were counting income instead of minding their duties. On the other hand, the customers who continued to give tips were receiving much better service and, most importantly, were served first. The restaurateurs from Lublin also concluded that the acts of aggression in their establishments revealed very poor social

38 *W sprawie strajku kelnerów* [With Regard to Waiters' Strike], "Głos Lubelski", 30 September 1919, no. 242, p. 2.

39 *Nowe nadużycia kelnerów* [Waiters' New Transgressions], "Głos Lubelski", 3 October 1919, no. 245, p. 2.

40 *Do Opinii Publicznej m. Lublina* [To the General Public of the City of Lublin], "Ziemia Lubelska", 5 October 1919, no. 408, p. 2.

behaviour of the waiters, who continued to antagonise the customers. They also stated that despite the difficulties posed by the waiters, the wages paid by the establishments did not diminish. The owners also accepted the voices of their customers, forced to self-serve, who regarded the situation as another step towards the democratisation of society and admitted that the percentage added for service should be donated to public causes<sup>41</sup>.

It was not until 7 October that, after a few days of negotiations, representatives of the Association of Restaurants and Confectionaries and the Trade Union of Waiters came to an agreement. As a result of the compromise, the strike ended after 17 days<sup>42</sup>. It is worth adding that at the same time, the number of strikers in Lublin demanding an increase of wages by 50% grew and included a groups of city workers, firefighters and tailors<sup>43</sup>. On 10 October, it was announced publicly that the striking waiters employed in Lublin's confectionaries, cafes and milk shops had made concessions. However, the owners of these establishments did not want to follow the example of the restaurateurs by meeting the majority of the demands, although they did start negotiations<sup>44</sup>. After three days, the waiters struck an agreement with the employers and went back to work<sup>45</sup>.

An excellent punch line to the waiters' strike was a rhyme printed in a supplement to an issue of "Ziemia Lubelska", indicating what the residents of Lublin thought about the situation caused by the protesting waiters. The rhyme went:

*Odnieśliśmy szybko, zgrabnie,  
My zwycięstwo w pewnej mierze  
Bo napiwków już na dworcu  
Żaden kelner wszak nie bierze  
Tak kelnerski głosi związek*

41 *List otwarty do p. J. Sieradzkiego, delegata z Warszawy i ogółu pp. Kelnerów w Lublinie* [An open Letter to Mr J. Sieradzki, Delegate from Warsaw and to the Waiters in Lublin], "Głos Lubelski", 6 October 1919, no. 248, p. 2.

42 *Zakończenie strajku kelnerów* [End of Waiters' Strike], "Głos Lubelski", 8 October 1919, no. 250, p. 3; *Oświadczenie* [Statement], "Ziemia Lubelska", 8 October 1919, no. 414, p. 1.

43 *Strajk krawców* [Tailors' Strike], "Głos Lubelski", 5 October 1919, no. 247, p. 6.

44 *Strajk kelnerów w cukierniach, mleczarniach i kawiarniach* [Waiters' Strike in Confectioneries, Milk Shops and Cafes], "Głos Lubelski", 10 October 1919, p. 252, p. 3.

45 *Zakończenie strajków kelnerów cukierniczych* [The End of Waiters' Strike in Confectioneries], "Głos Lubelski", 13 October 1919, no. 255, p. 3.

*A publiczność replikuje:  
To też gościa arogancko  
Stale kelner tam traktuje*<sup>46</sup>.

The Central Board of the Trade Union of Waiters in Warsaw, which wanted to fight for better working conditions but did not always use ethical and moral tactics, became a role model. Local branches used similar or the same methods of protest. Waiters' strikes took place in many cities, including Częstochowa, Kielce, Kraków and Łódź. However, only the Lublin protest took on the form of polemics in the local press. The situation reflects a subtle and clever approach to the subject both on the side of the employees and employers. Each action of the waiters from Lublin was well-planned and, most importantly, was not unreasonable, unlike using explosives in Warsaw, which could have caused many casualties. On the other hand, the demonstration involving the notice "Closed due to death" was more humorous than it was harmful. Several-hours-long actions which compelled the customers to self-serve were a case of forcing a response out of the employers, to make sure that the demands would not be ignored. This was probably why there was no reaction from the local authorities or police force. It is also evident that the owners feared events similar to those which had taken place in the capital. The restaurateurs clearly did not take any radical steps, but rather carefully proposed a solution in the form of setting a monthly salary. It is worth noting that in every article they solicited readers' opinions, thus showing their desire to find an agreement with the stubborn employees.

The events of the waiters' strike in Poland were also interesting for the direct involvement of ordinary citizens, who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, simply by wanting to eat a meal. It should be added that in the interwar period the Lublin dailies "Ziemia Lubelska" and

46 *Do Opinii Publicznej m. Lublina* [To the Public Opinion of the City of Lublin], Supplement to no. 408, "Ziemia Lubelska", 5 October 1919, p. 1.

*We have swiftly, smoothly scored  
Something of a victory  
As the waiters at the station  
No longer take tips  
That's what their union claims  
And the public replies:  
This is why the waiters still  
Treat the customers insolently.*

"Głos Lubelski" became an arena of a bitter dispute between employers and employees only for the duration of the waiters' strike.

The strikes which took place in Poland after it regained independence were organised by almost all trade unions, representing both workers and craftsmen. It was a very tumultuous process, since it developed intensely in industrial centres, where local branches of the unions were created. In the provinces, on the other hand, representatives of various labour sectors joined others in general unions. This movement strove not only to improve the situation of the proletariat, but most importantly to unite class unions and to find one course of shaping the state's political system<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> M. Korniluk, *Odbudowa klasowego ruchu zawodowego XI 1918–VII 1919*, in: L. Kieszczyński, M. Korniluk, *Ruch zawodowy...*, op. cit., pp. 53–55.

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# Abstract

Anna Jakimowicz

*"Waiters' Dictatorship...". The Fight of Food Establishments in Warsaw and Lublin in 1919 in the Local Press*

Poland's regaining of independence in 1918 contributed to increased activity of workers' movements. Employees who wanted improved working conditions, normalised work hours and increased wages in many cases organised demonstrations to achieve their goals. Members of the Trade Union of Waiters with the central office in Warsaw, who could not communicate with the stubborn owners of restaurants and cafes, undertook atypical forms of striking, which sometimes became a threat to the health and lives of the customers. Members of the Lublin branch, following the example of the waiters from Warsaw, organised many protests in restaurants, at the same time disputing with their employers in the local press.

**Keywords:** food establishments, trade unions, strike, 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lublin, Warsaw

## Abstrakt

Anna Jakimowicz

*„Kelnerska dyktatura...”. Walka organizacji gastronomicznych w Warszawie i Lublinie w 1919 roku na łamach prasy lokalnej*

**Słowa kluczowe:**  
organizacje  
gastronomiczne,  
związki zawodowe,  
strajk, XX wiek,  
Lublin, Warszawa

Odzyskanie przez Polskę niepodległości w 1918 roku przyczyniło się do wzrostu aktywności ruchów robotniczych. Pracownicy, chcąc poprawy warunków, unormowania godzin pracy oraz podwyższenia pensji, w wielu sytuacjach organizowali demonstracje, aby osiągnąć swoje cele. Istniejący wówczas Związek Zawodowy Kelnerów z centralną siedzibą w Warszawie, nie mogąc porozumieć się z nieustępliwymi właścicielami lokali gastronomicznych, podejmował się organizowania nietypowych form strajków, które niekiedy stanowiły zagrożenie dla zdrowia i życia klientów. Członkowie lubelskiego oddziału tej organizacji, wzorując się na działaniach warszawskich kelnerów, przeprowadzili wiele akcji protestacyjnych w lokalach, jednocześnie polemizując ze swoimi pracodawcami na łamach lokalnej prasy.