The Wellisz Family

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Poland's Free Market Pioneers

by

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Wilhelm Wellisch (1853-1911)

Leopold Wellisz (1882-1972)

Jewish origins in Brno (Brunn), Moravia

Wilhelm's Poland

Wilhelm: Jan Bloch's (1836-1902) right-hand man

Polish lands devastated: 1914-1920

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, sygn. 1-U-1904

Poland repulsed the Bolsheviks

LW's sister, Zofia, volunteered to serve to fight the Soviets

The industrial empire's *raison d'etre*

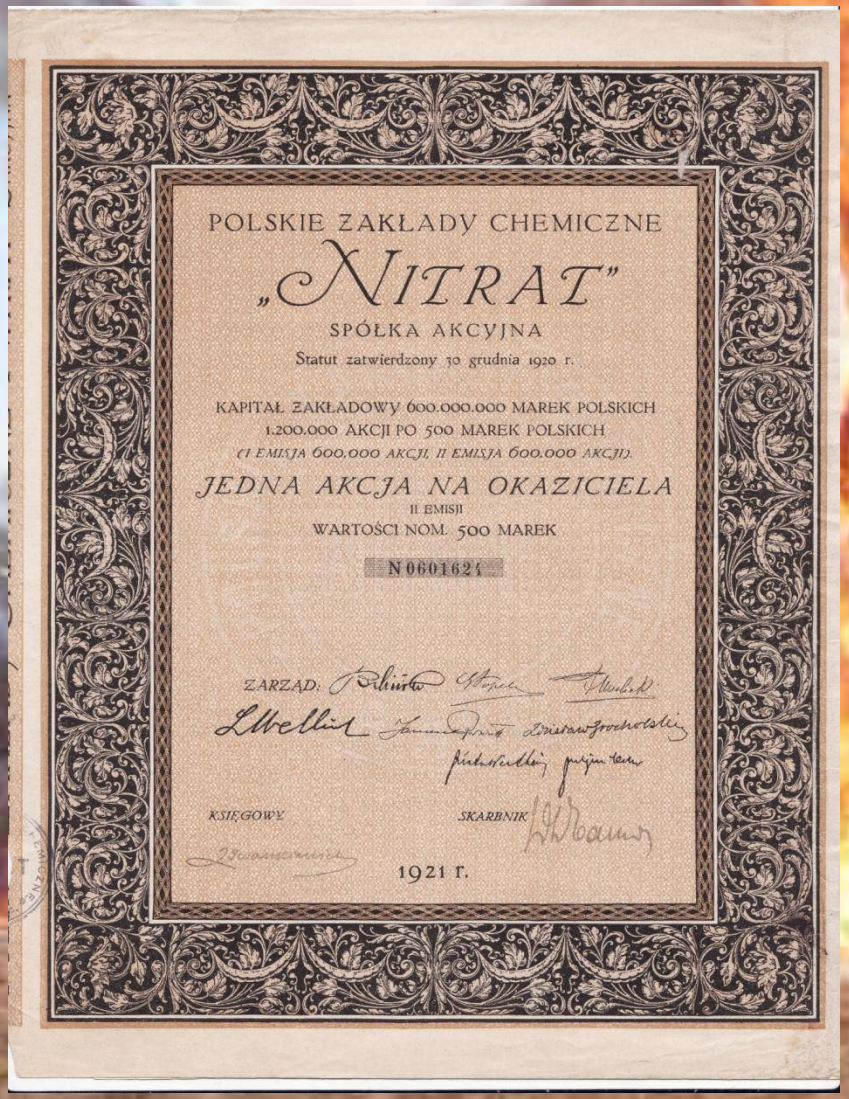
- "Following the difficulties of the first year [of independence] and the routing of the Bolshevik attack on Warsaw [in 1920], I considered it my duty to contribute, as much as my qualifications and expertise allowed, to the expansion of Polish industry, to create the greatest employment opportunities, and to guarantee our Country self-sufficiency in terms of the most indispensable means of defense" – Leopold Wellisz

Poland's precarious geopolitical situation, interwar period

"Pocisk" Ammo Factory: 1919-1939

Warsaw-Rembertow

“Nitrat” **explosives factory**: Niewiadow (near Lodz)



POLSKIE ZAKŁADY CHEMICZNE

„NITRAT”

SPÓŁKA AKCYJNA

Statut zatwierdzony 30 grudnia 1920 r.

KAPITAŁ ZAKŁADOWY 600.000.000 MAREK POLSKICH
1.200.000 AKCJI PO 500 MAREK POLSKICH
(I EMISJA 600.000 AKCJI, II EMISJA 600.000 AKCJI).

JEDNA AKCJA NA OKAZICIELA
II EMISJI
WARTOŚCI NOM. 500 MAREK

N 0601624

ZARZĄD:

KSIĘGOWY. SKARBNIK

1921 r.

“Fablok” locomotive factory: Chrzanow

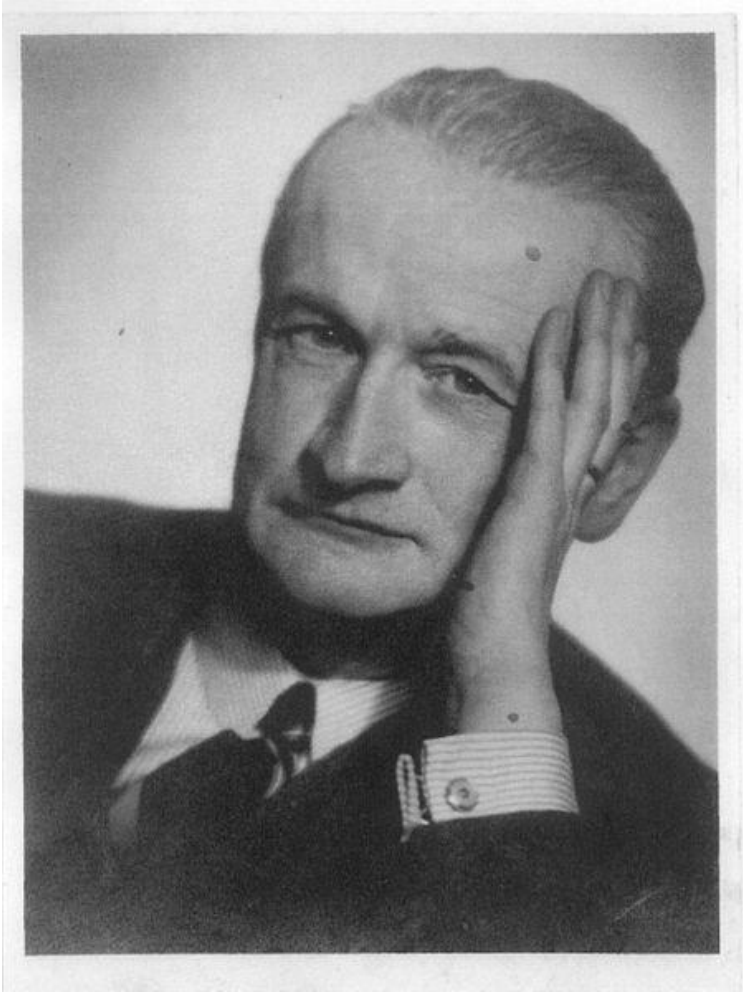
Aircraft factory at Okecie, Warsaw

Car assembly plant (Renault) in Naleczow, and a fueling station

L. Wellisz's world turned upside down

Worked for the London-based Polish Gov't-in-Exile of Gen. Sikorski

In NYC, Wellisz advised the Min. of Fin.



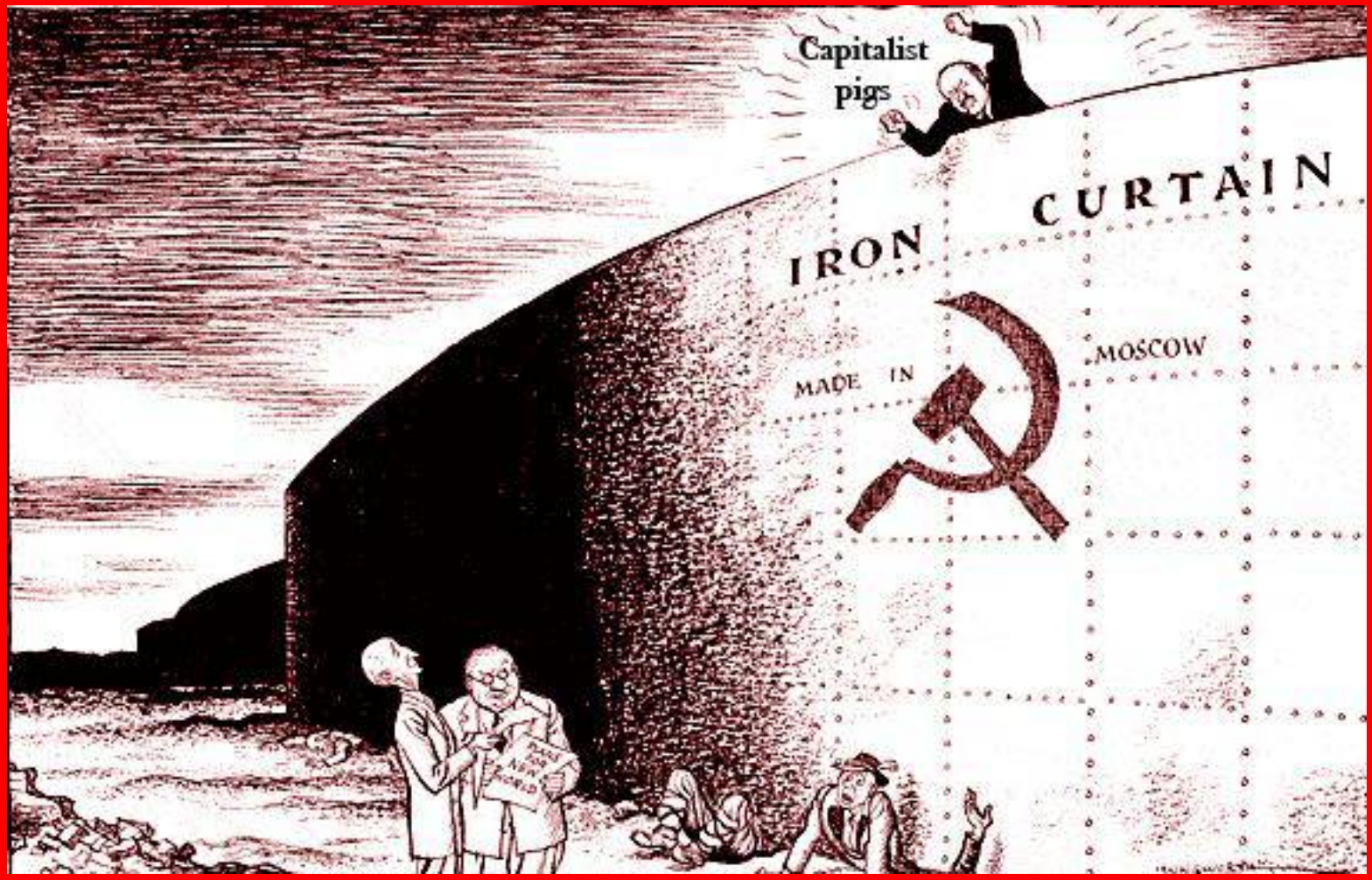
- *<u>His job included</u>*:
- Providing information on political and econ. trends in US
- Lobbying for Poland and postwar econ. Reconstruction
- Combating anti-Polish propaganda.

- This public service means that LW had to forgo much more lucrative business opportunities in the private sector, which once again illustrates his patriotism and sense of duty.

Wellisz's confidential June 1942 report

- Showed that the FDR administration and US gov't were not taking Poland into account as a factor in American postwar reconstruction plans.
- Nevertheless, Wellisz continued to stress the importance of a strong and economically robust Poland for Europe and the world.

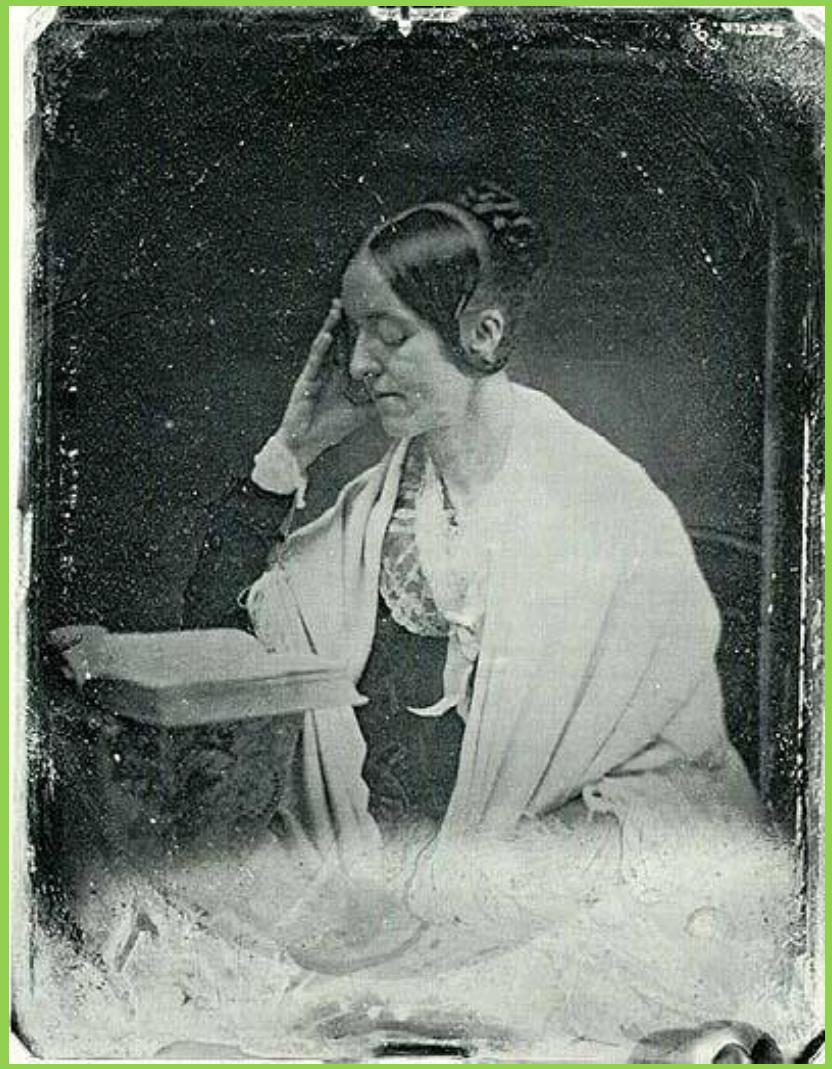
Forced to remain in exile after the war

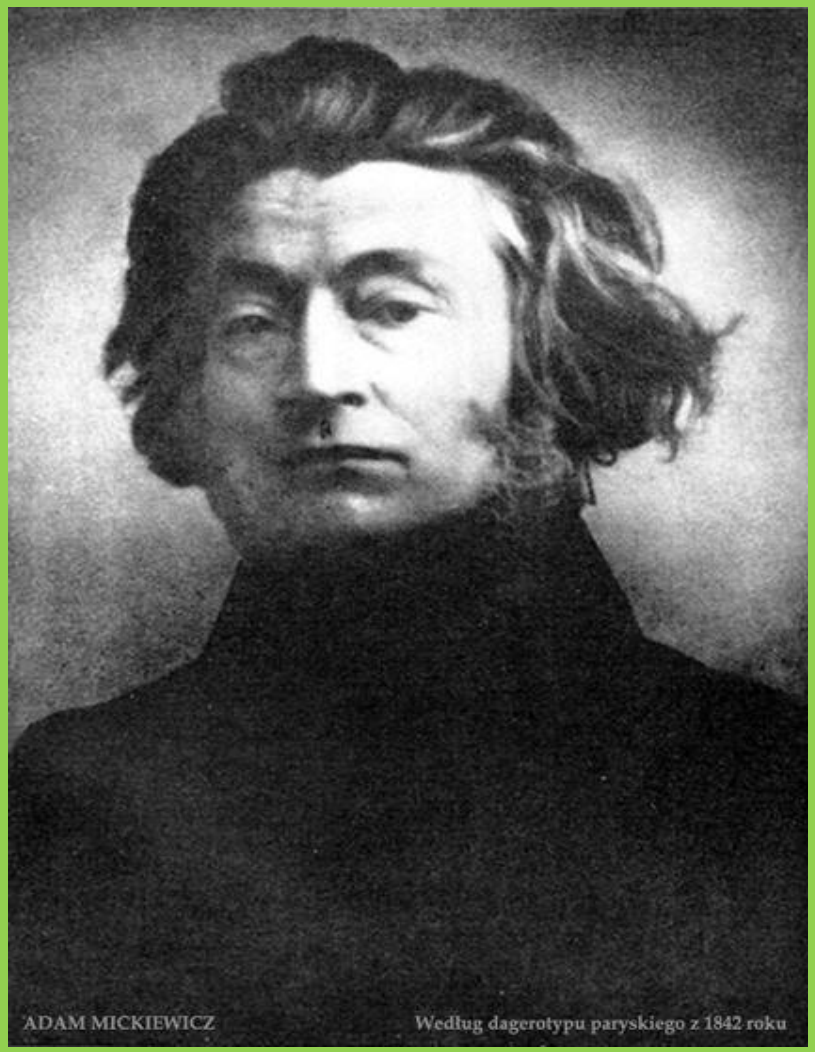


Postwar fate

- LW's vast property in Poland was seized by the Germans and, later, the Communists.
- E.g., the "Pocisk" factory facilities became a German Stalag and forced labor camp, and then an NKVD camp for AK and NSZ soldiers.
- Received only a small pittance as compensation from the US gov't more than two decades later.

Focused instead on Adam Mickiewicz and Margaret Fuller

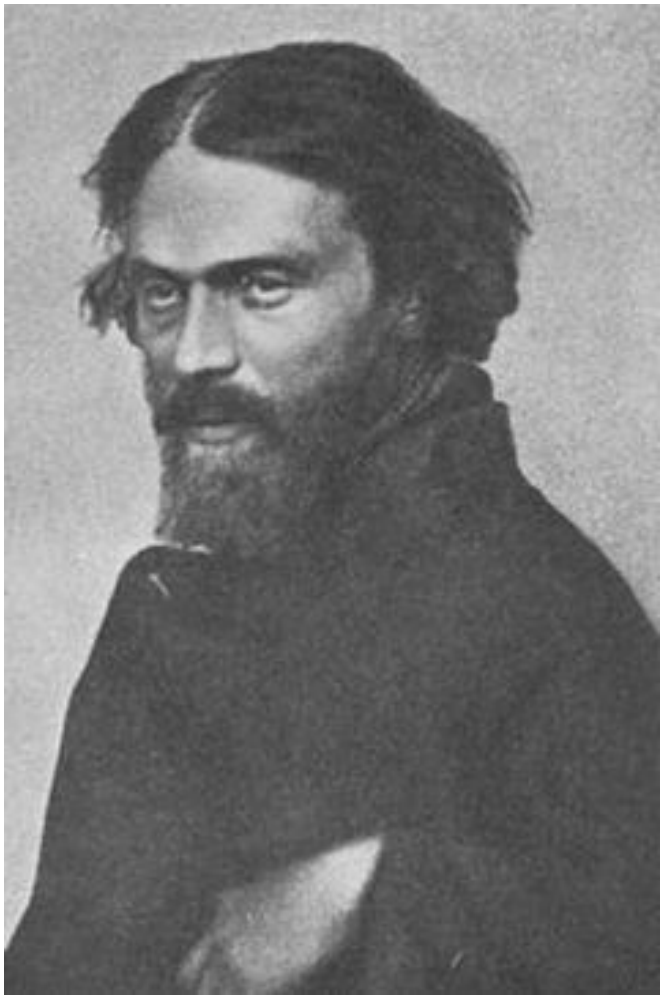




"Renaissance Man"

- One of the goals was to emphasize the cultural ties and affinities between Poland and the West
- Cold War, East vs. West context
- LW's great passions were art and literature; loved etchings; donated his collections to National Museum in Poland
- Hoped to see the appreciation of art spread to the masses

Discovered Norwid in Paris before the First World War



- Cyrpian Norwid: Polish dramatist, poet, sculptor, and painter
- Polymath like Wellisz
- Works given to Zenon Przesmycki-Miriam—poet and lit. critic—to publish.
- Wrote his first book on Norwid and French painter Ary Scheffer (1909)

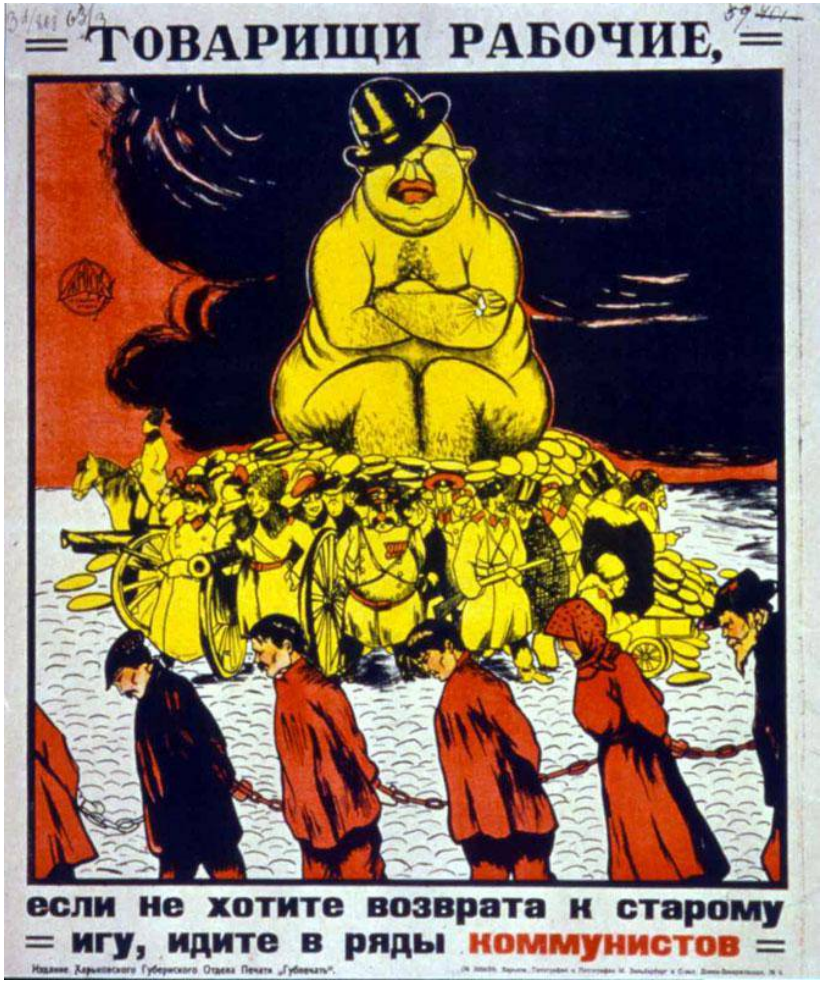
Money as a means, not an end

- **One of the reasons young Leopold became involved in business was to finance his love of the arts.**
- **In fact, he helped artists and supported their endeavors, such as the publishing of poetry.**
- **Money was clearly always a means towards a greater good, not merely an end in itself, for LW.**

“Responsible capitalism”

- Antithesis of the Marxist-inspired stereotype of the greedy, money-grubbing capitalist
- “The problem with socialism is socialism. The problem with capitalism is [some] capitalists”—Winston Churchill

Capitalist in Soviet agitprop



“Responsible capitalism” cd.

- LW built comfortable housing, sports facilities, granted scholarships to children of employees, engaged in voluntary profit-sharing, and otherwise helped his workers.
- On Sept. 1, 1939, LW employed 30,000 people. In factories directly under his supervision, no strikes occurred (in spite of the Great Depression)
- Further evidence that not all capitalists are evil and selfish

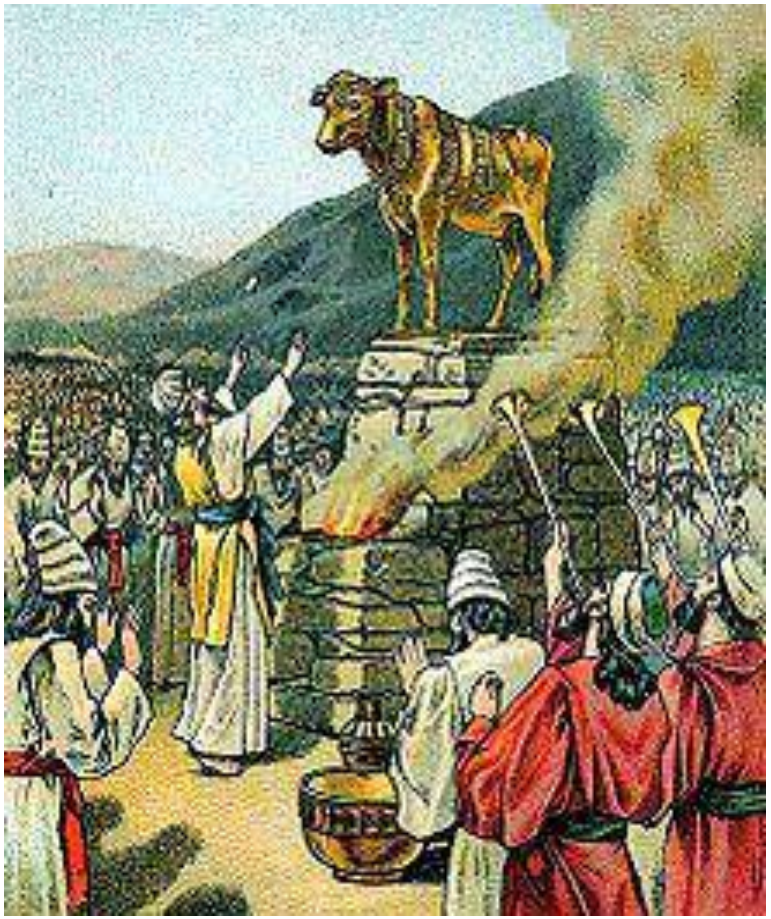
Why are Wellisz's contributions unknown, while Kwiatkowski is lionized?

Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski

Central Industrial District

The statist predilection

- After half a century of communist occupation and indoctrination, many Poles prefer and trust statist, socialist solutions while fearing and distrusting private initiative
- Interwar Poland had a patriotic-socialist and statist regime, the *Sanacja*, after 1926, which obstructed LW.
- “If the state doesn’t do it, no one will.”



“What is seen, and what is not seen”

- The insight of Frederic Bastiat
- Suggests that Poland might have developed faster had the state left entrepreneurs like LW alone

The appeal of Polish culture

- *... in spite of the fact that Poland was partitioned and often portrayed as a primitive backwater and cultural wasteland.*
- *And yet individuals from the German cultural world, such as the Welliszes (or Adm. Unrug, or the Zywiec Habsburgs) and others were attracted to Polishness.*
- *What were the causes of this appeal?*

“Polish Anti-Semitism”?

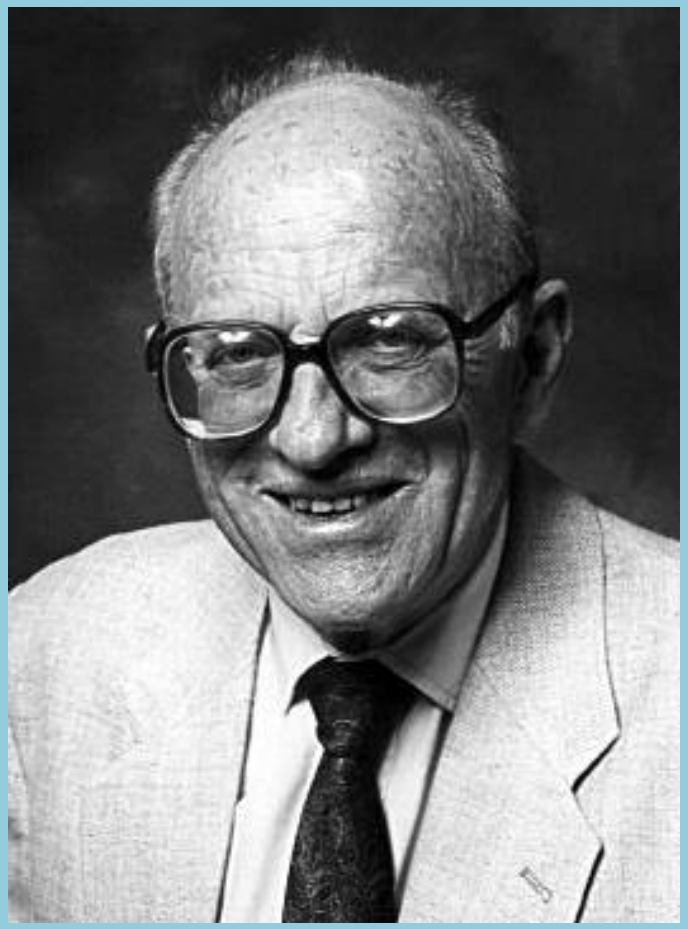
- The Wellisz Family story does not support the stereotype of Poland as a deeply anti-Semitic country and culture
- Both complaints about anti-Semitism or anti-Jewish sentiments are absent from LW’s writings and correspondence
- Families of Jewish descent were not doomed to the far-left, after all …

In fact, LW, a conservative liberal, associated with the Endeks

- … and his brother, Karol Wellisch—one of the main architects of Poland's commercial and industrial law code—belonged to the ND movement (he was murdered by the German NS)

- “The Polish nation comprises Polonized Germans, Tatars, Armenians, Roma, and Jews, provided that they live for the common ideal of Poland. (...) A black man or an American Indian can also become a true Pole, if he accepts the spiritual heritage of the Polish nation contained in its literature, art, politics, [and] customs, and if he possesses a steadfast will to contribute to the development of the Poles’ national being”—Prof. Wincenty Lutoslawski

Continuing the legacy



- LW's son, Stanislaw Wellisz, professor of economics at Columbia
- Author of an analysis of the economies of the Soviet Bloc (1964) and other works
- Advisor to post-1989, non-communist Polish governments and the IMF

Anti-thesis of post-communist oligarchs and kleptocrats

AMBER GOLD

Leopold would likely abhor the post-communist reality in Poland today

- Polish businessmen wishing to develop their country and to overcome communist-imposed backwardness would do well to study Leopold Wellisz and his achievements.
- He should serve as an example and his memory should be restored.