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**The System of Staff *Nomenklatura*
in Poland in the Years 1950 to 1970**

The denotation of „*nomenklatura*”

„New class,” „ruling class,” „new privileged class,” „new governing class,” „administrative class,” „soviet nobility,” „political bureaucracy,” „partokracja,” „il collectivismo biurocratico,” „partijnaya khorporacya”, „bureaucratic despotism” – these are just a few of the vast array of expressions used in attempts refer to the unique phenomenon prevailing in the Soviet Union and adopted in all communist-ruled countries. The differences between these expressions seem to come down to the choice of words or the terminological and linguistic competence of their authors rather than to any differences in the perception of the phenomenon itself. Generally, the expressions cover at least two components of the constitutional system closely related to each other:

1. The communist party exercises exclusive government over both the state apparatus in the most wide-ranging sense (i.e. economy, jurisdiction or legislature) and the entire social (public) life. The party controls not only associations and social organizations, but even small social groups and individuals, through its own organizations (local party units) and specialized state agencies (like the security apparatus). Some researchers have proposed that the state was taken over by the party. Thomas Lowit, perhaps its most radical supporter, entitled one of his articles „Are there States

in Eastern Europe?”¹ and in another he wrote that the state was transformed into „an organ transmitting party decisions.”²

2. The party exercises its authority with the help of the state, a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure in its own nature. After the phase of revolutionary mobilization (necessary to win power) this state of facts is petrified and so a separate social group emerges that becomes the „governing class”. The group is numerous and important since the state simultaneously becomes the owner of the economy in what is a kind of enfranchisement (*de facto*: pillage).

If we accept the above assumptions, establishing the boundaries of the class and describing its internal structure become significant issues. These tasks are by no means simple and obvious, unless we conclude that all the members of the monopolist party belong to the class. This however seems improper, especially for the post-revolutionary period when the party becomes a mass organization and a vast part of its members – the majority in fact – do not hold any executive positions. In the „member mass” the body of „active members” was clearly distinguishable as the group of people that held executive positions in the party, from the lowest level of committees to the highest executive bodies. In 1951, for example, the „the body of active members” of the PZPR was estimated at 300,000,³ which constituted one quarter of all party members. The „active members” had an hierarchical structure, which was understandable from the point of view of the group’s size, and were divided into „upper,” „middle,” and „lower.”⁴

Naturally the essence of the situation where the state is being taken over by the party is not seen in the structure and hierarchy inside the party, but rather in the way the party exercised its authority and control over the state apparatus and social organizations, culture etc. The most fundamental factor that enabled such authority was the presence of party members in appropriate structures, both those created in the revolutionary period and

¹ T. Lowit, „Y a-t-il des Etats en Europe de l’Est?”, in: *Revue Francaise de sociologie*, vol. 20, 1979, pp. 431-466

² T. Lowit, „Le parti polymorphe en l’Europe de l’Est”, in: *Revue Francaise des Sciences Politiques*, nos. 4-5, 1979, p. 821. In both cases the author includes the Soviet Union in the term „Eastern Europe”

³ A report by Jakub Berman at the PZPR municipal secretaries briefing of September 17, 1951, Archiwum Akt Nowych (New Files Archive, AAN), call no. 325, vol. 25. Out of them, 190,000 were members of the lowest units (the basic party organizations, POP, and the departmental party organizations, OOP), and some 57,000 were the „party organizers” working in places where the number of party members was too small to constitute an OOP or a POP.

⁴ The distinction was used by Bolesław Bierut in his address to the plenary session of the PZPR Central Committee in May 1950 devoted to recruitment matters.

those that were the remains of the *ancienne regime*. Bearing in mind that communist parties were centralized and usually highly disciplined,⁵ the directives issued to party members in various positions within state or social organizations were sufficiently effective. Nevertheless, the mode of appointing officials to public positions – in the early period of the communist state – was expressed in a set of rules. Derived from the very own internal language of the mother-party, the Bolshevik/Soviet Communist Party, the set of these rules was called the *nomenklatura*. The name is colorless, one could even say „bureaucratic”, and very different from the florid and telling terms quoted at the beginning of this text; nevertheless it is unambiguous and thus seems more convenient in the description of the mechanisms of power.

The most basic meaning of the term „nomenklatura” is the list of positions for which the decision (or approval) of a relevant party body was necessary to fill them. Apart from this meaning, it refers to persons („the members of nomenklatura”) that held one of the positions enumerated in the nomenklatura listing or were taken into account as prospective candidates for such a position („the staff reserve”). This can be said that to be the general subject matter of the term.

Yet, there is an object matter as well. It is constituted by the degree of competence of party bodies to decide on recruitment issues enumerated in the nomenklatura listing. Putting it somewhat generally, the higher the number of nomenklatura positions and the lower the levels of party bodies competent to decide on them, and the more the state becomes overwhelmed or taken over by the party.

One more problem is worth mentioning. There was something which one could call „the nomenklatura of the nomenklatura”: the listings included such positions within party structures that gave the right to decide on recruitment issues within the administration and social organizations. The nomenklatura covered even such party positions which, according to the statutes, were to be filled in elections,⁶ and this was in full accord with the rule of democratic centralism, the key *modus operandi* of communist parties. The system of nomenklatura mirrored this rule.

⁵ The cornerstone for party discipline was made up of the resolutions of the 10th Bolshevik Party Assembly of 1921 regarding limiting faction activities, and it was reinforced by Stalin who ruthlessly fought real, potential and imaginary „fractionists”. Since 1930s being „fractionist” has been one of the gravest accusations a communist could level at a comrade.

⁶ For instance, in accordance with the nomenklatura of the PZPR Central Committee (see doc. no. 6), the Political Bureau made decisions („gave approval”) regarding not only the positions of Central Committee department directors, but also the first secretaries of voivodship committees.

While the meaning of the „nomenklatura” is quite clear in the operational sense since it was set forth by normative documents, providing a definition in general terms is more difficult because establishing boundaries between nomenklatura and such notions as „political elite”, imprecise as they are, poses numerous problems. It is not the goal of this text to get into details of an issue that has been so well approached by Bohdan Harasymiw in the considerable space he has devoted to these theoretical problems in his studies.⁷ I wish to direct the reader’s attention to one significant aspect of the term „nomenklatura” that can lead to certain confusion. In his analysis based on the Polish examples – an analysis which can be extended to other countries as it was a copy of the Soviet model – Stanisław Ehrlich concluded that „regarding the nomenklatura, the issue is not the work of officers that are neither competent or rational, but an integrated and autonomous organization making decisions programmed to protect common yet internally varied and conflicting interests.”⁸ This hypothesis, though apparently imprecise (for instance, the expression „autonomous organization” seems far-fetched), is worth mentioning for the division it acknowledges between the nomenklatura and the bureaucracy. Lowit takes a similar stand when he states „the nomenklatura is not a bureaucracy in the classical meaning of the word” because „higher-level party bodies can always directly influence the decisions of lower-level ones disregarding hierarchy,” violating „one of the fundamental rules of a classical bureaucratic system.” Acting in this fashion, the higher body in fact behaves in an „anti-bureaucratic” way, which should in consequence – according to Lowit – lead either to the introduction of a new term or to redefining the one used thus far.⁹ Undoubtedly „nomenklatura” does not mean „bureaucracy”. However, one could wonder whether and to what extent the introduction of the nomenklatura system encouraged the creation of bureaucracy, since having exceeded a certain number of members, the functioning of the system (like keeping the records of its members and candidates) requires extended bureaucratic techniques.

Another important problem worth mentioning is the „internal life” of the nomenklatura: conflicts of interests, ways of behavior, group and

⁷ B. Harasymiw *Political Elite Recruitment in the Soviet Union*, London 1984, pp. 1-39

⁸ S. Ehrlich „Nomenklatura – przykład Polski (Próba analizy normatywno-porównawczej)” (Nomenklatura – The Example of Poland (Attempt at the Normative and Comparative Analysis)), in: *Państwo i Prawo*, no. 12, 1991, p. 28

⁹ T. Lowit „Y a-t-il des États...”, p. 444

individual strategies, patronage – researched in Poland by Jacek Tarkowski among others¹⁰ – or cliques (that should not be mistaken for political fractions). It is obvious that the nomenklatura system was more or less different from the norms and intentions of decision-making organs, which led to various „nomenklatura pathologies”. One of them was the urge of ever-lower levels of party bodies to have their „own” nomenklatura and the constant pressure to extend the lists of nomenklatura positions, which resulted in the possible loss of control of the central organs over a large part of the system. Anticipating further exposition, I wish to point out that there was certain tension between the interests of the center and the lower bodies. As a result of this, the party center felt forced at least three times (in 1956, 1970, and 1988) to revise the nomenklatura and decrease the number of its positions.

One should also mention that during times of political crisis the rules of the nomenklatura were sometimes broken and staff decisions were undertaken in an uncontrolled way. This was the case in Poland in the years 1967-1968 during the so-called anti-Zionist campaign (which in reality was anti-Semitic and pointed against the intelligentsia) when some party organizations passed motions to relegate members not only from the party itself, but also from the nomenklatura. The best-known example of this was the case of Polish Ambassador in London, Jerzy Morawski. The central executives had to expend considerable effort in reintroducing discipline in the lower bodies.

Literature

The „recruitment policy” of the Bolshevik party has for a long time been well documented and the term „nomenklatura” has been used in dozens of documents and party papers. I believe Borys Lewycki first introduced it in 1961 in his article „Die Nomenklatur – ein wichtiges Instrument sowjetischer Kaderpolitik.”¹¹ The phenomenon had been presented previously by Merle Faisond,¹² yet it had been less significant in

¹⁰ Jacek Tarkowski „Socjologia świata polityki. Część 2: Patroni i klienci jako deformacja w systemie scentralizowanym” (The Sociology of the World of Politics. Part 2: Patrons and Clients as a Deformation in the Centralized System), p. 139-152, and „Patronaż w scentralizowanym systemie socjalistycznym” (Patronage in the Centralized Socialist System), p. 153-166

¹¹ *Osteuropa*, vol. XI, 1961

¹² *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, New York 1958, and *How Russia is Ruled* (revised edition), Cambridge 1963. A large part of the archive of the Smolensk Bolshevik organization was taken over by Germans in 1941 and after the war by Americans who made it accessible for research.

the literature. The Canadian sociologist Bohdan Harasymiw prepared his presentation basing it on expanded sources analyzed in detail (these were party press publications, professional press and books, some only for „internal use”). His work of 1969 referred to the unknown term already in its title: „Nomenklatura: the Soviet Communist Party’s Leadership Recruitment System”.¹³ The term was in broader use throughout 1970s (an example of a Polish author using it would be Maria Hirszowicz)¹⁴ but separate texts devoted to the „nomenklatura” were rare. Among them were Dario Staff’s „Nomenklatura: il reclutamento dei dirigenti”¹⁵ or Thomas Lowit’s works quoted earlier, as well as Gert-Joachim Glaessner’s *Herrschaft durch Kader*.¹⁶ Analysis of recruitment policies and the nomenklatura system increasingly drew the attention of Western sovietologists, which forced Soviet theorists to try to „resist” (for instance, in W. A. Litkin’s article entitled „Kritika burzhuznoy falsifikatsy roly y nasnatsheniya aparata rukovodashchih organov KPSS”.¹⁷)

The term found a stable place in world literature only after an extensive treatise by Mikhail Voslensky *Nomenklatura* that was published simultaneously in German and French in 1980 and which, to a large extent, was based on the author’s own personal experiences.¹⁸ Because of language difficulties, the work became highly successful in its English version. With a foreword by Milovan Djilas, the author of the classical work of that time entitled *New Class*, the treatise reached bookstores in Orwell’s 1984. (Excerpts of Voslensky’s book were published in the Polish underground in 1983, i.e. before the English edition.)¹⁹ The 1980s saw some more important titles, among them a relatively short, but well documented article written by one of the veterans of sovietology Thomas

¹³ *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vo. II, 1969

¹⁴ In the essay *Komunistyczny Lewiatan (Communist Leviathan)*, Paris 1973

¹⁵ *Biblioteca della Liberta* (Turin), vol. LX, 1976

¹⁶ Full title: *Herrschaft durch Kader. Leitung der Gesellschaft und Kaderpolitik in der DDR am Beispiel des Staatsapparates*, Opladen 1977

¹⁷ *Vaprosy Istory KPSS*, no. 3, 1977

¹⁸ *Nomenklatura. Moskaus Machtelite*, Wien 1980, and *La Nomenklatura. Les privileges en URSS*, Paris 1980

¹⁹ Wydawnictwo „Krag”, Biblioteka „Krytyki”, Warsaw 1983, pp. 6-194. According to the authoritative *Bibliografia publikacji podziemnych w Polsce 13 XII 1981 – VI 1986 (Bibliography of Underground Publications in Poland between December 13, 1981 and June 1986)*, Paris 1988, p. 376 the run of this title was 5 thousand copies. A chapter entitled „Jeden dzień Denisa Iwanowicza” (A Day in the Life of Denis Ivanovich) was reprinted numerous in the version printed originally in *Aneks* no. 26, 1981

H. Rigby,²⁰ who even at the beginning of his academic career dealt with the recruitment policy problems (his doctoral thesis of 1954 was entitled „The Selection of Leading Personnel in the Soviet State and Communist Party”). The most important of these works was Harasymiw’s presentation referred to earlier. Harasymiw continued his research, introducing new theories and facts.

In the post-Soviet period (i.e. after communist archives had been partially declassified) the problem of the nomenklatura and recruitment policies in general did not become a subject of intensive research. Among other works, Tatiana P. Korzhihina and Yuriy J. Figatner published an extensive, though not very systematic, article entitled „Sovietskaya nomenklatura: stanovlenye, mekhanizm deystva”.²¹ Another example is an impressive but insubstantial text by Vladlen G. Sirotkin „Nomenklatura (zametky historika)”.²² Yuriy S. Asenov in his article „Apogey stalinizma: poslevayennaya piramida vlasty”²³ only signaled the nomenklatura problem. The Czech historian Karel Kaplan, unparalleled in the publication of sources, was first to publish the volume entitled *Kadrova nomenklatura KSC 1948-1956. Sbornik dokumentu*²⁴ (in the series published by the Ustav pro Soudobe Dejiny in Prague), but failed to include an extensive introduction and did not present the literature on the subject. I will point to the presentations relating to Poland later on in this text.

The creation of the system of nomenklatura

Contrary to the opinion of some researchers, the beginnings of the nomenklatura were not related with the „abandonment of NEP” or forced collectivizing,²⁵ but took place a few years prior to them. I do not know though if serious criticism will not topple Voslensky’s theory of the nomenklatura as a phenomenon originating in the „deep” history of the Bolshevik party as a party of professional revolutionaries,²⁶ (and I do not

²⁰ T.H. Rigby „Staffing USSR Incorporated: the Origins of the Nomenklatura System”, in: *Soviet Studies*, no. 4, 1988

²¹ *Vaprosy Istory KPSS*, no. 7, 1993

²² *Vestnik Akademiy Nauk SSSR*, no. 6, 1990

²³ *Vaprosy Istory KPSS*, no. 11, 1990

²⁴ Prague 1992

²⁵ S. Ehrlich, op. cit., p. 27

²⁶ Some historians were seeing the origins in the czarist tradition of „ranks” and „deeds”, but T. Ito (see footnote 36) points out that the systems of „ranks” existed in many centralized and bureaucratic states (like the Habsburg monarchy or the Chinese empire), yet their nature was different. Nevertheless the term

intend to critically approach this theory here). Still, the origins of the system can be seen in the formal recruitment actions of the victorious party. This was inevitable for at least one reason: in the early 1920s the professional party apparatus was more than 15,000 persons strong and even though some elements of the „democracy within the party” still remained (like the elections to some bodies, open internal discussions), managing such a mass of people required the existence of specialized units (*Utchraspred*, or the department for records and distribution of the Central Committee and its local branches), as well as the use of logistics for the masses. In the years 1920 to 1921 the first systematic lists of party members in key positions were being drawn up. In October 1921 these lists contained the names of some 23,500 persons.²⁷

The records were gradually improved and their range expanded. The 12th Assembly of the Bolshevik party held in April 1923 passed a formal resolution regarding „Organizational Matters”. It stated that the party should run a recruitment policy towards „Soviet economic, cooperative and professional institutions with the help of appropriate and comprehensive system of record keeping and selection”.²⁸ The resolution related not only to party members, but also to „all those sympathizing [*sotchuvstvuyushchy*] with communism”. In the following months, under the direction of General Secretary Stalin’s closest collaborators, Viatcheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovitch, the first project of the Central Committee nomenklatura was designed and was approved by the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee on October 12. The work was finished in 1925 when the Bureau approved the document „Employee Recruiting and Appointing System” (*O poradke podbora y naznacheniya robotnikov*).

Originally, there were two lists: Nomenklatura no. 1, subject to Central Committee decisions (and *de facto* to the Political Bureau), and Nomenklatura no. 2, subject to Organizational Department of the Central Committee. Initially there were some 5700 positions listed. Together with the *O poradke* document, Nomenklatura no. 3 established covering positions that remained in the control of state administration, but were effectively controlled by officers of the Organizational Department. There were some 5000 such positions. The Department decided during the same session that the nomenklatura system be extended onto *gubkoms* and *kraykoms* as well as the republican Central Committee (which then

„nomenklatura” was indeed used in czarist Russia and the Bolsheviks took it from there.

²⁷ T.H. Rigby „Staffing USSR...”, p. 528

²⁸ Korzhihina..., p. 26

transferred it down the hierarchy), and introduced nomenklatura positions in elective state organs and social organizations (originally some 1600 of the positions in lists 1 and 2).

The expansion of the system led to the division of recruitment units: one department was responsible for party positions (*Orginstruktorsky Otdel*), another for positions outside the party (*Otdel Naznachenny*). The system was based on: a. the nomenklatura pure, that is the list of positions that needed the decision or approval of an appropriate party body to be filled, and b. the records of persons („staffers”) that held nomenklatura positions (*rukavodyashchye kadri*) or remained in the „staff reserve” (*rezerv rukavodyashchyh kadrov*).

It seems appropriate to conclude that regardless of any future improvements and the expansion of nomenklatura lists²⁹ the system was codified in the years 1923 to 1925-6.

In the period of „Stalinism proper” nomenklatura matters were considered classified. That related to the lists as well as analyses and reports on recruitment policies. Since the mid-1950s hundreds of articles, treatises and books were published, but the term „nomenklatura” was nowhere in the titles, apparently because it was seen as „anti-Soviet”. The correct terms were „staff,” „party staff management,” „staff selection,” „use of staff,” or „staff training”.³⁰ The problems were indicated in numerous reports of a general character. This shameful term was rare in the publications, but the documents relating to nomenklatura positions (and especially to personal records) were not released. Similarly rare was the indication of the number of positions listed in the nomenklatura, and if they happened to appear, they concerned individual lower level cases.

Research on the nomenklatura in Poland

The situation was similar with regard to Poland. The term „nomenklatura”, used in the documents and publications designed „for internal use” at least from 1945, was not found in the extensive literature on the functioning of the state and law, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. That was the case even when the role of the party in the state or the staff

²⁹ According to Harasymiw’s calculations, the *obkom* nomenklatura lists of 1960s and 1970s normally did not exceed 1000-1200 positions, and the *kraykom* ones did not exceed 250 (*Political Elite...*, p. 165-169)

³⁰ Dozens of titles are quoted in Harasymiw’s works. Here is one striking example: M.G. Romashko „Deyatelnost komunisticheskoy parti Belarusi po podgotovke kadrov y politicheskomu vospitanyu lichnovo sostava organov MVD (1961-1968)”

policies of the communist party was described. Lawyers and political theorists dealing with the matter all started their works from Lenin's „universal forms of party management within the state”: „Setting the program for the state, appointing party members to executive positions within the state, exercising political control over the state apparatus.”³¹ Often they would openly or even unceremoniously write about the role of the party in the state: „The organic unity of the goals of the party and state does not make the party identical to the state (...) The proper functioning of the system of proletarian dictatorship is dependant on a constant strengthening of the autonomy of state organs and apparatus. Not full autonomy, but such that enables the political line of the party to be introduced.”³² It was no secret that „the presence of party members (...) is necessary throughout the entire state apparatus, that means not just the executive organs and general administration, but also in economic organs; not just in the army, security and jurisdiction, but also in education, science, propaganda and information.”³³ Even if it pointed to the fact that „appointing party members to state positions is subject to law regulating the appointment of such positions,”³⁴ there was no indication what legal regulations established these rules, who set them forth and where they were published, according to law. There was no indication of the range of the system of appointments.

The information was first introduced into academia by Thomas Lowit's „Y a-t-il des Etats...” quoted earlier. This included an addendum with the „Political Bureau's Directions Regarding the Nomenklatura of Party Staff with the List of Nomenklatura Positions of the Central, Voivodeship, County, Municipal Committees” and „Political Bureau's Regulations Regarding the Range of Authority in Staff Decision-Making in the Nomenklatura Positions of the Central Committee”. The documents were approved by a resolution of the Political Bureau entitled in a fashion typical of the communist jargon „Regarding Further Improvement of Recruitment Policies and the Labor of Executive Staff.”³⁵ The resolution

³¹ Adolf Dobieszewski *Zasady i mechanizmy funkcjonowania partii (Rules and Mechanisms for the Functioning of the Party)*, Warsaw 1984, p. 343

³² A. Dobieszewski *Partia marksistowsko-leninowska w społeczeństwie socjalistycznym (Marxist-Leninist Party in the Socialist Society)*, Warsaw 1975, p. 127

³³ *Organizacja społeczeństwa socjalistycznego w Polsce (Organization of the Socialist Society in Poland)*, ed. By Adam Łopatka, Warsaw 1971, p. 126

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 127

³⁵ See full text in: *Aneks* no. 26, 1981, pp. 41-58

was passed in October 1972 and distributed as an „internal use” brochure printed in a run of 500 copies.

It was a Japanese political theorist, Takayuki Ito, that first commented on it in his article „Controversy over Nomenklatura in Poland: The Twilight of a Monopolistic Instrument for Social Control.”³⁶ Starting with the problem of nomenklatura and an analysis of documents of 1972, the author devoted his article to the debate that took place in Poland during the sixteen months of the Solidarity. Apart from employee property, the issue of the party’s staff appointment monopoly was not just at the core of the dispute over the system of managing companies, but also one of the main subjects for political fight. One of the legendary 21 proposals of August 1980 was Point 12 - the demand to introduce „recruitment of executive staff based on qualifications”.³⁷

The documents of the PZPR Central Committee of 1972 that the Paris „Aneks” received from Lowit and added an excerpt from Voslensky’s book and the articles by Aleksander Smolar („Distribution of Social Goods and the Decay of the System”) and Hendrick Smith („The Privileged Class”) were published at the end of 1981 and start of 1982. It was in fact the first attempt to present the problem in Poland if we disregard the famous treatise by Dzhilas published in Polish as *The New Class of Exploiters: An Analysis of the Communist System*³⁸ or the first descriptions of the Soviet system as the „new class”, promoted by Lev Trotski in the texts written in exile. They were known in Poland before 1939, but after 1945 they were prohibited and difficult to access.

Benon Dymek published a splendidly documented article on party apparatus and in his account of his major interests he mentioned the problem of nomenklatura in the brochure published by the PZPR Central Committee in May 1950 and entitled „Staff Nomenklatura”.³⁹ Stanisław Ehrlich failed to refer to any of the texts and documents by „Aneks” or any literature on the subject, except for Voslensky’s book, in his interesting but

³⁶ *Acta Slavica Japonica*, vol. I, 1983, pp. 57-103

³⁷ It was in fact also proposed during the strikes of December 1970. See *Postulaty 1970-71 I 1980. Materiały źródłowe do dziejów wystąpień pracowniczych w latach 1970-1971 i 1980 (Gdańsk i Szczecin) (Proposals of 1970-1 and 1980: Source Materials Regarding Workers Strikes in the Years 1970-1 and 1980 (Gdańsk and Szczecin)* selected and edited by B. Chmiel and E. Kaczyńska, Warsaw 1998, p. 27

³⁸ Paris 1959, Biblioteka „Kultury”. The English edition was published just one year earlier.

³⁹ B. Dymek „Pracownicy etatowi PZPR w latach 1948-1954” (Full-time Employees of the PZPR in the Years 1948 to 1954), in: *Z pola walki (From the Battlefield)*, nos. 3-4, 1983

unsystematic essay on nomenklatura.⁴⁰ Despite the title „Party Nomenklatura: An Inside Look (1948-1989),”⁴¹ Adolf Dobieszewski also did not take up the subject in detail. Even though he was familiar with the 1950 brochure (indicated in his footnotes), he wrote that „the precise rules of the nomenklatura were introduced in mid 1960s” (p. 177). He does not refer to any publications on the subject, not even Ehrlich’s text or detailed studies (like some works by Jacek Tarkowski.)⁴² The literature devoted to the system of nomenklatura in Poland is thus extremely sparse, especially with reference to the period before 1970.

The creation of the nomenklatura system in Poland

Even though a model, ready-to-use and often improved, had previously existed, the introduction of the nomenklatura system in Poland was not possible in the first post-war years, despite the communist party’s (PPR) dominant position in People’s Poland from the very beginning of its existence. I believe this restraint was the result of the fact that the state remained *in statu nascendi*, and even though the PPR was the dominant party, it did not have a political monopoly. There were both opposition parties – since 1947 in the ruling coalition (like the PSL) – and allied ones, out of which at least one (the PPS) enjoyed autonomy. The nomenklatura system, at least in the classical Soviet model, called for only one center of power. This condition was fulfilled in December 1948 when the PPS was overrun by the PPR in the creation process of the PZPR.⁴³

The absence of a nomenklatura system by no means indicates that the PPR did not have its own staff policy towards recruitment for the executive positions within the state administration. Some of its segments, mostly those now called „the power departments,” had been treated by the communists as their own, and if they ever allowed persons from outside of their own party to participate, it was sporadic. As a result, 82% of security

⁴⁰ S. Ehrlich, op. cit.

⁴¹ In: *Elity władzy w Polsce a struktura społeczna (The Elites of Power in Poland and the Social Structure)*, ed. by Przemysław Wójcik, Warsaw 1993, pp. 177-201

⁴² For instance, the report „Władze terenowe po reformie” (Local Authorities After the Reform), in: *Władza lokalna u progu kryzysu. Studium dwu województw (Local Authorities at the Brink of Crisis. A Study of Two Voivodeships)*, ed. by J.J. Wiatr, Warsaw 1983, which contains some information on nomenklatura and the „staff reserve”.

⁴³ I omit the problem of satellite parties since they were forced into being the tools for the transmission of PZPR decisions and did little, and if so, then for a short time, to set themselves free.

officers (in the Ministry of Public Security and the local Public Security Offices, UBP) in 1947 were PPR members, when only 2.4% were members of the PPS.⁴⁴ The army showed similar though more moderate trends: in 1947 a quarter of officers were members of the PPR, which rose to a third of them a year later.⁴⁵ What is more significant from our point of view is the fact that in the security offices the staff decisions for the positions from voivodship deputy chiefs of the UBP upward were taken directly by the Political Bureau of the PPR, when the ministry merely executed them.

Matters were slightly different in other part of the state apparatus that were less significant and had to be shared with the PSL competitors or the PPS allies. Additionally, some positions had to be assigned to subordinate parties (the SL or SD) as a convenient form of „payment” for their services and increased the pool of positions over which the PPR had the right to decide. The communists not only took up a tough fight with the coalition partners over the highest positions (ministers and their deputies) and used the tactics of winning positions in personnel offices of ministries and central institutions. It was significant because the number of ministerial employees that were PPR members was not large (for May 1945 the figure was estimated at 5%)⁴⁶ though rising relatively quickly together with the belief that the PPR is the real „party of power”. To mobilize and centralize activities in ministries and central institutions an Inter-ministerial Unit was created in December 1944 (though it did not include the Public Security and National Defense Ministries). Its task however was not „to set forth fundamental directions, because it is not the Inter-ministerial Unit, but the Central Committee and the Government Fraction sets forth political directions.” One of the major tasks was to „set people the right way.”⁴⁷ In November 1945 on one of the Unit’s sessions, Edward Ochab, its supervisor for PPR management, concluded that „our personnel officers should be at war with the ministers that display an unfavorable attitude towards us”. As a result, in the fall of 1945 almost all personnel departments were managed by PPR members.

⁴⁴ A. Paczkowski „Aparat bezpieczeństwa” (Security Machine), in: *Institucje państwa totalitarnego. Polska 1944-1956 (The Institutions of a Totalitarian State. Poland 1944 to 1956)* ed. by A. Paczkowski, Warsaw 1994, p. 67

⁴⁵ Jerzy Poksiński „Kierownictwo partyjne siłami zbrojnymi” (Party Management of the Armed Forces), in: *ibid.*, p. 109

⁴⁶ AAN, KC PPR, 295/IX, vol. 375

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*

The only department that was the subject of source-based research is the Industry Ministry and the apparatus subordinate to it.⁴⁸ In his study, Jędrzej Chumiński clearly shows with what means and effect the ministry and industry management in general were taken over by the PPR. According to his calculations, in July 1948 three quarters of Central Boards directors, sixty percent of general directors of large corporations and autonomous companies, almost a half of factory directors were PPR members. Of 7055 executive officers 53,1 percent were PPR member, and among personnel managers (all levels) the figure stood at 90,4 percent.⁴⁹

Personnel matters were coordinated by the Personnel Department of the Central Committee, created in September 1944. Zenon Kliszko became its manager, although it is remembered that Zofia Gomułkowa, wife of PPR Central Committee's Secretary General, was the one who „pulled the strings”. The department kept the records of staffers (it ran a central catalog of party members), placing staffers within the party structure (outside of the Central Committee that was coordinated by the General Affairs Department till the end of 1948). There were voivodeship counterparts of the central department. According to the department's report⁵⁰ prepared before the 1st PPR Assembly (December 6-13, 1945), the most important task – and a problem as well – was the creation, updating and maintenance of the records. In that period, apart from keeping records, the department was responsible for appointments with the party structure: of 947 persons appointed individually, 398 (i.e. 42%) took up jobs with the party. Personnel officers in voivodeship committees were intensively trained, and party training at all levels was tightly supervised. Originally these tasks were not overwhelming: for November 19, 1945 the records of the Central Committee contained the files of 6568 persons, and those of voivodeship committees contained 4171 of them.⁵¹ Staff personnel was relatively small and probably inexperienced.

⁴⁸ Jędrzej Chumiński „Polityka kadrowa władz w przemyśle w latach 1945-1948 ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli kierowników personalnych” (Staff Policy of the Authorities in Industry in the Years 1945 to 1948 with an Emphasis on the Role of Personnel Managers), in: *Władze komunistyczne wobec ziem odzyskanych po II wojnie światowej (Communist Authorities and the Regained Territories after World War II)*, Słupsk 1997, p. 61-84. Włodzimierz Borodziej wrote of the staff policy in the Foreign Ministry in his *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby. Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945-1947 (From Potsdam to Szklarska Poręba: Poland in International Relations 1945 to 1947)*, London 1990, pp. 77-94

⁴⁹ J. Chumiński, op. cit., p. 81

⁵⁰ AAN, KC PPR, 295/VII, vol. 79

⁵¹ Ibidem

In the following years more attention was paid to the placement of persons at Central and Voivodeship Committee command in the state administration and the economy, but there was as yet no formal list of positions, since there had not been one center of staff coordination. Even though the PPS played an ever decreasing role, it was still a legal partner and had to be reckoned with regarding personnel matters. Jędrzej Chumiński is correct however when he writes that already in the years 1945 and 1948 „the model of a nomenklatura state” was formed.⁵² Naturally it was merely an application of the Soviet model of the 1920s, and in 1948 was still far from perfect. The situation changed radically with the emergence of the PZPR. Most probably soon after the 1st Assembly (December 15-21, 1948) the first list of positions was created under the name „Central Committee Staff Nomenklatura” (see document no. 5). It was not possible to find the names of its authors or the unit in which it was created or the date of its completion. The fact that it includes positions in the Ministry for Reconstruction, transformed into the Ministry for Construction in May 1949, suggests the list was created before that date. More or less at the same time – at the end of January 1949 – the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party discussed the first nomenklatura document.⁵³ It cannot be ruled out that the Soviet party in all the satellite states of Moscow inspired the introduction of the nomenklatura system. Equally probable is the possibility that the good model was copied voluntarily.

The information given to Moscow suggests the problem of „appointing, placement and training of staff” was to be discussed during the plenary session of the PZPR Central Committee scheduled for the end of October 1949.⁵⁴ Urgent and important matters connected with the trial of Laslo Rajek (September 16-24) were the reason for the change of subject of Bolesław Bierut’s report „The Tasks of the Party in the Fight for Revolutionary Alertness in the Present Situation”. Staff issues were not on the list of topics, except for the fact that Gomułka, Kliszka and Spychalski were dismissed from the Central Committee.

Nomenklatura in the years 1950 to 1970

The problem returned in spring 1950 (and at the same time nomenklatura lists were updated and elaborated in Czechoslovakia too).⁵⁵

⁵² J. Chumiński, op. cit., p. 72

⁵³ K. Kaplan *Kadrova nomenklatura...*, pp. 13-16

⁵⁴ *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentach rossiyskikh archivov*, vol. II, Moscow-Novosibirsk 1998, p. 225

⁵⁵ K. Kaplan *Kadrova nomenklatura...*, pp. 17-23

On March 31, 1950 the Office of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee (a new key decision-making unit at the highest party levels with no former PPS members allowed) discussed the „Outline of the Political Bureau Resolution Regarding Reorganizing Party Labor in Staff Matters” presented by Zenon Nowak and discussed the „issue of party staff nomenklatura.”⁵⁶ On April 19 Political Bureau members divided among themselves the work of preparing information materials on the staff of department and social organizations,⁵⁷ which was related to the plenary session of the Central Committee held from May 8-10 under the heading „Party Tasks in the Fight for New Staff in the Present Situation.” A week later the Office of the Organizational Bureau approved the „Nomenklatura of Personnel Matters in the Control of Voivodeship and County Committees.”⁵⁸ All this was codified in the brochure entitled *Staff Nomenklatura* published in May 1950 as classified material („for the Central and Voivodeship Committee apparatus”). The nomenklatura system was thus introduced in Poland and was to last for almost 40 years.

The Staff Department (name changed from Personnel Department of the PPR Central Committee) employed 43 persons in March 1950 and was the second largest political unit apart from the Organizational Department in the Central Committee apparatus. In the period of formalizing the lists of nomenklatura positions the department was managed by⁵⁹ Zenon Nowak (from December 1948 to April 1950) and Julian Tokarski (from October 1950). Ministries and central institutions were assigned to the officers of the department. It seems they performed mainly office work (record keeping, motions, correspondence), and exercised control of staff departments in voivodeship committees as well as the training of party staff. They prepared analyses of the situation in some groups and ministries⁶⁰ as well as the party apparatus.⁶¹ The „heart” of the department

⁵⁶ AAN, KC PZPR, vol. 1630, p. 156

⁵⁷ Ibidem, vol. 1636, p. 33

⁵⁸ Ibidem, vol. 1630, p. 127

⁵⁹ After the so-called August-September plenum of the PPR Central Committee both Kliszko and Zofia Gomułkowa disappeared from the department.

⁶⁰ Here are some examples: „Notatka o sytuacji na wyższych uczelniach” (Memorandum on the Situation in the Universities) of 1950, „Notatka o Przedsiębiorstwie Państwowym „Film Polski”” (Memorandum on the „Film Polski” State Corporation) of 1950, or „Notatka ws. Pracy Departamentu Kadr i Biura Szkolenia MHZ” (Memorandum regarding the Work of Staff Department and Training Bureau of the Foreign Trade Ministry) of 1951 – AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V-1a, vol. 14

was the Central Records Office⁶² that contained the information on persons that were in executive positions in the Central Committee nomenklatura or who remained in the „staff reserve.” These files contained diverse information and documents: not only questionnaires or CVs, but also materials coming from the security office and the investigations led by the party control board.

The Staff Department was dissolved in December 1952, mostly to improve the personnel policy in the ministries, and its responsibilities were divided between „branch” departments.⁶³ The responsibility of the party apparatus was taken over by the Organizational Department. Staff subcommittees were created in the departments, but the Central Records were not divided.⁶⁴ All of these changes were technical. Increasing the number of nomenklatura positions also did not change the issue. The deepest changes were experienced in the security and army. The reform package for the security was approved in February 1954,⁶⁵ and its goal was mostly to enlarge the nomenklatura list in the party units of the MBP and UBP. In November 1955, after long preparations, a new and largely expanded catalog of nomenklatura positions in the army (National Defense Ministry and Internal Troops) was approved. A significant and key element of the change for the army was incorporating frontline positions from division commander upward into the nomenklatura.⁶⁶ The gradual increase in the number of positions is believed to have been taking place constantly. Comparing the lists from the beginning of the 1950s with the materials of 1956⁶⁷ it can be concluded that at that time the following positions, among others, were incorporated into the Central Committee nomenklatura of various levels: party organizers in companies, scientific

⁶¹ For instance, in 1950 analysis of promotions of secretaries and department directors of voivodship committees as well as of the secretaries on county, municipal and common committees – Ibidem, vol. 16

⁶² For a number of years (till 1954) it was managed by Iza Róžańska, wife of the Investigative Department of the MBP

⁶³ Personnel matters of the security, army and district attorneys were taken away from the department in 1951 and transferred to the newly created Autonomous Staff Sector (or the Special Sector) originally subordinate to the Organizational Dept., and since December 1952 to the Administrative Dept. The Sector dealt with staffers that were „autonomous” indeed, like the candidates to the Truce Committee in Vietnam (AAN, KC PZPR, 1659, p. 153-154)

⁶⁴ AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V-16/2

⁶⁵ AAN, Zespół Akt Różnej Proweniencji (File Collection of Various Origins), the so-called Bierut’s closets, temp. call no. I/509

⁶⁶ AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V, vol. 39

⁶⁷ AAN, W. Dworakowski’s Heritage, 471, vol. 11

personnel of party schools, trade advisors, deans and managers of human sciences departments, and department managers of the ZG ZMP.

One of the results of the condemnation of „errors and distortions” in the security machine during the 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee (January 21-24, 1955) was the review of materials provided by the machine to the staff subunits and the Central Records. A committee of Autonomous Staff Sector employees created in April 1955 produced the rules for „the rearranging of personal files,”⁶⁸ which mostly meant the destruction of some of the documents or turning them over to the Central Party Control Committee.⁶⁹ It is unlikely that the procedure of providing humiliating information about party members to PZPR staff units by the security offices (the UB/SB, counterintelligence and military intelligence) was discontinued.

In the period of criticism towards the system, mostly the criticism of party apparatus, its expansion and privileges (the „yellow curtains” shops), attempts were made to correct the way of things. Apart from the privileges,⁷⁰ the number of nomenklatura positions was tackled. In April 1956 the analysis of the Central Committee nomenklatura list was ready together with the reform proposals.⁷¹ According to the document, the nomenklatura of the Political Bureau and the Office of the Central Committee included 4783 persons, 1587 (one third) of that number in the party apparatus. The compilation does not include the positions in the control of Central Committee’s departments that had a nomenklatura of 2236 persons, according to the same document. In autumn 1956 the entire nomenklatura of the Central Committee included 7037 persons. Unfortunately full nomenklatura listings of lower party bodies are not available. The accessible data of the Voivodship Committee Executive

⁶⁸ AAN, KC PZPR, vol. 1663

⁶⁹ Since late 1954 the documents related to the 10th Department of the MBP were being sent to Warsaw. The Department dealt with PZPR members and was responsible for a part of the documents kept in the Central and Voivodship Committees’ staff units. In February 1955 a special committee was created to „investigate and destroy” the documents. In 1956 this subject was still being brought up during the Political Bureau’s sessions (AAN, KC PZPR, 1674, pp. 87, 210). Eventually almost all of them were destroyed (the remains are found in the AAN, in the File Collection of Various Origins). It seems that the vast majority of humiliating materials sent to party institutions by the MBP and UBP came from other departments of the security.

⁷⁰ For instance the resolution on „limiting the material privileges for party, state, union and military activists” – AAN, W. Dworakowski’s Heritage, 471, vol. 11

⁷¹ Ibidem

Board in Krakow⁷², in mid 1956 the body exercised control over 482 positions (240 in the party apparatus), but the number does not include the positions in the nomenklatura of Voivodeship Committee Secretaries (and their office). Assuming that the secretaries (and their offices) had a comparable number of positions,⁷³ the Voivodeship Committee in Krakow had some one thousand positions at its disposal. Assuming that a similar number of positions was at the disposal of each of the voivodeship committees (differences were the result of a varying number of large industrial companies in different localities) it can be estimated that in 1956 voivodeship committees around the country controlled some twenty thousand positions. The report by the Personnel Bureau of the Central Committee in May 1971⁷⁴ states the following shares of nomenklatura for these party committees: central – 3%, voivodeship – 14%, county – 83%. If the proportions were similar fifteen years before, then knowing the number of positions at the Central Committees disposal (4783), it has to be concluded that voivodeship committees controlled some twenty-two thousand, and county committees had some one hundred and thirty thousand positions at their disposal. The nomenklatura would then be 150,000 strong. These figures are most probably overestimated.

The reforms were interrupted because of the political turmoil that Poland got involved in, and returned into the scope of interest of highest authorities only under Gomułka, in spring 1957. The outline of the new nomenklatura listing was discussed and approved at the Political Bureau session of April 1. The part relating to the Central Committee nomenklatura was classified,⁷⁵ and the voivodeship and county committee part (and other of the same level – municipal and city quarters ones) was published with the „directions” in the brochure that contained the following clause: „for committee executive officers’ use only”.⁷⁶

The differences, especially regarding the central nomenklatura, were minor. The general trend was to shorten the list. Among other positions, the following were dropped: voivodeship department managers, academic

⁷² Antoni Dudek „Komitet wojewódzki PZPR jako lokalny ośrodek władzy w latach 1949-1970 (przykład Krakowa)” (PZPR Voivodeship Committee as a Local Center of Power in the Years 1949 to 1970 (Example of Krakow), in: *Centrum władzy w Polsce 1948-1970. Raport z realizacji projektu w roku 1997* (The Centers of Power in Poland 1948 to 1970: Project Progress Report 1997), Warsaw, February 1998, p. 21

⁷³ In the Central Committee, the nomenklatura of the Secretary’s Office was larger than that of the Political Bureau.

⁷⁴ AAN, KC PZPR, vol. 2234

⁷⁵ AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V, vol. 15

⁷⁶ Ibidem

personnel of party schools, division commanders, embassy secretaries, corporate directors or ministerial department directors,⁷⁷ which resulted in a decrease in the number of people (there were certainly far more than a hundred department directors). Transferring the authority to make decisions from the secretary offices to the secretaries themselves was of a technical nature. Some positions had to be „consulted” with the voivodship committees. More authority was granted to the Central Party Unit of the Defense Ministry⁷⁸ that controlled nominations to a dozen of the higher (but not highest) military positions.

Walenty Titkow, manager of the Organizational Department, was invited to and participated in the session of the Political Bureau that debated the changes in the nomenklatura. A year later the staff service of the Central Committee was reorganized again with the creation of the Personnel Bureau (with the authority of a department) with Stefan Misiąszek, a longtime employee of central party apparatus, as its manager. The staff policy was thus centralized again.

The trend of limiting the number of nomenklatura positions (i.e. those that assured more power in the state administration) did not last long either. At the end of 1964 the nomenklatura of the Central Committee outside of the party was supplemented with a number of positions⁷⁹ taking the situation back to 1956. Similar phenomena took place also at the lower decision-making levels. According to the calculations of Antoni Dudek in the Krakow Voivodship Committee, the nomenklatura (outside the party) was increased from 265 posts in 1957 to 865 in 1969.⁸⁰ The increase was undoubtedly convenient for – and influenced by – lower bodies. County committees and their equals seem to have been trying to expand its personnel authority. Not only were new positions introduced into the nomenklatura, but attempts were also made for some positions of the voivodship nomenklatura to be moved down the decision-making hierarchy. An example of this is provided by Antoni Dudek in the work quoted above: in January 1968 the Krakow Voivodship Committee was discussing transferring turning over 48 positions to county and municipal

⁷⁷ With one important exception: the other intelligence and counterintelligence department directors, the fight with political enemies (i.e. the core of the Security Services) and the staff of the Internal Affairs Ministry

⁷⁸ It consisted exclusively of active officers. PZPR never had a Military Department - that role was played by the Main Political Board (the Military Committee of the Political Bureau that worked in 1949 to 1956 dealt primarily with general military and military industry issues rather than political activity in the army.)

⁷⁹ AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V, vol. 547.

⁸⁰ A. Dudek, *ibidem*, p. 21. 1958 to 1960 saw the steepest rise.

committees, but the executive board did not approve „giving away” the management of hospitals and theaters, among other positions, and the voivodeship nomenklatura was even increased by 41 positions. There were clashes even at the voivodeship level; for instance the motion to transfer assistant professor and professor nominations from the Secretary Office to the „departmental” secretary was rejected.⁸¹ Everyone wanted to have this important instrument of power in his hands.

The problem of the number of nomenklatura positions could be compared to the problem of the number of party members expressed in the following dilemma: a mass party reaching everywhere or a smaller one which was more disciplined and conscious. A large number of nomenklatura positions gave the possibility of direct control of state institutions, economic and social organizations, yet it also resulted in the dispersion of staff policy which created an opportunity for such pathologies as promoting friends and subservient persons. Therefore attempts were occasionally made to regulate the range of nomenklatura and block its growth.

Such attempts were made in 1969 when the Secretary Office of the Central Committee produced directions „Regarding the Rules and Modes of Evaluation of Staff Included in the Party Nomenklatura”⁸² which were to ensure „the objective evaluation”. Simultaneously, „the review of and exclusion from the nomenklatura of all the positions that are not politically or economically significant” was made.⁸³ This resulted in a decrease in the nomenklatura from 116,000 to some 87,000,⁸⁴ and the greater part of the reduction took place in the county nomenklatura (and levels equal to it). The analysis prepared by the Personnel Department of the Central Committee⁸⁵ in May 1971 – describing the situation of 1970-1 – is the first I managed to find in the Central Committee materials to describe the nomenklatura in such detail. It is however a formal analysis (for instance of the age, education, professional or nomenklatura experience) and does not contain any evaluation of the functioning of the system as such and the deformations within it.

Despite all the important and numerous changes in Poland during the destalinization period, the system of nomenklatura created in 1950 survived intact through the times of „storm and pressure” of 1956 to 1957

⁸¹ Ibidem, pp. 22-23. In this case the issue was not the nomenklatura proper, but merely the evaluation of candidates for appropriate state offices

⁸² AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V, vol. 257

⁸³ AAN, KC PZPR, 2234

⁸⁴ Ibidem

⁸⁵ In October 1972 the old name „Staff Department” was reintroduced.

and safely endured the deepest state crisis of 1980 to 1982.⁸⁶ Regardless of the phase or era, regardless of whether it was Stalinism or „real socialism” that had to be dealt with, whether Poland was more or less dependant on Big Brother, whether it was „constructing the fundamentals of socialism” or whether it formed „a developed socialist society” – the nomenklatura remained one of the cornerstones of the state order.

⁸⁶ There were 273.200 nomenklatura positions in 1988, including the Central Committee nomenklatura of 4.643 positions – AAN, KC PZPR, temp. call no. p.451, vol. 34, p. 66