

Stanislaus A. Blejwas received his B.A. [1963] from Providence College and his M.A. [1966] and Ph D [1973] from Columbia University in Polish and East European history. He is CSU University Professor of History and holder of the Endowed Chair of Polish and Polish American Studies at Central Connecticut State University. His publications include *Realism in Polish Politics: Warsaw Positivism and National Survival in Nineteenth Century Poland* (Yale Slavic and East European Monographs, 1984), *Pastor of the Poles: Polish American Essays* (co-edited with M. B. Biskupski, Polish Studies Monographs, I, 1982), and histories of the Polish American and Lithuanian American immigrant and ethnic communities and organizations in New England. His articles have appeared in *The Polish Review*, *Polish American Studies*, *Jewish Social Studies*, *PNCC Studies*, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, *Studia Polonijne*, *Polish-Anglo Saxon Studies*, *Analecta Cracoviensia*, *Austrian History Yearbook*, *Connecticut History*, *The Connecticut Review*, and in the following collections: *The Dean's Papers 1966*, *The Polish Presence in Canada and America* (1982), *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture and Politics* (1996), and *Ethnicity. Culture. City: Polish Americans in the USA* (1998). He recently completed a history of the Polish Singers Alliance of America, and will shortly publish *Puritans, Yankees, and Poles: New England Polish American Essays*. Professor Blejwas is on the editorial boards of *Polin* and *Polish American Studies*, is an honorary member of the Polonia Research Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences [Warsaw], and is a member of the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

American Polonia and the School Strike in Września

by

Stanisław A. Blejwas

The national consciousness of the Polish peasant is an issue debated in Polish politics and history since the partitions. Beginning with Kościuszko's Insurrection in 1794 and continuing through World War II, the peasant's integration into the struggle to recover independence and the level of his national consciousness occupied the attention of politicians and researchers.¹ The question assumed a unique dimension when the Great Peasant Economic Emigration to America accelerated after the American Civil War as political activists now fretted about the future of the Poles in America. Did the migrating peasants possess a Polish national consciousness? If they did, would they be denationalized in America? If the peasants only possessed what Stanisław Ossowski called a private homeland, could the peasant immigrant in a foreign land across an ocean be educated to identify with an ideological homeland?² Particularly in the absence of a Polish state, could Polish peasant immigrants in America be mobilized for the cause of independence? Furthermore, how could the immigrant's nationalization be achieved in the face of

¹ For a recent discussion see Jan Molenda, *Chłopi. Naród. Niepodległość. Kształtowanie się postaw narodowych i obywatelskich chłopów w Galicji i Królestwie Polskim w przedzeniu odrodzenia Polski* (Warsaw: NERITON, 1999. Instytut Historii PAN).

² Stanisław Ossowski, *O ojczyźnie i narodzie* (Warsaw: 1984), 26, cited by Jan Molenda, "The Formation of National Consciousness of the Polish Peasants and the Part They Played in the Regaining of Independence of Poland", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 63-64 (1991), 124. Ossowski was discussing the peasants in Poland, but his observations are transferable to the peasant immigrants abroad.

the pressures to Americanize new arrivals in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century? Would the American Poles, described by Professor Emil Dunikowski in 1891 as “the fourth sector” of Poland,³ be lost to the national cause?

Without surveys, public opinion polls, and statistical studies, a precise, comprehensive answer concerning the national consciousness of the Polish peasant in America prior to World War I is difficult to provide. However, one can examine American Polonia’s topography, its institutions, organizations, and media and public discourse and draw conclusions about the diaspora’s relationship to the homeland. American Polonia’s public and rhetorical reaction to homeland developments is also a gauge, albeit limited, of American Polonia’s political consciousness. The reaction of the American Poles to the 1901 school strike in Września, where Prussian school authorities corporally punished Polish children punished for refusing to accept religion lessons in German and tried and sentenced their parents to imprisonment and fines is an early example of Polonia, as the “fourth sector”, asserting its role as an intermediary between Poland and America.⁴

American Polonia in 1901

In 1901 the Polish American community was nearly a half-century old. Immigrants from Silesia established the first permanent Polish settlement in Panna Maria, Texas in 1854. Emigration from the Polish lands accelerated after the American Civil War. Until 1890 the greatest numbers came from the Prussian sector, and Prussian Poles, together with political exiles who had arrived before and after the January 1863 Insurrection, laid the organizational foundation of American Polonia. Emigration to America from the Prussian sector declined after 1890 but rose dramatically from the Austrian and Russian sectors until interrupted by World War I.⁵

In his pioneering history, Reverend Waclaw Kruszka asked “How many of us are there in America, or at least in the United States?” He posed the question in 1905 when the Great Peasant Economic Emigration was already a demographic presence in America. The answer was difficult to establish because of inconsistent record keeping by American immigration officials and because Jews, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusins also emigrated from the lands that once constituted the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. Kruszka believed that official American statistics for 1900 – 383,595 – were too low. Basing his estimates upon the total number of Poles living “within the borders of a parish,” the priest-historian calculated that there were 1,902,370 Poles in some 800 settlements where there were some 520 Polish Roman Catholic churches and

³ *Przegląd Emigracyjny*, I, no. 6 (1892), 51-2 and no. 12 (December 15, 1892), 117-18.

⁴ On the Września affair see John J. Kulczycki, *School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901 – 1907: The Struggle Over Bilingual Education* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981. LXXXII), 49 – 81; John J. Kulczycki, *Strajki szkolne w zaborze pruskim, 1901-1907* (Poznań: Urząd Wojewódzki w Poznaniu, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki, 1993), 91-114.

⁵ On American Polonia see James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1995), and John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

550 Polish clergy.⁶ Poles settled largely in urban-industrial America. In the Midwest they were numerous in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota; in the Middle Atlantic states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware; and in the New England states of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

The American Poles were extraordinarily diligent in the establishment of institutions and organizations. Local Polish communities developed around four basic institutions: the parish church, the parochial school, the fraternal insurance organizations, and a Polish language press supplemented with a host of other cultural, social, and athletic organizations and associations. According to Thomas and Znaniecki, the parish was the chief instrument in the unification and organization of America's Polish communities.⁷ Henryk Sienkiewicz observed that the Church and the Polish priests maintained a degree of moral unity among the immigrants, brought them together, and prevented them from disappearing "unnoticed among foreign elements".⁸ Communities grew around parishes and immigrants identified their neighborhoods with their parishes [i.e., Jackowo for Saint Jacek, Trójcowo for Holy Trinity, or Kantowo for Saint John Kanty].

Religious leaders and Catholic laymen not only believed that the community had to be organized around the parish: they insisted that a Pole could only be a Catholic and that the parish had to protect this identity. The organization of the Polish Roman Catholic Union [PRCU – Zjednoczenie Polskie Rzymsko-Katolickie] in 1873 articulated this religious model of community organization.⁹ However, clerical leadership did not go unchallenged. In 1880 political emigres organized the Polish National Alliance [PNA – Związek Narodowy Polski]. The organizers responded to the advice of the exiled Agaton Giller who urged "the national intellectual class" to educate and to unite the peasant immigrants for "the national cause" of Polish independence. Anticipating the immigrant's eventual advancement in America and influence in American political life, Giller believed that the emigration "will render great services to Poland" [odda Polsce wielkie usługi] serving as "intermediaries between Poland and the powerful republic so as to foster sympathy with our efforts for liberation and develop it into an enthusiasm that will express itself in action" [pośrednikami pomiędzy Polską a potężną republiką, zdolnymi utrzymać sympatje dla usiłowań naszego oswobodzenia się i rozplomienić je aż do zapału w czynie wyrażonym].¹⁰

⁶ X. Waław Kruska, *Historia polska w Ameryce. Początek, wyrost i rozwój dziejowy osad polskich w Północnej Ameryce (w Stanach Zjednoczonych i Kanadzie)* (Milwaukee, WI: Spółka Wydawnicza Kurjera, 1905. I), 87-8. For a translation and excellent annotation of this work see Waław Kruska, *A History of the Poles in America to 1908* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1993 – 20. I-IV. James S. Pula, editor).

⁷ William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York, NY: Dover Publications edition, 1958; originally published in 1918-1920), II, 1523 ff.

⁸ See Charles Morley, ed. and trans., *Portrait of America: Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959), 282.

⁹ See the still valuable work by Mieczysław Haiman, *Zjednoczenie Polskie Rzymsko-Katolickie w Ameryce, 1873 – 1948* (Chicago, ILL: Zjednoczenie Polskie Rzymsko-Katolickie w Ameryce, 1948).

¹⁰ *List Agatona Gillera o Organizacji Polaków w Ameryce* (Chicago, ILL: W. Dyniewicz, 1879), 19 – 20. I express my appreciation to Professor Halina Francić for making the full text of Giller's letter available to me. A severely

While the leaders of the PRCU identified faith with nationality and the fatherland, the organizers of the PNA initially advanced a broader definition of Pole. The restoration of independence was the PNA's primary objective and it welcomed everyone into its ranks who shared this goal, including Protestants, Greek Catholics, Jews, and religious independents. Many Catholic clergy objected to this broader definition of Polishness. Neither the religious nor the nationalist faction was successful in its attempts to impose its hegemony upon Polonia. The PRCU and the PNA, which both introduced the sale of insurance policies to their members, engaged in fierce intra-fraternal polemics over the definition of Pole on the pages of immigrant newspapers. The polemics stimulated secessions and what Mieczysław Haiman called „the partitioning of American Polonia” [rozbiór Polonji amerykańskiej] and deepened the immigrant's national awareness.¹¹ The organization of other patriotic initiatives also stimulated the turmoil. Among the national and regional organizations founded in the last two decades of the 19th century were: the Polish Falcons [1887 – Związek Sokołów Polskich w Ameryce], the Polish Singers Alliance of America [1889 – Związek Śpiewaków Polskich w Ameryce], the Polish Union of America [1889 – Unia Polska w Ameryce], the Union of Polish Youth [1894 – Związek Młodzieży Polskiej w Ameryce], The Polish Alma Mater [1897 – Macierza Polska], and the Polish Women's Alliance [1899 - Związek Polek w Ameryce]. The establishment of the pro-independence Union of Polish Socialists [Związek Socjalistów Polskich] in 1900 signaled the emergence of class a factor in American Polonia.¹²

The self-partitioning, or diversification of American Polonia prompted unsuccessful efforts to unify the community under a single national [krajowa] organization or “congress”.¹³ However, cooperation between the factions was not unknown, and did occur as American Polonia began to speak in America on Polish issues and homeland independence. Prior to 1900 there were joint protests against the Russo-American extradition treaty [1893] and against the Lodge immigration bill [1898], common commemorations of the centennial of Mickiewicz's birth, a memorial to the participants of the Hague conference [1899] that spoke of the need to reconstruct an independent Polish state, and the establishment of the short-lived Representation of Polish Organizations and Press of North America [1899 – Reprezentacja Organizacji i Prasy Polskiej w Stanach Zjednoczonych Północnej Ameryki].¹⁴

excerpted version of Giller's letter can be found in Stanisław Osada, *Historia Związku Narodowego Polskiego i rozwój ruchu narodowego polskiego w Ameryce Północnej. W dwudziestą piątą rocznicę założenia Związku* (Chicago, ILL: Związek Narodowy Polski, 1905), 97 – 108.

¹¹ Haiman, 149-56. On the fraternalists see Małgorzata M. Wawrykiewicz, *Polonijne organizacje ubezpieczeniowe w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1991).

¹² The history of Polish socialists in America still remains to be written. For a tentative effort see Danuta Piątkowska-Koźlik, *Związek Socjalistów Polskich w Ameryce (1900 – 1914)* (Opole: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1992).

¹³ See Andrzej Brożek, “Próby zjednoczenia Polonii amerykańskiej i ich ideologii”, in Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, and Tadeusz Gromada, eds., *Polonia Amerykańska: Przeszłość i Współczesność* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988), 149 – 75.

¹⁴ See Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia Amerykańska 1854 – 1939* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1977. English translation 1985), 71 – 83.

Another aspect of American Polonia role as an intermediary between Poland and America were the public commemorations of Polish patriotic anniversaries. The constitution of the Polish Roman Catholic Union encouraged annual commemorations of the 1830 Insurrection in November and of the 1863 Uprising in January. In 1891 Polonia celebrated the centennial of the Constitution of May 3rd on a national scale. The annual commemoration of these events became an integral element of community ritual. Public commemorations were the occasion to educate both the American public and the immigrant community about Poland's history and culture.

There were also domestic issues that occupied Polonia's leadership. One critical issue at the turn of the last century was the absence of Polish representation in the Roman Catholic Church's episcopal hierarchy. Another was the efforts of the American Catholic bishops, the majority of whom were Irish or German, to promote the Americanization of the numerous immigrant groups now crowding within diocesan jurisdictions. These issues came together at the second Polish Catholic Congress that was convened in Buffalo September 24 – 26, 1901. Although there were more than one million Polish Catholics in the United States and over 500 Polish priests ministering to them, no Pole had been appointed either bishop or auxiliary bishop. Furthermore, faced with a polyglot faithful, some American bishops were encouraging, as a practical matter, greater use of English in churches and parish schools. When in 1900 Bishops Frederick Eis of Marquette and Sebastian Messmer of Green Bay, Wisconsin, both of German origin, ordered that sermons be in English at least twice monthly in diocesan churches, Polish Americans protested. They misunderstood the intent and extend of the order, which was not directed against any national group and was intended to assure that the younger, English-speaking generation could attend English-language services.¹⁵ Nevertheless, many perceived the order as undermining the Polishness [Polskość] that the parish and school were established to maintain. Americanization was equated with denationalization.

The reasons for convoking a congress were precisely stated the organizing committee. The American Poles now numbered over a million individuals and possessed an expanding organizational infrastructure. One no longer spoke of Poles in America but of American Polonia as an organized, distinct nationality. However, the original organizations were no longer adequate "if we wish to preserve our individuality, our national distinctness" [jeżeli chcemy zachować naszą indywidualność, naszą odrębność narodową]. Polonia could exist for a long time as a distinct nationality without becoming submerged by Americanism, but its enemies wanted to denationalize as rapidly as possible. "Here and there assaults have begun on our Polish language, on our national distinctiveness" [To i owdzie poczęto robić już zamachy na nasz polski język, na naszą odrębność narodową]. These attacks prompted Poles to put aside differences and "to think not only of defense but also about the permanent establishment of our existence as Poles in America" [myśleć nietylko o obronie, ale i trwałem ustaleniu naszego istnienia, jako Polaków na amerykańskiej ziemi]. Thus parishes, organizations, societies, clergy and representatives of the Polish American press were invited to reflect under the slogan of "God and Country" [Bóg i Ojczyzna].¹⁶

¹⁵ Anthony J. Kuzniewski, *Faith and Fatherland. The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896 – 1918* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 44 – 5.

¹⁶ "Program Kongresu", *Ameryka*, 6 lipiec 1902.

The majority of the delegates were priests, and clerical interests were prominent in the discussions. The Congress voted to try to convince the American bishops to appoint auxiliary bishops and, failing that, to send a delegation directly to Rome. The most prominent and controversial advocate of “equal rights” [równouprawnienia] for the Polish clergy in America was Reverend Waław Kruszką of Wisconsin, who advanced the idea of “polyglot bishops for polyglot dioceses”, i.e., polyglot bishops are necessary to communicate the principles of faith in a polyglot diocese. Kruszką advanced the startling theological conclusion that a monolingual priest who accepted an episcopal appointment “commits a mortal sin”.¹⁷ Kruszką questioned forced Americanization in the Church as a nationalistic policy and lauded the idea of Roman Catholicism’s unity in diversity. However, when the Executive Committee established by the Congress issued its appeal to the American bishops, it did not justify the Polish case on theological grounds. Rather it invoked the growing “Independent Movement” and the threat of schism within the Polish Roman Catholic immigrant community.

Since the 1870s a small number of independent Polish parishes had appeared. Disputes between the parishioners over ownership of the church and parish property, the right to name the pastor and the right to determine parish administration occasioned many conflicts that led to establishment of independent parishes. The parishioners’ assertion of their right to control and manage parish affairs was evidence of the democratization of the immigrants in America. Additionally, the efforts of American bishops to promote the immigrants’ Americanization and the absence of Poles from the hierarchy also fueled the flames of independentism and stirred national sentiments. In 1897 Reverend Anthony Kozłowski of Chicago obtained episcopal ordination from the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, Holland. With apostolic succession and emancipated from Rome, Kozłowski, as head of the Polish Catholic Church in America, was the first Polish and Old Catholic bishop in America. A rival group, the Polish Catholic Independent Church, emerged in Buffalo, New York under Father Stephen Kamiński.¹⁸ Independentism was also gathering momentum in the coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania. In 1897 Reverend Franciszek Hodur accepted the pastorate of the independent Saint Stanislaus Parish. In 1904 Hodur successfully convoked the founding synod of the Polish National Catholic Church and in 1907 obtained episcopal ordination from the Old Catholic Church.¹⁹

¹⁷ Kuzniewski, 44 – 7. For a more extensive and colorful discussion see X. Waław Kruszką, *Siedm siedmioleci czyli pół wieku życia. Pamiętnik i przyczynki do historii polskiej w Ameryce* (Poznań and Milwaukee: Drukarnia Św. Wojciecha, 1924), I, 385 – 815.

¹⁸ Reverend Monsignor John P. Gallagher, “The Polish National Catholic Church: Its Roman Catholic Origins,” (www.PNCC.com), 5 - 6.

¹⁹ The history of the PNCC remains to be written. For a sociological study see Hieronim Kubiak, *The Polish National Catholic Church in the United States of America from 1897 to 1980* (Kraków: PWN, 1982). Also Brożek, *Polonia Amerykańska*, 97 – 110; Laurence J. Orzell, “The National Catholic Response: Franciszek Hodur and His Followers, 1897 – 1907”, in Frank Renkiewicz, ed., *The Polish Presence in Canada and America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982), 117 – 35; a partisan work by Biskup Tadeusz R. Majewski, *Biskup Franciszek Hodur i Jego Dzieło* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 1987); and a Roman Catholic view by Reverend John P. Gallagher, *A Century of History. The Diocese of Scranton: 1868 – 1968* (Scranton, PA: The Diocese of Scranton, 1968), 210 – 63, 355 – 59, 404 – 11, 418 – 19.

The Polish Roman Catholic clergy, through the Executive Committee of the Second Polish Catholic Congress, tried to persuade the American bishops of the seriousness of the threat of schism. The independent movement disrupted parish life and a reported 50,000 individuals had apostatized. Moreover, the “heretics and schismatics” tried to manipulate “our good but simple-minded people” with accusations against the bishops. The schismatics accused the bishops of having “no use whatever for the poor and ignorant Poles” and of being “bent upon wiping out the Polish Nationality in this country”. The independents argued that because the bishops lacked charity and justice in dealing with the Poles, believers were not obliged to obey them. They also invoked the absence of Poles in the Roman Catholic hierarchy and argued that that was “because the Irish and German Bishops object to it, because they consider the Poles unfit for such a dignity”. While loyal clergy have responded by encouraging higher education and the unification of the faithful in societies, “the schismatics have the popular side of the affair” because of the absence of Polish bishops. The Polish Roman Catholic clergy stand accused by their critics of “treason to their nation when holding allegiance to Irish and German bishops”.²⁰

To deprive the schismatics of a key argument, the Executive Committee did not suggest “a national bishop for all the Poles of this country, or exclusively for them anywhere”. However, there were dioceses “in which the Polish language could be effectually employed”, where “the appointment of men, speaking Polish, to various auxiliaries would be very salutary”. The petitioners concluded that naming Polish auxiliary bishops “would work wonders towards forestalling the movement of ‘Away from Rome’.”²¹

Polish representation in the American Roman Catholic episcopate was only achieved in 1908 with the installation of Reverend Paweł Rhode as auxiliary bishop Chicago. Rhode’s appointment helped to resolve the struggle between the religionist and nationalist factions in the Polish American community although it did not bring the PNCC back to Rome. Still, with Rhode’s appointment American Catholicism recognized that one could, as Victor Greene observed, “be both Catholic and Polish”. It was a signal to “American Polonia that Catholic Poles could also be Polish Catholics”.²²

The Second Polish Catholic Congress also adopted resolutions on education and relations with the homeland. The School Committee recommended the establishment of a body to oversee Polish schools and to establish a plan and unified curriculum for Polish schools. The Committee also recommended that Polish children studying at „non-Polish institutions of higher education” [innonarodowych wyższych szkołach] receive support so that “the largest possible Polish intelligentsia be created” [jak najwięcej wytworzyć inteligencji polskiej]. The Commission on Relations with the Old Country [Wydział Nawiązania Stosunków ze Starym Krajem] recommended the establishment of a body „to defend the good name of American Polonia, about which [our] brother countrymen beyond the ocean are erroneously informed, receiving and propagating erroneous and harmful information” [któraby stała na straży dobrego imienia Polonji

²⁰ The text of this November 21, 1901 appeal is published in Kruszką, I, 441 – 44.

²¹ *Ibid*, 443.

²² Victor Greene, For God and Country. *The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860 – 1910* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975), 142.

amerykańskiej, o której Bracia Rodacy za Oceanem mylnie informowani, mylnie i krzywdzące otrzymują i rozgłaszają wieści].²³ Such a body would correct the erroneous and unfavorable impressions of American Polonia held by Poles in Poland and encourage and assist Poles from the Old Country in establishing commercial and industrial links in America.

The Września Affair

The commissions and resolutions of the Second Polish Catholic Congress indicate that schools, the preservation of native language, and relations with the Old Country were very much on the minds of many American Poles in 1901. The American Poles debated “equality of rights” for the Polish clergy in the Roman Catholic Church in America under the pressure of growing schism. The larger issue was American Catholicism recognizing and embracing cultural pluralism, the right of the faithful to retain that which made them unique, their language, customs, and traditions. The American Poles resisted and protested efforts to forcibly denationalize them through the compulsory Americanization of their parishes. In America the issue was with the Roman Catholic Church, in Prussian Poland with the state.

The Polish community in America and its media were pre-disposed to be receptive to news from Września. Many organizers of the earliest organizations, both priests and secular activists, had migrated from the Prussian sector in the wake of the German migration to America. In America there were parishes that originated as joint Polish – German initiatives. The personal investment by Poles in parish affairs across the ocean was an expression of Old World relations and experiences. The migration from Prussian Poland arrived with practical ideas, some based on German models, for parish – community organization that envisioned immigrant settlements as economic entities. The relationship with their German neighbors in America was not the only element in the external shaping of the Polish American community. Poles from the Prussian sector were personally familiar with Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* and the Germanization policies of the Prussian government. In America they also struggled to emancipate themselves from German control of their religious life in the New World and establish their own, Polish parishes.²⁴

The Poles in America regularly read in *Zgoda*, the PNA’s official organ, and *Naród Polski*, the PRCU official organ, about the persecution of Poles in the Prussian sector and the condemnations of the HaKaTa and its supporters and activities. Similar stories were to be found in *Ameryka*, an independent weekly published by Antoni Paryski in Toledo, Ohio. In 1901 there were reports about dismissals of Poles from the military and civil service, Polish soldiers compelled to confess in German, the expulsion of Polish students from gymnasia and the university for engaging in Polish cultural initiatives, the ban on Polish in churches and in schools, and reports of teachers seizing Polish language school books from their students. One comment on the administrative harassment of Poles described it as “fierce German purges [that] are prepared to cut off the heads of all Poles and to order them to walk about on all four hands and legs. The punishments for our sins do not matter and it is not enough for our enemy to severely persecute us. We will still conduct an obstinate battle” [Zażarte niemczyńska gotowi wszystkim

²³ Kruszką, I, 421 – 22.

²⁴ Mieczysław Szawleski, *Wychodźstwo Polskie w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki* (Lwów: Ossolińskieum, 1924), 82 – 3.

polakom głowy pościnać a potem na czworakach kazać chodzić. – Mało to jeszcze kary za nasze grzechy, bo niedosyć, że wróg nas srodze prześladowuje, to jeszcze my sami zaciętą prowadzimy walkę.”²⁵ Letters to *Naród Polski* from Poles in West and East Prussia expressed concern for children, “the victims of the barbarism and chauvinism of the Prussian bureaucracy” [ofiara barbaryzmu pruskiej biurokracji i szowinizmu]. “The barbarism of the Prussian HaKaTa-ists” [barbaryzm hakatów pruskich] was so bad that Moscovite persecutions paled by comparison.²⁶ Another article could not understand the reasons for the “present war of extermination” that the German government wages against the Poles.²⁷ Nevertheless, Professor Tomasz Siemiradzki believed that Germanization was not to be feared for it encouraged “the Polish spirit” [duch polski] and that the day would come when “the future Poland might even be grateful for this compulsory school of patriotism” [przyszła Polska może nawet wdzięczna im będzie za tę przymusową szkołę patryotyzmu].²⁸ This discourse was emotionally charged, but it included another patriotic lesson for the American Poles. Identifying with “our brothers” the appropriate response “in this foreign land” was “to unite, to work for the common good, to awaken the Polish spirit and to faithfully stand by the faith of our fathers and the merciful Lord Our God will shorten the days of our labor” [łączyć, pracować dla dobra ogółu, budzić ducha polskiego i wiernie stać przy wierze ojców naszych a Pan Bóg skróci dni mąk naszych].²⁹

The first reports about Września appeared in the Polonia press in the third week of June 1901. *Naród Polski*, emphasizing the gender dimension, published an article about „the mothers’ indignation” [oburzenie matek]. The article reminded everyone that „the HaKaTa-ist Prussian government” [hatatystyczny rząd pruski] made religious instruction in German obligatory at every level. The article, relying upon the Polish press, then recounted the canning of the Polish school children for refusing to respond in German to questions from the religion teacher and their refusal to accept German-language catechisms. The article described the reaction of the parents and crowd that gathered [on May 20] and the arrest of two participants. Citing a letter to *Dziennik Poznański*, the canning of the children was compared to the persecution of the first Christians. *Naród Polski* concluded that this is how „the German purge avenges itself on young innocents” and rued the fact that German civilization was making such „progress” in many places”.³⁰

The very next day *Zgoda* reported on Września, summarizing and taking issue with the German-language press’ dismissive treatment of the event. *Zgoda* agreed with *Dziennik Poznański* in blaming the incident on the teachers’ canning the children. However, the real cause of Polish bitterness and of the protestors’ actions was not incitement by the Polish clergy but „namely the present anti-Polish school system” and „such HaKaTa instigators” [takich

²⁵ “Widoczna kara Boża”, *Naród Polski*, 29 maj 1901.

²⁶ “Uwagi”, *Naród Polski*, 8 maj 1901.

²⁷ “Zaciekłość niemiecka”, *Ameryka*, 15 czerwiec 1902.

²⁸ Tomasz Siemiradzki, “Bzik antypolski w Prusach”, *Ameryka*, 12 czerwiec 1902.

²⁹ “Uwagi”, *Naród Polski*, 8 maj 1901.

³⁰ “Oburzenie matek”, *Naród Polski*, 19 czerwiec 1901.

podżegaczy hatakatystycznych] in the German-language press like the *Posener Tageblatt*.³¹ The headline in *Ameryka* was „War with Children” [Wojna z Dziecimi!] for an article that declared the events in Września the consequence of the „shameful policy of the Prussian government against the Poles” [haniebna polityka rządu pruskiego względem Polaków].³²

The national Polonia press recapitulated the history of German persecution of the Poles going back to Bismarck and expressed the conviction that the new persecution, while arousing fear, indignation and the demand for revenge, „deepens in our spirit, hardens and fixes the conviction that we will persevere, we will survive, and triumph despite everything” [coraz głębiej zakorzenia się w duszy naszej, hartuje się i staje niezłomnem przekonanie, że wytrwamy, przetrwamy i zwyciężymy pomimo wszystko].³³ There were also more reports of the contemporary German – Polish school and language conflict. Readers found out about the banning of the speaking of Polish in the schoolyard in Krotoszyn and about the Gnieźno children who returned their German-language catechisms explaining to the teacher that their parents told them that „to pray in German was a mortal sin and that their parents and priests ordered them not to sin” [iż po niemiecku modlić się jest grzechem śmiertelnym, a rodzice i duchowni zakazali im grzeszyć].³⁴ The Toruń trial of Polish secondary schools students who were members of a secret society to promote the study of Polish history and literature also made the news.³⁵

While the reports of the canning of the Polish children appeared shortly after their occurrence, the Września affair did not immediately become a national crusade. The question of “equal rights” dominated the Second Polish Catholic Congress, which also grappled with the future of Polish schools in America. Furthermore, the Congress met in the shadow of the assassination of President William Mc Kinley by Leon Czołgosz, a second-generation American Pole. Czołgosz’s act profoundly disturbed American Polonia. Although Czołgosz acted alone, the press railed against anarchists. Czołgosz’s action provoked feelings of shame among Polish community leaders that worried how American society would view Poles. They disassociated the assassin from their community, more than one denying that Czołgosz could be a Pole.³⁶ American Polonia also followed the PRCU’s 27th Convention [Sejm]. The Convention opened on October 1, 1902 in Syracuse, New York, under a portrait of Mc Kinley draped in mourning, symbolic of the cloud over American Polonia. Among the items the delegates to the convention discussed was the creation a federation of Catholic organizations around which American Polonia

³¹ “Z Poznańskiego. Zajście we Wrześni”, *Zgoda*, 20 czerwiec 1901.

³² “Wojna z dziecimi!” *Ameryka*, 22 czerwiec 1901.

³³ “Prześladowanie pruskie”, *Zgoda*, 20 czerwiec 1901.

³⁴ “Z Księstwa – Znowu denuncyacya”, *Naród Polski*, 19 czerwiec 1901, and “Z Ziemi Ojczystej – Protest maluczkich”, *Zgoda*, 18 lipiec 1901.

³⁵ “Proces toruński”, *Zgoda*, 17 październik 1901.

³⁶ Mc Kinley was assassinated in Buffalo. For a discuss of the reaction of Buffalo’s community leaders see William G. Falkowski, “Accommodations and conflicts: Patterns of Polish immigrant adaptation to industrial capitalism and American political pluralism in Buffalo, New York, 1873 – 1901” (Unpublished doctoral thesis: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1990), 420 – 50.

could unite. The unification of American Polonia was still in the future, but the favorable assessment of the convention by the PNA, the PRCU's chief rival, led Mieczysław Haiman to comment that „new winds were blowing between the two organizations”.³⁷

The assassination of Mc Kinley also clouded the 14th Convention [Sejm] of the PNA, which met two weeks later in Toledo, Ohio. Here the delegates heard the editor of *Zgoda* declare that there are no Polish anarchists and the remarkable statement that while Czołgosz's father was a Pole that that does not spiritually make the son one. Among the other matters reported on were the Educational Department's [Wydziół Oświaty] efforts to introduce Polish into American public schools. The convention's resolution affirmed the delegates' loyalty to the United States. The resolution also expressed the delegates' nationalism. Addressing the Poles in Poland, “our brother blood of our blood, bones of our bones” [nasi bracia krew z krwi naszej i kość z kości], the delegates presented their highest regards to Poland, “the martyr of nations” [ta męczennica narodów] and to all those struggling for its independence. The resolution likewise recognized the National League [Liga Narodowa] and “the legally functioning authorities of the Polish state” [prawnie funkcjonującą władzę Państwa Polskiego]. Identifying its program with the Polish League in Europe, the PNA delegates considered themselves “the representatives of this idea in the Polish American community” [przestawicielei idei tej w społeczeństwie polsko - amerykańskim].³⁸

The events that made Września a *cause celebre* among the American Poles were those that internationalized the affair elsewhere, the trial of the arrested parents and pupils in November 1901, and the harsh sentences [a total of nineteen years to twenty-years] imposed on the defendants.³⁹ For *Ameryka* the trial verdict was proof that in the German courts the principle was “power above the law” [siłą przed prawem]. The hidden motive for taking a school matter to the courts was to drive a wedge between Poles and the German Catholic Center Party and to prepare German society, as the victor, to realize the HaKaTa program.⁴⁰ This commentary was accompanied by Henryk Sienkiewicz's appeal “to Polish mothers”.⁴¹

Sienkiewicz's appeal put Września on American Polonia's agenda. *Naród Polski* and *Zgoda*, as well as local papers published it in its entirety along with commentaries.⁴² For *Zgoda* the Września and Toruń trials occasioned an article brimming with contempt for HaKaTa-ism. The „civilized world” was now aware of the Polish plight because of „the ineffective and in the highest degree malicious Prussian government's jerking around in order to crush the national spirit of the Poles” [bezsilnemu a w najwyższym stopniu złośliwemu szarpania się rządu pruskiego w

³⁷ Haiman, *Zjednoczenie Polskie Rzymsko-Katolickie*, 184 – 88.

³⁸ *Osada*, 524, 527, 531 – 32.

³⁹ Kulczycki, *School Strikes*, 54; Kulczycki, *Strajki szkolne*, 98.

⁴⁰ “Po procesie wrzesińskim”, *Ameryka*, 14 grudzień 1901.

⁴¹ “Głos Henryka Sienkiewicza”, *Ameryka* 14 grudzień 1901.

⁴² “Henryk Sienkiewicz do matek polskich”, *Zgoda*, 5-ego grudzień 1901; “Odzewa Sienkiewicza”, *Naród Polski*, 11-ego grudnia 1901, and *Kuryer Polski*, 7 grudnia 1901.

celu stłumienia ducha narodowego w polakach].. „Infected with poison of hakataism, a government that once distinguished itself with power and political understanding even in what it did that was bad, now has declared war on children and women” [Zrażony jadem hakatyizmu, rząd ten, niegdyś odznaczający się siłą i rozumem politycznym nawet w tem, co czynił złego, wypowiedział w ostatnich czasach wojnę dzieciom i kobietom]. The spirit of the participants in earlier insurrectionary battles imbued the Polish school children, whom *Zgoda* described as „true martyrs for faith and the fatherland” [prawdziwych męczenników za wiarę i ojczyznę]. The Polish National Alliance, as „a national and patriotic organization” [organizacja narodowa i patriotyczna] deeply shared the suffering of “its brothers and sisters in the old country and joined with all of Poland” [swoich braci i sióstr kraju i łączy się z całą Polską] in expressing its indignation at the actions of the Prussian government. On November 30 the Alliance’s Central Government [Zarząd Centralny] voted to send a protest to the English-language press about “the inhuman and unjust policy of the Prussian government whose treatment of Poles merits being labeled the shame of the XXth century” [niehumanym i niuprawnej polityce rządu pruskiego, który swoim postępowaniem z polakami zasłużył sobie na miano hańby XX-go stulecia]. The PNA Central Government united with the Poles in Europe and voted \$50 for the convicted students and women and called upon all its members to send similar donations to *Zgoda*.⁴³ The PNA Central Government then issued a separate appeal to all PNA members protesting the “barbaric action of a government that wants to pass as civilized”. Germany was criticized for its hypocrisy in protesting British policy toward the Boers in South Africa when it permitted the same atrocities against a nation that it seized with brutal force”. Finally, PNA members were called upon to organize public protest meetings.⁴⁴

Other Polonia organizations also mobilized in support of the victims. The recently established Polish Women’s Alliance [Związek Polek], in response to a call from Zygmunt Miłkowski, initiated the collection of signatures protesting the tormenting of Polish children and their mothers in the Prussian sector. The Alliance energetically appealed to its members and to all Polish women in America.⁴⁵ The Executive Committee that grew out of the Second Polish Catholic Congress imitated the European Poles and urged local protests against the Germanization of the religious education of young Poles. The Executive Committee called for a show of sympathy and contributions for the striking children of Września who it believed fight the same battle as itself to preserve the national language and culture. The appeal “for bread for the orphans” [na chleb dla sierot] declared that the amount of funds collected was not as important as “documenting our spiritual unity with [our] brothers on the Polish lands. In this way we will show that after a hundred years of slavery *we are strong through unity*. We will prove that we, across the ocean, deeply feel the wrongs committed by the Prussians against Polish children and the families defending them” [o zadokumentowanie naszej duchowej łączności z braćmi na ziemi polskiej. Pokażmy, że dzis po stu latach niewoli *jesteśmy silni jednością*. Udowodnijmy, że i my, za morzami, odczuwamy głęboko krzywdy wyrządzone przez Prusaków

⁴³ “Przeciwko Hakacie”, *Zgoda*, 5 grudzień 1901.

⁴⁴ “Do Grup Związku N. P.” *Zgoda*, 12 grudzień 1901. See Appendix A.

⁴⁵ Jadwiga Karłowiczowa, *Historia Związku Polek w Ameryce. Przyczynki do poznania Dusz Wschodźstwa Polskiego w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej* (Chicago, ILL: Związek Polek w Ameryce, 1938), 39. Ameryka published Jeż’s appeal. “List T. T. Jeża”, *Ameryka*, 21 grudzień 1902.

dzieciom polskim i rodzicom stawającym w ich obronie]. People were asked to send their donations before the New Year to the Reverend Kazimierz Sztucko, the pastor of Chicago's Holy Cross Parish.⁴⁶ The Committee also inspired stories about the Września affair in the English language press.⁴⁷

Protest meetings were another aspect of the nationwide campaign to bring the Września affair and Prussia policy to the attention of the American public and media. These meetings educated both the immigrants and the American public about the issues. Among the early protests was “an indignation meeting” [indygnacyjne posiedzenia] held in Saint Kazimierz Parish in Milwaukee on December 22, 1901 and led by the pastor, Reverend Idzi Tarasiewicz. Reverend Jan Blechacz, the main speaker, presented “the hypocrisy and breach of faith of the Prussian government from the time of the Teutonic Knights to the present” [obłudę i niedotrzymanie słowa rządu pruskiego od Krzyżaków aż do tego czasu]. As was usual with these protests, those assembled adopted a resolution condemning Prussia policy while expressing support for the victims and took up a collection for their relief.⁴⁸ That same day in Buffalo three Polish women's societies organized a meeting in Fillmore Hall. Everyone heard a Miss Piechocka, who only the month before had returned from Września, assure the women that “everything the wire services and gazettes publish is true” [to wszystko jest prawdą co telegramy krajowe i gazety piszą] and contributed \$22.65 for the Września victims.⁴⁹ In Grand Rapids, Michigan, also on December 22, \$500 was raised. Grand Rapids Polonia was warned of their “obligation” not to buy goods “Made in Germany”. The pastor, Reverend Szymon Pongania used Września in his sermon to speak against intermarriage. He regretted that some Polish women married Germans, Irish, French, and men from other nationalities and lost the Polish language, customs and religion.⁵⁰ In Boston a week later the crowd in the overfilled hall collected \$21 and voted a resolution to be published in the English-language Press.⁵¹ That same day in Saint Louis, Missouri \$30 was collected at a meeting in Stollers Hall. The beautiful Polish of an American-born speaker, Miss Mielczarek, was lauded as an example “for many of our young ladies who, when forced to speak Polish – make you shut your ears ... and flee”. The absence of the local clergy was also noted.⁵²

There was of course protest in Chicago. On January 10, 1902 Polish and non-Polish speakers filled Pułaski Hall and condemned the “barbaric action of the Prussians”. Judge Józef La

⁴⁶ “Na chleb dla sierot”, *Naród Polski*, 18 grudnia 1901. See Appendix B.

⁴⁷ Ks. K. Sztucko, O.S.C., “Trzechmiesięczna działalność Wdziału Wykonowczego”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 18 stycznia 1902.

⁴⁸ “Protest parafii św. Kazimierza”, *Kuryer Polski*, 23 grudnia 1901. See Appendix C. The organizing committee also sent a letter of support to defense attorney Wolinski. See Appendix D.

⁴⁹ “Buffalo, N.Y.” *Kuryer Polski*, 28 grudnia 1901; and “Wiec niewiast polskich w Buffalo, N.Y.” *Ameryka*, 4 stycznia 1902.

⁵⁰ “Z osad polskich – Z Grand Rapids, Mich.” *Kuryer Polski*, 27 grudnia 1901.

⁵¹ “Z Boston, Mass.” *Zgoda*, 2 stycznia 1902.

⁵² „Z osad polskich – St. Louis, Mo.” *Ameryka*, 11 stycznia 1902.

Buy chaired the protest attended by priests and members of church societies and fraternal societies.⁵³ Press reports tell us that all speakers were greeted with thunderous applause [grzmotami oklasków], particularly three American judges who contemptuously condemned Prussian actions in Toruń, Poznań, and Gnieźno and the teachers in Września. Judge Tutshill expressed the moral condemnation of the United States for the tearing away of the Polish language from the children of Września. “A storm of applause” [burza oklasków] that shook Pułaski Hall greeted the judge when he declared “Shame on you! Shame! Shame!” [*Hańba wam! Hańba! Hańba!*]. Elated by the meeting, the reporter for *Dziennik Chicagoski* was sure that the German Consul in Chicago would report to his government what “free Americans think of the Września affair” [co sądzą wolni Amerykanie o sprawie wrzesińskiej] and that the meeting’s objective had been achieved.⁵⁴

Milwaukee, a city with large German and Polish populations, was an active center of protest. After the trial and Sienkiewicz’s appeal, nearly every December issue of Michał Kruska’s *Kuryer Polski* carried a story about Września, protests in Germany and other countries, and about protests in Wisconsin and in neighboring states.⁵⁵ The fiery Kruska, who was the brother of Reverend Waclaw Kruska, went so far as to call for a boycott of goods from Prussia and Germany. He pointedly told Polish parents that at a time when the Prussian government was punishing Polish children and mothers to buy goods “made in Germany” is “simply a crime” [poprostu zbrodnią]. The Poles in America should join Poles elsewhere in the world and boycott German goods because Germans “wish to eradicate our nationality” [chcą narodowość naszą wytępić]. Kruska exhorted the Poles to defend “our nationality” and those in the Old Country and at the same time weaken “the Prussians, our most brutal enemy” by boycotting German goods.⁵⁶ Using the same logic that he used to justify the economic boycott, Kruska also scolded those Poles who attended “the Huns’s ball”, an annual event organized by German army veterans at Kościuszko Hall. The editor found such behavior shameful “when Prussians shamelessly before the eyes of the world declared a life and death struggle against us” [gdy Prusacy bezwstydnie na oczach całej świata wydali nam walkę na śmierć i życie] and were doing “everything to realize the Bismarckian slogan ‘ausrotten’” [gdy dokładają wszelkich usiłowań by przeprowadzić swe bismarkowskie hasło ‘ausrotten’]. Polish attendance at the ball was “inexplicable” [nie ma wytłómaczenia].⁵⁷

The call for a boycott did not resonate in Polonia. In immigrant households and in daily life, politics receded before convenient economic relations with local German or Jewish businesses and with one’s neighbors. Nevertheless, the indignation over Września was genuine,

⁵³ La Buy (1846 – 1916) was a veteran of the Civil War and the first Pole to attain the judiciary bench in Chicago.

⁵⁴ “Polacy w Chicago – Demonstracja w hali Pułaskiego”, and “Nie robi sobie nic z opinii świata cywilizowanego”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 11 stycznia 1902 and 13 stycznia 1902.

⁵⁵ A recent study about Polish – German relations in Milwaukee makes no mention of Września. See Dorota Praszalowicz, *Stosunki Polsko-Niemieckie na Obczyźnie. Polacy i Niemcy Imigranci w Milwaukee, Wisconsin (USA) 1860 – 1920* (Kraków: Universitas).

⁵⁶ M. K. “NIE KUPUJECIE TOWARÓW STEMPLOWANYCH ‘MADE IN GERMANY’”, *Kuryer Polski*, 11 grudnia 1901.

⁵⁷ “Nie Czują Krzywdz Narodu”, *Kuryer Polski*, 9 grudnia 1901.

and on Sunday evening, January 19, 1902, 5,000 Poles gathered in Kościuszkó Hall to commemorate the January Insurrection and to protest the Września affair. Mr. F. H. Jabłoński delivered an oration on the January Insurrection, and was followed by Reverend Canon J. Gluski who linked the Milwaukee demonstration to the world-wide protest against the Prussian action. Gluski's speech moved many to tears, as did a rendition of "The Complaint" [Skarga] by a male choir, and a speech by Miss Bronisława Rajska. Miss Rajska called upon Polish mothers to educate their children as good Poles and faithful Catholics, and concluded that every Polish mother ought to remember that "the mission of Polish mothers is sacred" [posłannictwo matki polski jes święte]. Those present then expressed their solidarity with the persecuted, the innocent children, and the assaulted families. They also voiced their "deep contempt" [głęboką pogardę] for the Prussian government for using barbaric methods against the Poles and at the same time their confidence that nation will not be destroyed. The protestors also assured those being persecuted that "the Poles in America are always prepared to assist materially and morally". Further, they promised to print their resolution in the American press as a reminder that "Poles know about the annihilation and life and death battle decreed against them and of which they are not afraid" [Polacy wiedzą o wydanem przeciw sobie haśle zagłady i walki na śmierci i życie i że jej się nie lękają]. Finally, the meeting ended when everyone stood and sang "God Save Poland" [Boże coś Polskę]. The reporter covering the story speculated that perhaps never have "the imploring words and tones of this national prayer risen to the Creator's feet with such feeling and power as from the bosoms of the several thousand person public gathered yesterday to mark the heroism of the January Uprising and at the protest meeting". [błagalne słowa i tony tej modlitwy narodowej nie szły do stóp Twórcy z takim uczuciem i siłą ja z piersi zebranej wczoraj z okazji obchodu męczeństwa z powstania z roku 1863 i wiecu protestującego].⁵⁸

Crowded protest demonstrations were held in other large cities, such as Detroit, Michigan, Cleveland, Ohio, New York, New York, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Newark, New Jersey, Baltimore, Maryland, and also in smaller cities like South Bend, Indiana, Adams and Salem, Massachusetts, and Utica, New York.⁵⁹ The Detroit demonstration, which was attended by Mayor Maybury and Bishop Foley, was favorably reported in one of Michigan's most influential papers, the *Detroit Free Press* (January 27, 1902). The article even ended with the publication of stanzas from *Boże coś Polskę*. *Zgoda's* account noted that everyone participated, including the Czech parish.⁶⁰ In Cleveland five PNA groups called a meeting of all Poles in Cleveland to protest Prussian behavior. The Cleveland protesters expressed "our amazement that one could find in Prussia such a barbaric court as the one in Gniezno" [nasze zdziwienie, iż może się w Prusach znaleźć tak barbarzyński sąd, podobny do gnieźnieńskiego] that imposed such harsh sentences upon the victims and appealed to "all noble thinking people and lovers of freedom to condemn the barbaric activity unworthy of a free nation" [szlachetnie mżślących ludzi i miłujących

⁵⁸ „Protest Polaków w Milwaukee”, *Kuryer Polski*, 20 styczeń 1902. The resolution also was published in Chicago. See "Wiec w Milwaukee", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 21 styczeń 1902. See Appendix E.

⁵⁹ For Newark, N.J., Utica, N.Y., and Adams, MA. see "Z osad polskich", *Ameryka*, 11 i 18 styczeń 1902. For Baltimore, MD see "Co słycać?" *Zgoda*, 27 luty 1902.

⁶⁰ "Polacy w Ameryce – Z Detroit, Mich." *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 31 styczeń 1902. "Echo z Wiecu Polskiego w Detroit", *Zgoda*, 27 luty 1902. See Appendix F.

wolność, by potępiły barbarzyński czyn niezgodny narodowych celów].⁶¹ “Thousands” gathered at the Irving Hall in New York City at a protest meeting that was addressed in Polish by the pastor of Saint Stanislaus Parish, Reverend Jan Strzelecki. A socialist, Mr. Cieszewski, delivered a long speech in English in which he compared Emperor Wilhelm to Herod. The next speaker, Mr. Dembski, called for unity and for support of the National Treasury [Skarb Narodowy] and for embracing the idea “of rebuilding Poland within its former boundaries”.⁶² Those present also collected \$300 for the victims of the Prussian “butchers” [katów].⁶³ Over 5,000 people jammed Pittsburgh’s old City Hall to express their indignation and collect \$200 for the “orphans”.⁶⁴ In South Bend, Indiana, the strongest community protest of conditions in the old country was aimed at Prussia for policies in their Polish provinces, the birthplace of most local immigrants. There was a lively mass meeting with appropriate resolutions and \$118.23 was collected.⁶⁵ The protestors at Salem, Massachusetts collected \$16.40 and appealed, in the name of “national and human rights” to everyone in the world and to all mothers in placing the Września affair “before the court of civilized nations” [przed sąd narodów cywilizowanych].⁶⁶

Reportedly there were hundreds of protest meetings arranged by the American Poles.⁶⁷ In Chicago, where the largest concentration of American Poles resided, protest resolutions were adopted in late December 1901 and early 1902 at the parishes of Saint Stanislaus, Saint John Kanty, and Saint Mary. Now in mid-January a series of protest meetings were planned in five Chicago parishes. The initiative according to *Dziennik Chicagoski* came from the Central Government of the PNA, but the organizing committee reflected the indignation of a united community. The PRCU president, Leon Szopiński, attended the initial committee meetings in December 1901, as did representatives of other organizations. Reflecting the new winds blowing through the PNA and PRCU, Szopiński agreed with the PNA idea to organize a large meeting in one of Chicago’s auditoriums in order to reveal “the villainy of the Prussian government and the vile persecution of the Poles in the Prussian partition” [nikczemność rządu pruskiego podłe prześladowanie Polaków pod zaborem pruskim].⁶⁸ The initial objective was to organize a mass

⁶¹ “Rezolucja wypracowana przez komitet Polaków w Cleveland, Ohio 4-ego styczeń 1902 r.” *Kuryer Polski*, 11 styczeń 1902; and “W sprawie wrzesińskiej”, *Zgoda*, 9 styczeń 1902. See Appendix G.

⁶² „Polacy w Ameryce – Z New Yorku, N.Y.” *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 4 luty 1902. For the resolution see Appendix H. *Zgoda* published an appeal from an organizing committee headed by L. Fremikowski for a protest meeting on January 28, 1902 in Everett Hall on 4th Street. All Poles, regardless of different religious and political views, were encouraged to participate in „our national protest” [nasz protest narodowy] „Odezwa do Polaków w New Yorku i okolicy”, *Zgoda*, 23 styczeń 1902. It is possible that there were two meetings in New York City. See Appendix I.

⁶³ *Parafia św. Stanisława B. i M. w New Yorku 1874 – 1949* (New York, NY: 1949), 34; and Louis L. Makulec, *Church of St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr on East Seventh Street in New York City 1874 – 1954* (New York, NY: The Roman Catholic Church of St. Stanislaus, B. M., 1954), 35.

⁶⁴ „Z osad polskich”, *Kuryer Polski*, 6 styczeń 1902.

⁶⁵ Frank A. Renkiewicz, “The Polish Settlement of St. Joseph County, Indiana: 1855 – 1935” [University of Notre Dame. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1967], 257 – 58.

⁶⁶ “Z osada polskich – Salem, MASS.” *Ameryka*, 8 luty 1902. See Appendix J.

⁶⁷ Makulec, 35.

meeting and to adopt protest resolutions about Września, following Galicia's example. However, time passed after the trial and sentencing and by mid-January the idea of broadening the demonstration to protest Prussian as well as Moscovite outrages was bruited about. The approaching anniversary of the 1863 justified this approach. The parishes waited upon the PNA's call because to its Central Government "belonged the honor of raising and acting upon the idea of calling of a general meeting" [należy się zaszczyt poruszenia i wprowadzenia w czyn myśli zwołania wiecu ogólnego]. Nevertheless, the Chicago meeting would be something "entirely original, greater, broader and more magnificent" than meetings in Poland or elsewhere in America, going beyond Września and the Toruń and Poznań trials.⁶⁹

In a show of unity, PRCU president Szopiński chaired the organizing committee, assisted by Teodor M. Heliński of the PNA. Polonia's protest demonstration on Sunday, January 26, 1902 was held in five parishes – Saint Adalbert [św. Wojciecha], Our Lady of Perpetual Help [Najśw. Maryi Panny od Nieustającej Pomocy], Holy Trinity [św. Trójcy], Saint Joseph [św. Józefa], and Immaculate Conception [Niepokalanego poczęcia N.M.P.]. A reported 25,000 Poles and their supporters gathered that day. The manifestation's purpose was to draw American society's attention to the Prussian outrages. The organizers wanted the American press to report the speeches and print the common resolution adopted at each of the individual meetings. The English-language speakers included: Judge E. E. Dunne, Matthew P. Brady, Professor Thomas W. Taylor, and Daniel Donahoe, while on the Polish side the editor of *Naród Polski*, Dr. Adam Sz wajkart, and several distinguished clergy, including Reverend Sztuczko, the secretary of the Executive Committee of the Second Polish – Catholic Congress, shared the platform with Szopiński and Heliński.⁷⁰

The announcement of the Chicago demonstrations was reported in major Chicago English-language papers, and even in some German-language papers, while most of the city's major papers reported on the demonstrations. The protestors unanimously adopted resolutions in both Polish and English. The English-language resolution included a historical prologue to educate American society. The prologue opened by asserting the sanctity of one's native tongue: "[O]ne's native language is a sacred heritage – it is God's gift". A native language was "the sweetest music" one hears. Proof of a language's sanctity was the effort the foreigners in America, including Germans who managed to have their language introduced into "public schools at the expense of the State", invested in schools where "their children might learn the language of their fathers". Hence, attempts government attempts to deprive a nation and parents of "this treasure, this sacred right of parents to teach their children their mother tongue, is a barbarous crime".⁷¹

The prologue then became a brief historical discourse about Poland and Polish – German relations, as seen from the Polish side. Millions of people spoke Polish, Poland existed for ten

⁶⁸ "Notatki z Chicago", *Kuryer Polski*, 20 and 26 grudnia 1901.

⁶⁹ "Uwagi", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 17 stycznia 1902.

⁷⁰ "Wielka Demonstracja", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 27 stycznia 1902.

⁷¹ "The following resolutions, protesting against the Prussian government were adopted by the Poles of Chicago at 5 mass meetings held in various parts of the City", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 27 stycznia 1902. See Appendix K.

centuries and was a bulwark of Christianity, and lost its national independence because of “the rapacious greed of its neighbors”. The prologue accused Prussia from the beginning of the partitions of not only plundering Polish material possessions, but also depriving Poles of “their language and religion – to make them paupers and Prussians”. Prussian policies intended to denationalize the Poles were detailed, including the substitution of German for Polish place names, the prohibition of business signs in Polish, the removal of the Polish language from the schools, German colonization, the staffing of nearly all administrative positions with “German carpetbaggers” who were motivated only by hatred of Poles, and the arrest of Polish students “simply because they belonged to Polish literary societies”. The prologue then recapitulated the Września affair, the unmerciful flogging of „little students” by their teachers and the arrest and imprisonment of parents for the „crime” of defending their children. The Prussian occupation was but „a long chain of persecution perpetrated upon the Polish people in their own native land”.

The resolution itself was a protest in the name of the 200,000 Chicago Poles and the two million Poles in America, more fortunate than their brethren under Prussian rule because they enjoy „the blessing of true liberty under the stars and stripes of this grand and glorious republic, the grandest and noblest nation on earth”. The American Poles expressed their „indignation, abhorrence and contempt” for the Prussian government and its policies and called „upon the free born American people, upon the whole civilized world, upon the mothers of every land and clime, no matter what tongue they speak, to whom the lullaby songs of their native tongue, with which they cradle their little ones to sleep, are ever so dear, to sit in judgement”. The accused stood charged „with torturing little children because they refused to lisp their prayers to God in other than their mother tongue”. They also stood charged with barbarously imprisoning the mothers protesting the torturing of their children. The Prussian Minister Von Buelow did not deny the basic facts, and „the candid public” was invited „to pass judgement upon the vaunted Prussian civilization”. Finally, the protesters extended their „heartfelt sympathies” to „our suffering brethren across the ocean” and their „warmest admiration for those little martyrs who exhibited such heroic virtues, who dared to defy their tyrants, as well as for their devoted mothers and fathers”. An appeal was raised „to the God of all nations”, who it was noted „speaks and understands all tongues”, that God would grant these martyrs the „same fortitude that characterized our early Christians to enable them to withstand this barbarous persecution of their modern Neros”.⁷²

The Polish-language text covered much of the same ground, but with more emotion and passion. The resolution asked if there was a heart that not pained by the suffering of the mothers whose only crime was that “they were mothers, mothers of Polish children! Let the shout of despair torn out of the mothers’ bosoms move all hearts and for centuries brand the foreheads of the Prussian torturers. History and God will judge this crime and measure out justice”. [że były matkami, matkami dzieci polskich! Niech krzyk rozpaczny piersiom macierzyńskim wydarty poruszy serca wszystkich i piętem hańby naznaczą na wieki czoła katów pruskich. Osądzi tę zbrodnię historia, osądzi Bóg i wymierzy sprawiedliwości]. Finally, the protestors unanimously declared that they will not “cease in our effort to tear off the mask from the barbarous Prussandom” [nie ustawać w naszej pracy około zdzierania maski z barbazyńskiego prusactwa] and pledged to call shortly a common meeting in one of Chicago’s great halls “to raise once again

⁷² *Ibid.*

and in the most ceremonious manner the voice of protest and indignation against the Prussian government's brutal persecution of Poles" [ażeby tamże raz jeszcze jak najuroczściej podnieść głos protestu i oburzenia przeciw brutalnemu prześladowaniu Polaków przez rząd pruski].⁷³

A report from the rally held at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in the Bridgeport section of Chicago conveys the mood of the day. The report details the rituals followed at the numerous patriotic and religious commemorations that marked the calendar of American Polonia. The first signs of life appeared early in the morning as the local religious and secular societies entered the Church *en corpore* at 7:30 a.m. for Mass for the victims of the November 1830 Insurrection, a traditional commemoration in American Polonia up until World War I. This commemoration served on January 26, 1902, as a stage for the Września protest. At 2 p.m. the church societies marched off to 32nd street where they were joined by the national societies, and together they marched to South Morgan and 32nd street to the hall of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. At 3 p.m. the chairman of the protest, Leon Czeslawski opened the meeting and called upon the pastor, Reverend Stanisław Nawrocki, to chair the meeting and Antoni Sucholaski to serve as secretary. There were thirteen points on the program:

1. A prayer sung by the Saint Agnes Choir.
2. An address in English by Judge E. E. Dunne that "made a deep impression on the listeners [zrobiła głębokie wrażenie na słuchaczach].
3. A declamation, "Poland lives" [Polska żyje] by J. Kwiatkowska.
4. The song "Over the grave" [Na groby], sung by the Zorza Society.
5. A lecture by W. Bakowski on the present persecutions of "Polonia under the Prussians" [Polonia pod Prusakiem].
6. A solo, "The Complaint" [Skarga] sung by Ms. M. Brychel.
7. A speech by Dr. Adam Szwajkart.
8. A declamation, "From the Poznań field" [Z poznańskiej niwy] by M.Lass.
9. A speech by Citizen Czeslawski that also left a deep impression upon the listeners.
10. A declamation by Miss Sikorska, "Hail to You" [Cześć wam].
11. "The Guard on the Vistula" [Straż nad Wisłą] sung by the Saint Cecilia Choir.
12. The reading of the protest and resolution in English and Polish by Attorney N. L. Piotrowski, and its unanimous adoption.
13. Living scenes [żywy obraz], "Poland in Chains" [Polska w kajdanach] and "Freedom, Equality, and Independence" [Wolność, Równość, i Niepodległość], followed by a collection for the children of Września.

The protest concluded with the singing of the "imploring hymn" God Save Poland, and according to the recording secretary, the demonstration "would remain long in the memory of Bridgeport Polonia, and God grant that there will be more" [obchód ten, pozostanie długo w pamięci Polonii w Bridgeport. Daj Boże więcej takich].⁷⁴

⁷³ *Ibid.* The text was also published in Stanisław Osada, *Historia Związku Narodowego Polskiego i Rozwój Ruchu Narodowego Polskiego w Ameryce Północnej. W dwudziestą piątą rocznicę założenia Związku* (Chicago, ILL: Związek Narodowy Polski, 1905), 536 – 37.

⁷⁴ Antoni Sucholaski, "Obchód na Bridgeporcie", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 30 styczeń 1902.

The PNA and the PRCU through their lodges and media were prominent in the mobilization of the American Poles. Patriotic indignation fueled the mobilization, but organizational competition mixed with national sentiments. In Pittsburgh, a group of female PNA members issued an “appeal to the Polish women” to join with Piasecka, “who did not hesitate to challenge and to slap the face of the oppressors of our nation” [która nie wahała się rzucić rękawicy gnębicielom narodu naszego]. Invoking Piasecka as an example, the signers of the appeal declared that “here in this foreign land we have work, the work of defending the native language among our youth in this free country where it is so easy to denationalize” [tu na tej obcej mamy pracę, pracę bronięcia języka ojczystego wśród naszej młodzieży ta ne tej wolne ziemi tak łatwą jest do wynarodowienia]. The women called upon others to unite into a society that would encourage education among women not only to make them exemplary mothers but also “good and exemplary Poles who competently will be able to inoculate future generations with hatred and contempt for anything that stands in the way of the armed winning of the independence of Poland and the spread of morality and human happiness” [dobre i przykładowe polki, które umiejętnie zaszczipiać będą w przyszłe pokolenie nienawiści i wzgardę do wstypkiego cokolwiek stoi na drodze w wywalczeniu niepodległości Polski i szerzeniu moralności i szczęścia ludzkiego]. The declaration concluded by informing the readers that the PNA at its recent convention in Toledo had voted to allow women to organize PNA lodges, which is what the signers of the appeal did. Thus the appeal to patriotism and the defense of the native language and to motherhood and the dignity of women was also an appeal for new members for the new PNA lodge.⁷⁵

The PNA organizers recognized the gender factor in the Września affair and the broadly based sympathy for the victims among American Poles. The recently organized PWA was indignant. The new fraternal, founded by middle class women who were not permitted to join the PNA, was committed to equal rights for women as well as to the promotion of Polish patriotism and the development of the national spirit. When the PWA held its 3rd Convention in Chicago in June 1902 the delegates, aware of events in Prussian Poland, approved the motion moved by Łucja Wołowska “to stand in honor of the Polish women who were suffering because the Września affair” [uczcić przez powstanie te polki, które cierpią za sprawę wrześnińską].⁷⁶

Września also echoed within Reverend Franciszek Hodur’s emerging Polish National Catholic Church. The school children of the Saint Stanislaus [św. Stanisław] Parish School in Scranton collected \$10 “among themselves for the persecuted youth in Prussia, in particular for the school children of Września” [pomiędzy sobą na rzecz prześladowanej młodzieży w Prusiech, zwłaszcza szkolnych dzieci we Wrześni].⁷⁷ For the new church, the issue was more than just emotional sentiment for persecuted children, but one linked to the Church’s very *raison d’etre*, the defense of the Polish language and the immigrants’ autonomous control of parish affairs and

⁷⁵ “Odezwa do Polek miasta Pittsburgha i okolicy”, *Zgoda*, 2 stycznia 1902.

⁷⁶ *Głos Polek*, I, no. 2 (Sierpień), 1902. Karłowiczowa omits this resolution in her history. *Karłowiczowa*, I, 40. *Głos Polek* was first published in July 1902, so there is little information about the PWA and Września demonstrations. See Thaddeus Radzilowski, “Głos Polek and the Polish Womens Alliance in America 1898 – 1917”, *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science* (Winter 1977), II, 2, 182 – 203.

⁷⁷ *Straż*, 21 grudzień 1901.

property. In December 1901 Hodur announced that services at Saint Stanislaus Church, departing from the Latin tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, were to be in Polish. Hodur in an editorial “to the Polish People of the United States” [Do Ludu Polskiego w Stanach Zjednoczonych] justified the decision on both religious and national grounds. As a child speaks in the language in which it can express its love for its father, “so we the children of God ought only in our native language to call out at the altar of Our Most Good and Most Merciful Father” [tak i my dzieci Boże, powinniśmy tylko w ojczystej mowie odzywać się u ołtarzy do naszego Najlepszego i Najlitściwszego Ojca]. Only a priest speaking in Polish and not in a dead language fulfills his role in explaining the feelings of the Polish nation before a judge and only then is “an authentic sacrificer and intermediary between the people and God who created and endowed us with the beautiful Polish language” [prawdziwym ofiarnikiem i pośrednikiem między ludem a Bogiem, który na stworzył i obdarzał przepiękną mową polską]. Crossing the line from religion to nationalism, Hodur declared that Poles prove “that we are an independent nation having the same rights to exist, to fame, and to happiness as have all other peoples” [iżesmy narodem samodzielnym mającym takie same prawa do bytu, do sławy i szczęścia, jak i te wszystkie inne ludy]. Only language unites Poles, the saddest among the peoples, into a “single living nation” [jeden żywy naród]. Hodur wanted “the powerful and sweet Polish tones” to sail across the ocean to the Carpathians, the Warta, and the Niemen and to say “to our amazed Brothers – Well, it lives – the eternal Polish language!” [zdumienym Bracio naszym oto żyje, otom polska mowa nieśmiertelna!] In an allusion to efforts to Germanize and Russify the Poles, Hodur referred to the contempt of emperors and kings and the efforts to crush the language by decrees. The charismatic cleric concluded: “Our enemies want to tear out from us the native language but the more it is held in contempt and persecuted, the more we love it – we make it the intermediary between the nation and God” [Nieprzyjaciele nasi chcą wydrzać nam mowę ojczystą, więc my umiłowawszy ją tembardziej wzgardzona i prześladowana – uczynimy ją pośrednikiem między narodem i Bogiem].⁷⁸

The persecution of the native language linked the Polish National Catholic Church to the suffering Poles in Germany and Russia, but the Church arose in America as a response to “the pressure of our enemies”, the Irish and German bishops who aimed for the “complete oppression of the Poles in America” [zupełne pogniębienie polaków w Ameryce]. To oppose the PNCC was to oppose those who strove to liberate the Polish nation. As proof, Hodur referred to the Pope’s order to the Polish clergy in Poznań to discourage agitation. This act should convince Poles “that our future, our victory depends upon us alone!” [że przyszłość nasza, zwycięstwo nasze spoczwa tylko w nas samych!] The same could be said Hodur went on, about those who in the face of the events in Września and elsewhere in the Poznań region suggested that friendship with Russia might be an appropriate Polish political strategy, a policy that Hodur rejected.⁷⁹ The next year, when Archbishop Kopp of Breslau [Wrocław] issued a pastoral letter that declared that national differences would lose their significance on the Day of Judgement, Hodur again raised his voice in indignation. He assailed both the “agents of the Vatican government” in the fatherland and the “papal agents” [i.e., the Roman Catholic bishops] in the United States that try in every way “to shatter and to crush the Polish nation so that no trace of it would remain” [aby tylko naród polski

⁷⁸ “Do Ludu Polskiego w Stanach Zjednoczonych”, *Straż*, 21 grudzień 1901.

⁷⁹ “Błędne Drogi”, *Straż*, 11 stycznia 1902.

zdruzgotać, zmiażdżyć i śladu po nim nie pozostawić]. Hodur invoked the Bishop of Salzburg's imprisonment of Saint Methodius for preaching in Slavic and the sign over the crucified Christ in Hebrew, Greek and Latin as a preface to his assertion that: "the Lord God Himself created languages and for this reason one can praise God in a Slavic language" [Pan Bóg tak samo stworzył i inne języki, dlatego i w języku słowiańskim wielbić można Boga].⁸⁰

There were additional protest demonstrations in February 1902 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, South Brooklyn, New York, and in Jersey City, New Jersey.⁸¹ However, the protests and demonstrations had peaked in January 1902, perhaps in part because the organizers linked them with the commemoration of the January 1863 Insurrection, a ritual in many communities. Fund-raising deadlines terminated in January, and attention turned to the planning for a 6,000 person rally in March in one of Chicago's great halls. The PRCU expressed doubts about a second rally, arguing that it would not resonate as loudly because the American press does not like a "repeat" [powtórka].⁸² However, the March visit of Prince Henry caused the organizers to reschedule the rally to coincide with the Polish Constitution Day celebration on May 4. Szopiński and Heliński feared that Prince Henry of Prussia would draw all attention from their efforts to inform the public.⁸³ Polonia now debated its posture with regard to the Prince's visit, and in Chicago both the Czechs and the Poles boycotted his visit. Their absence reportedly surprised Chicago's *Abendpost* that held that the American Germans were not responsible for the actions of Austrian Pan Germans. As for the Poles, the *Abendpost* declared that if the Poles in Germany learned Polish as quickly as the Poles in America learn English, then the HaKaTa-ists would not forbid them to speak Polish. An indignant *Dziennik Chicagoski* replied by wishing for a new Napoleon who would "liberate Barvaria, Wittemberg, and Saxony, return Alscase to France, Schleswick to Denmark and Silesia, Poznań and Prussia if only to Russia" [oswobodził Bawaryę, Wyrtembergię i Saksonię, zwrocił Alzacyę Francyi, Szlezwik Danii, Szlązk, Poznańskie i Prusy chociażby tylko Rosyi].⁸⁴

Another aspect of American Polonia's reaction to Września was a call, in both Cleveland and Chicago, for the "expulsion" of German from public schools. In Cleveland *Polonia w Ameryce* argued that teaching German burdens the financially under-financed school system and was as well a burden upon tax payers, especially those of non-German heritage. The paper also argued that neither American foreign nor commercial policy justified German in the curriculum. *Dziennik Chicagoski* supported the "expulsion" of German, and suggested mobilizing together with the Czechs, other Slavs, the Irish, Spanish, and French. At the same time, any insinuation that such action was mobilized by revenge was rejected because "not every German is a wild Prussian" [dzikim Prusakiem] and Polish Americans had nothing personal against "respectable" German Americans who like the Poles were American citizens.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ „Smutne porównanie”, *Straż*, 4 lipiec 1903.

⁸¹ “Co słyhać?” *Zgoda*, 20 luty 1902. For the Jersey City Protest see Appendix L.

⁸² „Wielka Demonstracja”, *Naród Polski*, 29 styczeń 1902.

⁸³ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 11 luty 1902.

⁸⁴ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 6 marzec 1902.

The press coverage of the Września affair was opportunity for the immigrant leadership to educate the immigrant and their children. There was extensive, in some cases “blanket” coverage of Września developments in all three areas of partitioned Poland. *Ameryka* ran such news under the headline “Echoes of the Września Affair” [Echa Sprawy Wrzesińskiej] or the “Września Trial” [Proces wrzesiński], beginning with the actual events in Września and the trial and verdict.⁸⁶ There were also long, polemical and nationalistic articles about the history of German – Polish relations and about Polish rights in Prussian Poland that dated back to the Congress of Vienna in 1815.⁸⁷ The media undoubtedly reinforced the idea of a unified Poland among the American Poles. Września was also an opportunity to educate the American public. It is not clear to what extent this objective was achieved because of the immigrant media and public protests. Some American media did report on the January 26, 1902 demonstration in Chicago and on protests elsewhere.⁸⁸ However, the American media also carried reports of the German – Polish language clashes, especially after Sienkiewicz’s appeal “to Polish mothers”.⁸⁹ The Polonia press astutely understood that Września was a public relations disaster for Germany, and exploited the opportunity by reporting extensively on the American and foreign press coverage. For Polonia’s media, such coverage focused invaluable public attention and sympathy on the Polish question as an international issue and at the same time reinforced the idea within the community that Poland was an important issue.⁹⁰

By Spring 1902 Września had entered into the vocabulary of Polonia’s public discourse as a powerful symbol of Polish resistance to denationalization that transcended the boundaries of partitioned Poland. The media and rally speakers invoked the language of martyrdom, and the children, deprived of the imprisoned parents who had rushed to their defense, were “the orphans”. When similar school strikes began to occur in the Kingdom of Poland, they became “the New Września” [Nowa Września], “the Russian Września” [Rosyjska ‘Września’], or “Moscow’s Września” [Września moskiewska].⁹¹ Stanisław Osada, a PNA publicist, grandiloquently

⁸⁵ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagowski*, 11 luty 1902.

⁸⁶ See for example, *Ameryka*, 21 and 28 grudzień 1901; 4, 18, 22, and 25 styczeń 1902; and 8 luty 1902. *Kuryer Polski*, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 19, 30 grudzień 1901. *Naród Polski*, 25grudzień 1901; 1, 8 styczeń, 1902. *Zgoda*, 19 and 26 grudzień 1901; 2, 9, 16 styczeń 1902.

⁸⁷ “Walka z Hakatyzmem – zabezpieczone prawa narodowe Polaków na Kongresie Wiedeńskim r. 1815”, *Ameryka*, 1 marzec 1902.

⁸⁸ “Poles Tell of Their Wrongs”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, LXI, no. 27 (January 27, 1902), 3. *Naród Polski* mentioned articles in *The Chicago Record Herald*, *Chronicle*, *Daily News*, *American*, *InterOcean*, and „others”. „Wielka Demonstracja”, *Naród Polski*, 29 styczeń 1902.

⁸⁹ “The Polish Language Question in Prussia”, *The Literary Digest*, XXIII, no. 20 (November 16, 1901), 614- 15. This summation of the European press also quotes *Zgoda*. See also “Polish People Indignant”, *The New York Times*, LI, no. 16,192 (November 29, 1901) and “German Treatment of Poles”, December 14, 1901.

⁹⁰ T. Siemiradzki, “Prusy przed sądem ludzkości”, *Zgoda*, 19 grudzień 1901; “Sprawa wrzesińska w Dziennikach Milwauckich”, *Kuryer Polski*, 12 grudzień 1901; “Polak Przeciw Prusakowi”, *Kuryer Polski*, 14 grudzień 1901 [translation of an article, “Poles against Prussian”, from the *Chicago Tribune*]. This issue also includes reports from the European press. See also “Bibliograficzne notatki. Co mówi o nas obca prasa”, *Zgoda*, 16 styczeń 1902; *Naród Polski*, 18 grudzień 1901.

declared these new acts of defiance “the harvest of the protest sown by the little hands of the children of Września against the violation of the most unpardonable laws of nature by the criminal partitioners of Poland”. [to plon zasianego rączętami dzieci wrześnińskich pod koniec roku 1901 protestu przeciwko gwałceniu najkarygodniejszych praw natury przez zbroniczych rozbiorców Polski].⁹²

In May 1902 American Polonia gathered to commemorate the Constitution of May 3, 1791. The major protest planned for a large Chicago auditorium for May 4 to protest Września did not occur. However, Września was one of the themes at the many traditional Polish Constitution Day commemorations that year. At the PNA commemoration in Chicago, and at commemorations organized by PNA lodges in Erie, Pennsylvania, Poznań, Michigan, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Portland, Oregon, Dunkirk and South Brooklyn, New York, and Bremond, Texas, Polish speakers, school children, and invited English-speaking guests invoked Września. They protested the policies and actions of the Prussian government and hailed the children and their parents. The victims had become exemplary models of patriotic behavior for American Polonia. In Minneapolis George T. Kozłowski speaking as neither an “alliancer” [związkowiec] or a “unionist” [unista], but as a Pole, told how the “accursed Prussian” [przykłyty Prusak] was trying to tear out the Polish language, beating Polish children and women who only wanted to pray in Polish, and imprisoning them. However, in America, Poles were free to preserve their national language and customs and to pray in their own language. Still there were many who shed their nationality and who were ashamed to speak Polish. If one only knew Poland’s history and its magnificent heroes you would not reject your nationality but would be “proud that you are born a Pole” [żeś się urodził polakiem].⁹³ In looking at Polonia’s future, Teodor M. Heliński, the PNA Secretary General, declared that the Prussian crimes aroused the national spirit [duch narodowy] that will not retreat before sacrifice and dedication.⁹⁴ Reflecting these themes, the May 3rd program in Portland, Oregon included the song “I am a Polish Child” [Jestem polskie dziecko], the poem “The Germans are coming” [Niemcy idą], and the recitation of “The Little Child’s Catechism [Katechizm małego dziecka].⁹⁵

Września served as warning against Americanization. In May 1902 the German priests of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee agreed to substitute English for German as the language of religious instruction. *Dziennik Chicagowski* worried that pressure would now be brought to bear on Polish schools because Polish pastors were subject to German and Irish school inspectors. However, the paper confidently opined that “the Americanizers would not have an easy time with the Poles” [tak łatwo pójdzie Amerykanizatorom z Polakami]. Citing the Poles in Prussian Poland who were not afraid of ministerial decrees or jail for the sake of learning religion in Polish, *Dziennik Chicagowski* believed that the absence of fines and penal threats would enable the

⁹¹ “Nowa Września”, *Zgoda*, 27 luty 1902; “Rosyjska ‘Września’”, *Ameryka*, 1 marzec 1902 and “Września moskiewska”, *Ameryka*, 22 marzec 1902.

⁹² *Osada*, 537.

⁹³ “Echa z obchodów – Z Minneapolis, Minn.” *Zgoda*, 22 maj 1902.

⁹⁴ “Obchód 3 –go Maja”, *Zgoda*, 8 maj 1902.

⁹⁵ “Echa z obchodów – Z Portland, Ore.” *Zgoda*, 22 maj 1902. For a verse occasioned by Września and published in the Polonia press see Appendix M.

Poles “with a united and unified determination easily to resist pressure from above with pressure from below” [przy zgodnem i solidarnem postępowaniu łatwo nam będzie odprzeć nacisk z góry, oporem z dołu].⁹⁶ Thus the militancy of the children and parents of Września was to inspire Polonia’s commitment to the maintenance of Polish language and culture in a foreign country.

Conclusions

Over the next two years, Września did not disappear from the pages of the Polonia press. However, subsequent coverage was of events in the Prussia. Reports of the Leipzig Tribunal’s decision affirming the penalties, the financial accounting of the Poznań and Galician committees, the flight and fate of Nepomucena Piasecka [a Września victim who fled Prussian Poland], the subsequent trial and acquittal of thirteen of the fourteen members of the Poznań Committee accused of abetting Piasecka and Smidowiczówna in their flight, and the transfer of funds from the Poznań to the Kraków committee appeared in Polonia newspapers.⁹⁷ The issue remained before Polonia, but Polonia’s protest demonstrations and collections on behalf of the children and parents were over.

While Polish American historiography either omits or gives scant attention to Września, the scale of Polonia’s reaction indicate that this was an important moment in the community’s history.⁹⁸ It was one of the first instances of fraternal cooperation between the PNA and the PRCU and an indication that fierce intra-fraternal strife that had characterized relations between the PNA and the PRCU belonged to the past. The show of PRCU - PNA unity in organizing the January 26, 1902 rallies in Chicago reflected a new spirit of cooperation between Polonia’s two leading insurance fraternal. Such cooperation established a precedent. There were areas of mutual patriotic and community interest where PNA and PRCU could work together or at least support each other. It is noteworthy that the PNA came to embrace the idea for the appointment of a Polish bishop. Victor Greene noted that the 1908 election of Reverend Paweł Rhode as the first Roman Catholic bishop of Polish origin was a triumph welcomed by both the clerical PRCU and the nationalist PNA. For American Polonia, Rhode’s election brought the slogans of God and Country together. Greene also concluded that the struggle for “equality of rights” advanced the ethnic consciousness of “the Polish – American rank and file”.⁹⁹ This conclusion is appropriate as well with regard to Polonia’s reaction during the Września affair.

The engagement of a significant part of American Polonia’s clergy and editors on behalf of the Września affair indicate that the community’s elite identified with the ideological homeland. However, the national scale of the numerous protest rallies and Polonia’s generous

⁹⁶ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 3 maj 1902.

⁹⁷ As examples see *Zgoda* 12, 19, 26 czerwiec, 3, 17, 24, 31 lipiec 1902; 4, 11, 25, czerwiec, 8, 15 październik 1903; and *Dziennik Chicagoski*, “Piasecka zbiega z Września”, 13 czerwiec 1902, and “Z ziem polskich – Września”, 20 czerwiec 1903..

⁹⁸ Passing mention is made in Donald E. Pienkos, *For Your Freedom Through Ours. Polish American Efforts on Poland’s Behalf, 1863 – 1991* (Denver, CO: East European Monographs, CCCXI, 1991), 45 – 6, and in Brożek, *Polonia Amerykańska*, 72. Neither work details the extent and the implications of Polonia’s response to Września.

⁹⁹ Greene, 170.

response to the financial collections suggest that a Polish national consciousness reverberated beyond Polonia's leadership. In response to Sienkiewicz's appeal, American Polonia collected and forwarded to Europe several thousands of dollars. The PRCU responded immediately to the appeal of the Executive Committee of the Second Polish Catholic Congress December 1901 appeal. The PRCU voted a \$75 donation and initiated its own fund-raising campaign, asking its members "as true Poles and Catholics" to fulfill their obligation and to send their donations to *Naród Polski* so as to document "our union with [our] brothers in Poland and demonstrate that we are not afraid of the power of the Prussian scoundrels" [naszą łączność z braćmi w kraju i pokażmy, że potęgi pruskich łotrów nie obawiamy].¹⁰⁰ The PNA also appealed to its members. As donations began to arrive, newspapers published the donors' names and addresses and their donations. The donations came from individuals and organizations, and from throughout the United States. Polish societies voted donations or took up collections at their annual meetings, many of which occurred in January. Collections were also taken up in parishes or at family occasions like christenings. Donations ranged from a few cents (5, 10, 25, 50 cents) to a few dollars, no insignificant sums in view of the limited disposable incomes possessed by immigrants and their children.¹⁰¹ Donations came from Chicago and elsewhere in Illinois, and from dozens of states where Polish immigrants and their children resided: from New York to Texas, and from Wisconsin and Minnesota to West Virginia.

Mieczysław Szawleski devoted only a sentence to Polonia's reaction to Września in a discussion of the community's national life, but he precisely states that the "Polish migration in America raised a powerful voice on behalf of the martyrdom of the Września children and sent significant financial donations to assist the victims of the Prussian educator noted" [wychodźstwo polskie w Ameryce zabiera silny głos w sprawie męczeństwa dzieci wrześnińskich i śle poważne datki pieniężne na pomoc dla ofiar pruskiego wychowawcy].¹⁰² *Dziennik Chicagoski*, a daily controlled by the influential Resurrectionist Order, reported on January 7, 1902, that American Polonia had collected \$4,000 for the victims of Prussian oppression and confidently expected that the figure would easily reach \$5,000.¹⁰³ The publication of donor lists in the Polonia press and emotional rallies stimulated donations. The individual accountings published in the press, taking into consideration possible overlapping, confirm that American Polonia raised more than \$10,000 for the victims of Września, the Toruń trial, and the victims of the Prussian school system. *Kuryer Polski* collected \$746.48,¹⁰⁴ *Zgoda* \$1,525.76,¹⁰⁵ the Executive Committee of the Second Catholic Congress \$3,369.14 [14,102 marks],¹⁰⁶ and *Dziennik Chicagoski* closed its books at

¹⁰⁰ "Uwagi", *Naród Polski*, 18 grudzień 1901.

¹⁰¹ See „Na fundusz wrześniński i w ogóle na ofiary pruskiego system szkolnego”, and „Z Toledo, O.”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 7 and 11 styczeń 1902; and „Tow. św Rafała”, *Kuryer Polski*, 23 grudzień 1902.

¹⁰² Szawleski, 174.

¹⁰³ "Uwagi", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 7 styczeń 1902.

¹⁰⁴ "Polacy w Ameryce", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 22 luty 1902.

¹⁰⁵ "Na dar narodowy", *Zgoda*, 9 marzec 1902.

¹⁰⁶ "Polacy w Chicago – Małe sprostowanie", *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 12 luty 1902.

\$920.65 that was sent to *Czas* in Kraków,¹⁰⁷ for a total of \$6,572.03. *Zgoda* credited *Dziennik Narodowy* and other papers belonging to “the progressive [i.e., nationalist] camp” with raising \$4,000, and another \$1,000 to Chicago publisher Władysław Dyniewicz.¹⁰⁸ Another 8,604 k. 92 h. went to *Czas* from a committee in Jersey City, New Jersey [1,530 k.], Buffalo’s *Polak w Ameryce* [1,560 k.], Romuald Piątkowski in Detroit by the paper *Niedziela* [4,050 k.], and from three Milwaukee Polish parishes [1,464 k. 92 h.].¹⁰⁹

The mobilization of the American Poles during the Września affair was an example of the importance of homeland politics in an immigrant and ethnic community. For the American Poles, their response was an assertion of its right to a voice in homeland affairs. *Dziennik Chicagoski* was proud of the role of the press in keeping Polonia well informed about events in all three areas of the partitioned homeland and mobilized to protest for a homeland issue, and believed that Polonia “wanted to be in constant touch with its brothers across the ocean” [pragnie w ciągłej być łączności z braćmi swoimi za oceanem]. Polonia’s response to the Września affair was but the latest example of the times that Polonia had to the opportunity “to extend its brotherly hand and express its sympathy and active interest in order to bring material assistance wherever it was needed” [bratnią dłoń wyciąga, ażeby wyrazić i współczucie i żywe zainteresowanie się aby przynieść pomoc materyalną tam gdzie ona okazuje się potrzebną].¹¹⁰ The American Pole’s participation in fund raising for Września encouraged a sense of empowerment among Polonia leaders in regard to homeland matters. When the Poznań Committee transferred its funds to the Kraków Committee in 1903, the PNA, which had ties with the National Democratic Party, urgently requested that two members from the political grouping that it favored be added to the Stanczyk-dominated Committee. As *Zgoda* warned, the „Kraków Lords” [Panowie krakowscy] might at some time in the future come seeking „Polish American pennies” [grosz polaków amerykańskich].¹¹¹

Polonia’s contemporary domestic concerns also explain its identification and sympathy with the attempted Germanization of Polish children by depriving them of religious instruction in their native language. There was an obvious parallel between compulsory Germanization and the Americanization of European immigrants advocated by some American Roman Catholic bishops, most of whom were of Irish or German origin. In worrying about the future of Polish in their parishes and schools, the American Poles were in fact expressing their anxiety about their identity and their community’s future. It was not accidental that more than one rally speaker in 1901 and 1902 invoked Września as a warning and as a model of heroic commitment to Polish language and culture and as a warning against Americanization. In public discourse Września expressed the anxiety over and recognition of the inroads of acculturation among the American-born

¹⁰⁷ *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 17 luty 1902. *Dziennik Chicagoski* closed its collection on January 20, 1902.

¹⁰⁸ “Nowy komitet wrzesiński”, *Zgoda*, 11 czerwiec 1903.

¹⁰⁹ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 23 kwiecień 1902.

¹¹⁰ “Uwagi”, *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 29 styczeń 1902.

¹¹¹ “Nowy komitet wrzesiński”, *Zgoda*, 11 czerwiec 1903.

generation of American Poles. In the case of Francis Hodur and the Polish National Catholic Church, the use of the Polish language was one of the flash points that brought them to schism.

A review of Polonia's popular reaction to the events in Prussian Poland suggests that many American Poles possessed a vital Polish national consciousness at the turn of the last century and that the events of 1901 and 1902 deepened Polonia's awareness of the ideological homeland.