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Editor's Introduction

“No sex difference” – Women's rights, empowerment and gender equality

Abstract:

Presented articles in this issue of “Papers of Social Pedagogy” are devoted to women's rights, gender equality and subjectivity. The issue is related to the anniversary of the announcement of women's electoral rights in Poland. This anniversary is the main motive for a discussion on women's roles in a global society today. Presented articles are the reflection on women's issues in the context of global and local perspectives. They are an attempt to understand social, economic and political situation of women.

On 11 November 1918 the agreement between the Entente and the German Empire, which ended the First World War, was signed. For Poland it was a breakthrough moment – after 123 years of partitioning, Poland regained its independence. However, the First World War changed not only the political map of Europe; it also influenced the legal, social and professional situation of women. In many European countries women were granted full electoral rights. In Poland, it was on 28 November 1918 that Józef Piłsudski as the Head of State, signed a decree on the electoral law. In this way, all citizens, regardless of sex, received the right to participate in the elections.

In Europe electoral rights were won firstly by women in Finland; it was in 1906. The next countries that announced the electoral rights of women were: Norway (1913), Denmark and

Iceland (1915). In 1917, women gained the rights in Russia, Estonia, the Ukraine, Latvia and Belarus. In 1918 also Germany, Lithuania and Austria announced the electoral rights of women.

However, not all women, citizen of Europe, gained full voting rights with the end of the First World War. In the United Kingdom, the European cradle of feminism, women had to wait until 1928 to get their active electoral rights; on the other hand, passive right was acquired by women 10 years later. In France, in turn, women have officially become full citizens in 1944. Exactly on 21 April 1944 general Charles de Gaulle signed an act on the organization of public authorities after the liberation of France. According to article 17 of this document: „Women vote and are elected on the basis of such rights as men” (Assemblée-nationale.fr).

It is worth to mention that it is in France, in the 18th century, that Olimpia de Gouges launched the struggle for women's rights proclaiming in 1791 the *Declaration of Women's and Citizens' Rights*. The first article of this Declaration states: "A woman is born and remains free and equal in the rights of a man (Olympedegouges.eu)". Olympe de Gouges postulated the right to education for all women as well as the right of private property. She demanded gender equality in the family (she proposed a civilian, secular marriage contract). She also drew attention to social inequalities of the sexes, postulating the right of women to Honors and functions equal to those possessed by men: "Women have the right to mount the scaffold, they must also have the right to mount the speaker's rostrum", says one of the most famous sentences of the Declaration of Women and Citizens Rights (Ibid.). However, de Gouges did not have a chance to speak from the rostrum. On November 3, 1793, she was beheaded from Robespierre order.

In Poland, the beginning of social and political activities of women started in the nineteenth century and was related to a group of Enthusiasts, among others. This group was focused around Narcyza Żmichowska, a novelist and pedagogue who supported girls' education and economic independence of women. In order to implement the postulate of the empowerment of women, Żmichowska developed a girls' education program (one of economic and practical profile and the other - scientific one). In 1845 she founded her own school for girls in Warsaw. She also conducted informal courses for women (so-called pedagogical talks) and even she established an illegal rural school. The young women that found her ideas of education important for them, were called enthusiasts. This enthusiasm, understood as an

inner zeal, was to be a characteristic feature of new women: independent, thoughtful, diligent (Borkowska 1996: 49).

An important figure in the Polish women's movement was Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, social activist, publicist and feminist. She co-created many educational, professional, charitable and political organizations and institutions. In 1895, she founded, among others, Polish first magazine devoted to women's rights: "Ster" (Zawiszewska 2018). A few years later, in 1907, she created the Polish Women's Gender Equality Association, whose main goal was to obtain electoral rights without distinction of sex, nationality and religion.

As time went by, the number of women's organizations increased. Both, right-wing and left-wing women's organizations demanded the rights for women to education and vote. There were established the Women's Congresses. They were a forum for exchanging views and experiences. During one of them, the young writer Zofia Nałkowska gave a speech concluded with the exclamation: "We want all life!" (2018: 303) .

Maria Dulębianka, who presented her political pre-election program already in 1908, was actively engaged for women's rights. Taking advantage of the legal gap, she decided to participate in the elections to the Parliament in Galicia. Although she won over four hundred votes, her candidacy was rejected "for formal reasons" . However, Dulębianka did not stop her activities; she was organizing protests, conventions, as well as edited the magazine "Głos Kobiet". In 1917 the Polish Women's Congress took place in Warsaw. It was attended by 1015 participants. The inaugural speech was given by Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, a doctor and pioneer in the field of women's health. She addressed the gathered people with the words: "We Poles do not want to be passive spectators, but we want to act, we want to take a direct part in the act of resurrection of Polish state" (Dzimira –Zarzycka 2018). During Congress a special delegation was selected to talk with Józef Piłsudski, the Provisional Head of State (Program of the Polish Women's Congress in Warsaw 1917). A few months after the Congress, Budzińska-Tylicka along with other social activists, including Maria Dulębianka, went to Piłsudski to give him a petition, demanding that women deserve the same political rights as men.

On November 28, 1918 the Decree on the Ordinary Election, regardless of sex, was signed. The first elections to the Parliament were scheduled on January 26, 1919. For the first time in

history women have benefited from their civil rights. The number of seats won by women in the Parliament was only 8 (2% of the total), but it was a huge success (“Jestem feministką!”).

This short historical outline is the introduction to the newest issue of "Papers of Social Pedagogy" which is devoted to women. Although, the articles presented do not refer strictly to history and the anniversary of the announcement of women's electoral rights, the issues of women's rights, gender equality and subjectivity dominate and are ubiquitous in this issue. The anniversary of the announcement of women's electoral rights in Poland became the main motive for a discussion on women's roles in a global society today.

On November 26 a conference on women's issues was held in Warsaw (prawakobiet19182018.wordpress.com). It was attended by women-representatives of science, culture, art and non-governmental organizations. There were also many female students. The special guest of the conference was Professor Roland Pfefferkorn from the University of Strasbourg (France). The conference was accompanied by an exhibition of social posters by Monika Cybulska. There were three sessions devoted to the following issues: “Gender inequality as a social problem”, “Biographies of women as examples of self-empowerment and agency” and “Social activity of women and the activities of women's/feminist movements”. Selected papers that were contributed to the conference are presented in this issue of “Papers of Social Pedagogy”.

Presented articles are the reflection on women's issues in the context of global and local perspectives. They are an attempt to understand social, economic and political situation of women. And last but not least, they are a kind of homage paid to all women.

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