



Województwo
Śląskie



Instytut Myśli Polskiej
im. Wojciecha Korfanteo

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The struggle between the two Korfantys

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On a frosty morning, December 9, 1918, the platform of the railway station in Kędzierzyn filled with delegates leaving the train cars. Among them were representatives of various political spectrums in Upper Silesia: conservatives from the German National People's Party, liberals from the German Democratic Party, and social democrats from the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The delegates headed to the Proske hotel for a conference hosted by Prelate Carl Ulitzka, the chairman of the German-Catholic Center Party, which had a strong base in Upper Silesia (besides Westphalia and Bavaria). Not by accident the communists, Wojciech Korfanty and his supporters were not invited to the meeting. Ulitzka was terrified by the growing influence of the radical left, and Korfanty was seen as a mortal enemy in the fight to maintain Prussian influence in Silesia. Many workers demanded the return of Upper Silesian territories to the newly reborn Poland.

The chief advocate of Polishness was the then deputy Wojciech Korfanty, who in the Reichstag on October 25, 1918, referred to the peace plan of President Woodrow Wilson. This document, in point 13, postulated the creation of a Polish state in the area inhabited by Poles.

This approach clashed with Ulitzka's interests and those of his guests, who sought to defend eastern German territories from Polish aspirations for independence. Ulitzka proposed extensive autonomy for Upper Silesia. In his vision, the region would become a separate state within the German Reich, with both Polish and German as official languages. This „Republic of Upper Silesia”, similar to the ethnically diverse Switzerland or the Walloon-French-speaking part of Belgium, would distance itself from the dictates of Berlin, in which power was taken by the left wing, spreading anti-church slogans that would not be understood by Upper Silesian citizens of towns and villages, overwhelmingly Catholics.

Among the companions of the council in Proske, Ulitzka belonged to the minority - the rest opted for the concept of creating a temporary Silesian state, which he

propagated under the so-called of the Kędzierzyn resolution, the Upper Silesian Committee. However, the dream of separatism was ultimately buried by the Treaty of Versailles. Ulitzka, enjoying the opinion of an outstanding expert on Upper Silesian issues, participated in the peace conference in Versailles. The Entente powers finally recognized the conduct of a plebiscite in Upper Silesia under international supervision, whose safety was to be ensured by French, British and Italian military personnel. According to Ulitzka, the idea of holding a plebiscite was preposterous. However, he decided, together with the other „free-staters” gathered at the Center, that participation in the game not on your own terms could be profitable: We are not chauvinists, but what proves a human character or lack of a strong character is loyalty, and this loyalty now binds us to the German Reich and the nation - Ulitzka argued on January 2, 1920 from the Reichshalle stage - the largest concert hall in Katowice. At that time it was called „German Korfanty”. The prelate argued that the Upper Silesians would not gain anything by opting for Poland, on the contrary, they would be used by it, receiving from Warsaw not the addition of civic subjectivity, but centralist outside control, and, in the longer term, it would not provide them with peace, as the Germans would not come to terms with the lost territory and will strive to regain Oberschlesien. Worse, Ulitzka argued, Poland would not provide adequate defence against Bolshevik aggression. Only Germany will respect the rules of Upper Silesian autonomy. The propaganda machinery of the „German Korfanty” remained in the shadow of its Polish adversary. Wojciech Korfanty was supported by the press and involvement in the Polish plebiscite committee located in the Lomnitz hotel in Bytom (well-organised communication with local structures), providing a colossal advantage that the "second Korfanty" could not match. Wojciech Korfanty launched a journalistic cannon against the Center party as early as 1901, the text „Down with the Centre!”, anonymously for printing. In a modest article (less than 13 pages), he exposed the will to Germanize Upper Silesian workers, depriving them of their language, rights, customs and faith (marginalising the influence of the Catholic Church in favour of Evangelicals). The alarmist tone of the brochure, addressed to the patriotic feelings of the Upper Silesians, compared the fight against hackatistic oppression to a civil war comparable to the famous relief of Vienna. He also stigmatised the lack of a coherent social program on the part of the Center (phrases about the protection of family and working class traditions countered with the Centre's demands for an increase in taxes, the „centrists” representing the industrial

lobby exploiting the Upper Silesian natural resources and not supporting trade unions). Carl Ulitzka wanted to achieve his political intentions by peaceful means. However, when both sides sent significant military forces to Upper Silesia, Ulitzka lost hope for a solution without massive bloodshed. On March 20, 1921, the result of the plebiscite was announced (about 60 percent of votes for Germany). Such a result was unacceptable for Wojciech Korfanty, who - with the tacit approval of Warsaw - led to the initiation of the Third Silesian Uprising already on May 3 of that year. At that time, Ulitzka was on a diplomatic mission in Italy, where he wanted to persuade the local authorities to the idea of an "unfair" division of Upper Silesia. When the news of the outbreak of the uprising reached him, he immediately decided to return to his parish in Racibórz, from where he went to Opole. From there, Ulitzka sent letters of protest to French and British officials, in which he accused Korfanty of demagoguery, calculation and lack of moral compass, apparently not realising that since the insurgent ammunition was fired for epistolary art, it was little bit too late. He naively appealed for the end of German aggression and celebrated masses on behalf of the insurgents. After the victory of the Poles, he moved to the Province of Upper Silesia created under Prussia, which he managed, still dreaming of reunifying Upper Silesia.

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