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**DECENT CITIZENS SERVING CHAUVINISM.  
SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING  
IN THE BLOCKADE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW  
IN 1936**

**Abstract**

November 1936 saw the blockade of the University of Warsaw, an occupational strike organised by far-right students demanding the introduction of the so-called 'ghetto benches' for Jewish students. This article draws a social portrait of the ordinary participants in the blockade and analyses their motivations. I argue that the socialisation of youth into exemplary citizens of a modern nation-state created a fertile ground for far-right organisations and their demands. Moreover, the largest student association, the Fraternal Aid Society, became a space for self-organisation into extreme nationalist politics. Its leaders tapped into the positive motivations of youth, i.e. the search for a sense of belonging and the desire of individuals to fit into the normative order of the community. My examination of the blockade offers a unique insight into the academic background of the far-right and its means of political mobilisation.

**Keywords:** far-right, social portrait, political socialisation, University of Warsaw, students

Crowds thronged Krakowskie Przedmieście street. People were blocking the pavement at the odd-numbered side of the street, pushing against the road barred by the police cordon. ... The [University of Warsaw] gate was covered with students inside, standing on the ground or hanging onto the grille as if onto a rock. They were laughing, excited, joyful... The blockade of the university was organised by National Democracy youth, who demanded the removal of the Jews, their fellow students, from [the university]. ... I watched it from the pavement, ... people from the crowd exchanged various opinions. Some praised the incident, and others reproved it. Someone was gabbing that only a handful of members of the National Radical Camp

[Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR] and Falanga blocked the university gates, preventing the whole mass of colleagues from leaving to create the impression of mass action. As a rule, anti-Semitic brawls were organised by just a small group, but this specific leadership was possible because of the utterly passive behaviour of most academics. They did not beat the Jews themselves, but they did not react to the beatings. A jelly!<sup>1</sup>

That is how Kazimierz Koźniewski, then a Warsaw gymnasium student, recalled the largest demonstration and political action at the University of Warsaw students during the interwar period years later. It was the blockade of the university on 23–25 November 1936 when far-right student organisations set up an occupational strike on the campus at Krakowskie Przedmieście.<sup>2</sup> The blockade was officially organised as an act of solidarity with the academic youth of Vilnius, who had occupied the dormitory at Bouffałowa Street (today: Tauro) since 14 November, demanding the introduction of a bench ghetto for Jewish students. The Vilnius occupation strike ended late on 22 November, after the students received assurances that their demand would be met.<sup>3</sup> This success of the nationalist youth at the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius encouraged students of Warsaw university to carry out their actions.<sup>4</sup> In addition to demands for the introduction of ethnic segregation in lecture halls, they put forward claims for a reduction in tuition fees and exemption from disciplinary penalties for participants of the anti-Semitic riots in October and November 1936.<sup>5</sup>

To further explain the context, let us remind that there were political tensions between three far-right student groups, similar in their programmes, which competed for influence in the academic

<sup>1</sup> Kazimierz Koźniewski, *Różowe cienie* (Warszawa, 1960), 263–4.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Barański, *Lata młodości i walki* (London, 1984), 70.

<sup>3</sup> On the blockade of the dormitory in Vilnius, see Natalia Judzińska, “Odmowa ta spowodowała zajście”: sprawa dyscyplinarna Rywki Profitkier a “getto ławkowe”, in Krystyna Slany (ed.), *Utopie kobiet. 100 lat praw wyborczych kobiet (1918–2018)* (Kraków, 2019), 155–73.

<sup>4</sup> The series of student blockades began with the occupation of the main building of the Warsaw University of Technology in March 1936, led by activists of the National-Radical Movement ‘ABC’ [Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny ‘ABC’]. Then the students made mainly economic demands and 2,500–3,000 participants took part in the strike. See Wojciech J. Muszyński, *Duch młodych. Organizacja Polska i Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny w latach 1934–1944* (Warszawa, 2011), 154–5.

<sup>5</sup> Archiwum Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (hereinafter: AUW), RP-69, Report of the Rector Professor Włodzimierz Antoniewicz, 15.



The gate of the University of Warsaw during the blockade in 1936

community. There was the Academic Section of the National Party [Sekcja Akademicka Stronnictwa Narodowego, SA SN], i.e. the youth movement of the National Democrats, and the fascist National-Radical Movement [Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny, RNR, so-called Falanga], which acted together against the Union of Polish National-Radical Youth [Związek Polskiej Młodzieży Narodowej-Radykalnej, ZPMNR], which was an academic branch of far-right National Radical Movement 'ABC' [Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny 'ABC', ONR 'ABC']. The latter played a leading role in the Fraternal Aid Society [Towarzystwo 'Bratnia Pomoc', co-called Bratniak], i.e. the most significant mutual aid organisation at the university, and a kind of student self-government.

The protest was led by Witold Borowski, a law student and head of the SA SN, and Zygmunt Przetakiewicz, a student at the Wawelberg and Rotwand technical school and member of the RNR, who was in charge of the security guard. The larger blockade committee, which formed very quickly, negotiated with the University authorities and tried to push through the demands listed above. The occupational strike turned into a great political spectacle of national-radical youth,

aimed at both the students and people of Warsaw gathering in front of the gate. The protesters guarded the main gate and draped it with numerous banners. The symbol of the nationalistic movement – a hand with a sword – was hung over the entrance along with slogans: “Long live Great Poland!”, “Death to the Judeo-bolshevism!”, “We demand a ghetto for Jews and a reduction in fees!”, they also declared readiness to fight “until victory”.<sup>6</sup> The organisers did not allow anyone to enter the university except the lecturers and representatives of academic authorities who lived there,<sup>7</sup> and they disorganised the ordinary course of classes.<sup>8</sup> After the blockade committee took an uncompromising stand and broke off talks with the university authorities, the rector of the University of Warsaw called on the protesters to end the strike under the threat of deprivation of their rights and the entry of the police into the university premises. The students responded dismissively and refused to obey. Finally, on the night of 25–26 November, the police entered the university campus, and a special unit from Gołędzinów [a housing estate located in the Praga-Północ district of Warsaw, where three companies of the Police Reserve were stationed in 1936] launched an attack on Auditorium Maximum, the main site of the strike. Students defended themselves fiercely, throwing stones and pieces of equipment at the police, while access to the building was blocked by barricades set up inside it. The police used water cannons and tear gas to seize the edifice, and a unit from Gołędzinów had to storm its first floor. Eventually, around 250 students were detained.

Historians have already detailed the course of the blockade, the main postulates of the strike and its leaders, as well as the political context of the entire action. However, these analyses are usually superficial and abbreviated.<sup>9</sup> There is no mention of those whom

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<sup>6</sup> Museum of the University of Warsaw, N. 1729, The gate of the University of Warsaw during the anti-Jewish blockade, 1931 [sic]; ‘Blokada UJP trwa nadal’, *Gazeta Polska* (25 Nov. 1936), 2.

<sup>7</sup> AUW, RP-69, Testimony of the Prorector of the University of Warsaw Professor Franciszek Czubalski, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Already on 24 November, the rectors decided to suspend classes in all Warsaw universities.

<sup>9</sup> See Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, “paragraf aryjski”* (Warszawa, 1999), 104–9; Muszyński, *Duch młodych*, 138–9; Szymon Rudnicki, *Falanga: Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny* (Warszawa, 2018), 192–4; Wojciech J. Muszyński,

Kazimierz Koźniewski described as ‘a jelly’, i.e. the participants of the political demonstration standing behind student leaders and political organisations. The opinions about them in memoirs and literature vary.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, some scholars are convinced, as the memorialist has also pointed out, that only a group of political activists were responsible for the demonstrations and the anti-Semitic violence and that many students were dragged into the action by accident, by force or manipulated to take part in the protests. On the other hand, Piotr M. Majewski, in his latest monograph on the university, refers to the entire group of detained participants in the blockade as “the most active militants”, which does not seem justified.<sup>11</sup> After all, militia in the structures of political organisations, including student ones, were rather elite and sparse units, recruited from the most fanatical activists or mercenary non-students.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, all sources about the blockade report both a group of activists and a group of ‘passive participants’, which mirrors the structure of all such protests.<sup>13</sup> In neither of these two interpretations, there is room for questions about who participated in the strike and their social backgrounds, why they got involved in that risky political action, and what social mechanisms supported their motivations.

This article answers the above questions and paints a social portrait of the blockade. It scrutinises ordinary participants who did not play leading roles and were not recognised by academic authorities as organisers of the strike and examines the motives behind their involvement in the protest. The socialisation of young people into model citizens of a modern nation-state in public and Catholic schools

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‘Blokada Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego’, in Marzena Korytkowska (ed.), *Encyklopedia “Białych Plam”* (Radom, 2000), 116–19.

<sup>10</sup> This view is represented e.g. by Ewa Bukowska-Marczak, *Przyjaciele, koledzy, wrogowie? Relacje pomiędzy polskimi, żydowskimi i ukraińskimi studentami Uniwersytetu Jana Kazimierza we Lwowie w okresie międzywojennym (1918–1939)* (Warszawa, 2019). I agree in this respect with the hypotheses put forward by Piotr M. Majewski, who draws attention to the prevalence of anti-Semitic attitudes at the University and describes many shades of student passivity. See Piotr M. Majewski, ‘Społeczność akademicka 1915–1939’, in *id.* (ed.) *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945* (Warszawa, 2016), 264–7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>12</sup> Rudnicki, *Falanga*, 141–2.

<sup>13</sup> AUW, RP-69, Rector’s Report, 13–23; *ibid.*, Testimony of the Prorector, 24–31.

created a fertile ground for far-right organisations with their ethnic nationalism and the exclusion of Jewish students from the academic community as their main demands. The largest mutual aid organisation Fraternal Aid Society at the University of Warsaw, had become a space of self-organisation into extreme nationalistic politics. Moreover, its leaders exploited the positive motivations of youth, the search for a sense of belonging and the socially desirable aspirations of individuals to fit into the normative order of the community. In this way, young 'decent citizens', who wished to build a strong state and generational solidarity, became participants in radical political action.

The analysis of the social composition of the blockade and the motivations of the ordinary participants gives a unique insight into the background of the academic far-right and its various activities. It also enables to show how typical social and psychological mechanisms that build bonds and sustain social order and commitment to the community in slightly changed conditions can be used by radical political movements to achieve their goals.<sup>14</sup>

## I METHODOLOGY

The social portrait of the blockade is based on the analysis of the files of its participants, which are collected in the Archive of the University of Warsaw [Archiwum Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, AUW]. After the police broke up the blockade, 252 students were arrested and charged before the Special Disciplinary Commission, established under the chairmanship of Professor Bogdan Nawroczyński, an educationalist and historian of pedagogy at the university. The commission was set up by order of the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment,<sup>15</sup> and its composition was to ensure impartiality. Its two other members were not lecturers at the University of Warsaw. These were Professor Engineer Stanisław Turczynowicz, a hydrotechnician from the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, and Professor Engineer Edward Warchałowski, a surveyor and former rector of the Warsaw

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<sup>14</sup> See Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford UK–Cambridge, MA, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> *Sprawozdanie z działalności Uniwersytetu Józefa Piłsudskiego za rok akademicki 1936/37* (Warszawa, 1938), 10, 40.

University of Technology. The latter had to face a blockade by students of the main building of the technical university in the spring of 1936. Thus, he had the experience of managing a similar crisis and ending the conflict with a compromise because he had agreed to financial concessions for students and the postponement of tuition fees.<sup>16</sup> Little is known about the political sympathies of the disciplinary judges, and these could certainly have influenced the verdicts of the commission and the classification of the acts of the detained students. It may be suspected that Turczynowicz, as a fillister (veteran) of the Arkonia academic corporation, which brought together many nationalistic students, may have approached the blockade with understanding. Nawroczyński, for his part, although not affiliated with nationalist circles, was critical of the *Sanacja* government and, as a student himself, participated in the occupation strike of the University of Warsaw in 1905. That was when students rose against the Russian Tsarist authorities and demanded academic autonomy.<sup>17</sup> This experience may have built an intergenerational sense of community and influenced his assessment of student actions.

The preserved catalogue of disciplinary cases enabled me to trace all those brought before this court and create a personal database of the occupational strike participants. A group of students stayed in the Auditorium building until the very end, i.e. the moment a special unit of the police lifted the blockade, and their involvement in the protest was of various natures. Some of them remained in the building voluntarily and willingly; others were detained by force, which will be discussed later in the text. Estimates of the number of participants vary; following Szymon Rudnicki, I assume that around 1,000 people took part in the strike, which accounted for more than 10 per cent of the students at the university.<sup>18</sup> Those charged before the disciplinary court would constitute only 25 per cent of all strikers. Whether this

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<sup>16</sup> See Muszyński, *Duch Młodych*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Renata Nowakowska-Siuta, 'Bogdan Nawroczyński. Jasność i ścisłość myśli pedagogicznej', *Ruch Pedagogiczny*, 1 (2018), 51–67.

<sup>18</sup> See Rudnicki, *Falanga*, 193. Monika Natkowska presents these estimates differently, calculating on the basis of *Gazeta Polska* reports that approximately 300–400 people took part in the blockade. It seems, however, that these calculations are heavily underestimated, since after several groups of strikers had left, 252 people were detained in the Auditorium. In turn, *Gazeta Polska* reported that only 150 people were arrested. The government official press release could certainly

group is representative of all strike participants is difficult to assess. However, it is undeniable that the blockade case gives us an opportunity – unique in the context of the available source material – to analyse the ordinary participants who were not activists of the organisation.

Out of 252 disciplinary cases, the files of 75 people have not survived, i.e. approx. 30 per cent of the participants, which largely coincides with the degree of preservation of all pre-war student records in the AUW resources, so 80 per cent of which survived the ravages of war. At the same time, the preserved student documents also remain largely incomplete. Part of the standard university documentation is missing, as it had been destroyed or dispersed during the war, and often only remnants of pre-war documents remain. Therefore, data about students were collected based on their applications and CVs written during the interwar period and after the Second World War, when they re-enrolled at the university to complete their studies or pass the remaining exams. The missing data on protesters and their social background were reconstructed using civil registrations and cemetery databases.<sup>19</sup> The records were also filled with the aid of biographical articles and dictionaries, ego-documents, and reports and publications prepared by pre-war secondary schools whose graduates were students of the University of Warsaw. This research made it possible to complete data for 149 persons and establish at least partial data for another 26.

## II

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PASSIVE?

As a result of the disciplinary commission's work, students were divided into 'active,' i.e. organising the blockade, acting in its sections and unambiguously supporting it, and 'passive,' i.e. all those who explicitly stated that they did not sympathise with the blockade or whose active involvement was not substantiated. Among those arrested and brought before the disciplinary commission – as mentioned previously – 49 students were found to have actively participated

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have wanted to downplay the scale and significance of the blockade of the largest university in the country. Cf. Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe*, 105–9.

<sup>19</sup> Online databases of civil status records, such as: <https://geneteka.genealodzy.pl/> were in use.



in the strike, which accounted for 19.4 per cent.<sup>20</sup> For 195 people or 77.4 per cent of those arrested, 'passive' participation was stated. Indeed, the number of 'passive' participants was much higher, but they left the university premises on the evening of 25 November or earlier. However, it can also be assumed that many strongly supported the blockade among the 'passive' participants, such as Tadeusz Łabędzki, the editor of *Wszechpolak*, a far-right student journal, from 1937.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from the 'passive' and 'active' categories used by academic judges, eight people were singled out as resisting. They were released from guilt and punishment by the commission. That was the case of Robert Komkowski, a second-year law student, who "accepted the announcement of the blockade with indignation, and tried to get out and separated himself from the rest of the students".<sup>22</sup> Other resisters, in turn, showed that they had made efforts to leave the campus but were forcibly kept at the university or even beaten by militia members.<sup>23</sup> Breaking out of the collective solidarity was an act of courage and evidence of individual independence. This group comprised of students of the first three years of the university, including two women and three students coming from the Polish countryside, which can suggest a more cautious approach to a common historical narrative on the gender and class subordination of the students from the popular classes to leaders from the upper years of the university and 'youngsters' from so-called 'better homes.'

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<sup>20</sup> For those students whose files did not survive, the type of participation in the blockade was determined on the basis of the punishment meted out to them by the commission. According to surviving documents, the punishment of expulsion or failure to complete a part of the academic year was imposed only on active participants. Sometimes, however, 'active' participants who sympathised with the blockade but had no function assigned received lower penalties, so it is possible that the percentage was even higher.

<sup>21</sup> AUW, 50045, Łabędzki Tadeusz, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Commission of 26 Feb. 1937. See also Jolanta Mysiakowska-Muszyńska, 'Tadeusz Łabędzki', in Wojciech J. Muszyński and Jolanta Mysiakowska-Muszyńska (eds), *Lista strat obozu narodowego w latach 1939–1945. Słownik biograficzny* (Warszawa, 2010), 188.

<sup>22</sup> AUW, 48756, Komkowski Robert, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Commission of 8 Feb. 1937.

<sup>23</sup> These were: Witold Marchewa (46462), Marian Kajka (50897), Jadwiga Okólska (49067).

**Table 1:** Form of participation in the blockade

	Nos.	%
Active participation	49	19.4
Passive participation	195	77.4
Resistance to the blockade	8	3.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>

The category of ‘passivity’ is worth a closer examination. While it is incorrect to consider all strikers as ‘militant,’ it should be underlined that the passivity assigned to them is rather apparent. The dichotomy between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ is problematic. Even those who remained on campus out of sheer curiosity did so in the public sphere as part of a political self-organisation form, such as a strike. Their very presence was a form of speaking up in a community, and it legitimised and supported the group’s claims. If we consider political participation a form of individual involvement in exerting political influence, we should treat even ‘passive’ participation as an important category.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the occupational strike is a kind of unconventional participation, i.e. such a way of exerting direct pressure on the authorities’ decisions and demonstrating civil disobedience, which always involves taking certain risks.<sup>25</sup> The students who persevered to the very end of the protest and were detained by the police could, of course, remain in Auditorium Maximum out of fear or inertia. Still, most of them first had to make a conscious decision to stay on the campus, and there was no shortage of opportunities to leave during the three days of blockade. Moreover, the rector’s report shows that the last student groups were still leaving the University campus on the evening of 25 November. Thus, many detained students must have remained there voluntarily, even if they succumbed to panic in the face of police incursions. It is also difficult to posit that the small group of leaders and militants would have succeeded in locking 250 people in the building and terrorising all of them, especially as the protesters were

<sup>24</sup> Krystyna Skarżyńska, ‘Aktywność i bierność polityczna’, in *ead.* (ed.), *Podstawy psychologii politycznej* (Poznań, 2002), 27.

<sup>25</sup> Skarżyńska, ‘Aktywność’, 29.

forced to focus on defending themselves against the police in the last phase of the blockade.<sup>26</sup>

The 'active'/'passive' classification was also linked to the policy of the academic authorities and the disciplinary committee. They wanted to see students more as victims of university politicians and militias, and only in the second place as victims of clashes with the police, which influenced the assessment of student deeds and the fines imposed; it will be discussed later in the text. However, the limited information and laconic style of protocols by the Disciplinary Commission persuaded me to stick to the distinctions of the disciplinary court, as the terminology in principle does not prevent us from looking at the social composition of the blockade and the declared motivations. However, the ambiguous character of the 'passive' term is signalled by quotation marks.

### III STRUCTURES OF INVOLVEMENT

The organisation of the blockade rested with the political structures of student groups and their leaders, as stated by the activists of the academic right themselves.<sup>27</sup> Among the 'active' participants, apart from Borowski, Przetakiewicz and Jan Barański, characterised by historians numerous times, were such SA SN activists as Tadeusz Kozerski, a pharmacy student, Edmund Zadziński, studying physics, and law students Florian Kuskowski, Stefan Morawski, and Andrzej Niklewicz, the son of Maria Niklewicz, a close friend of the leader of the *Endecja* [National Democracy], Roman Dmowski. Among the members of the RNR, the blockade participants included Jan Olechowski, a student of Polish literature, Zygmunt Stermiński, a future lawyer, and Ryszard de Holtorp, a student of the Warsaw University of Technology. Stanisław Kopeć, a third-year law student and son of Stefan Kopeć, a well-known biologist-endocrinologist at the University of Warsaw, was also affiliated with the RNR, as was his sister Maria Kopicówna, a medical student. Several siblings and

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<sup>26</sup> Zygmunt Przetakiewicz, *Od ONR-u do PAX-u* (Warszawa, 2010), 32–3.

<sup>27</sup> See Barański, *Lata młodości i walki*, 69–70; Przetakiewicz, *Od ONR-u do PAX-u*, 30–1; Stanisław Boczyński (ed.), *Sprawozdanie z działalności Towarzystwa "Bratnia Pomoc" Studentów Uniwersytetu Józefa Piłsudskiego za rok 1936* (Warszawa, 1937).

couples can be found among the activists of the National-Radical Movement, which shows how important a role the atmosphere of the family home and social connections played in political socialisation. Family ties and his father's position were probably why Stanisław Kopeć signed the letter presenting the youth's demands on behalf of the blocking party and became a member of the delegation to the rector. Exposition of the well-known, respected surname was a kind of manipulation in order to legitimise political actions by himself and his comrades with authority of professor Kopeć. It was also easier for him to navigate the academic field and enter into negotiations with the university authorities, as he had been socialised in the professor's home and probably had contacts with representatives of the academic community from an early age.

The security guards and *ad hoc* organised services also included five members of the Board of the Fraternal Aid Society and many students whose political affiliation is known, such as Sławomir Guttmejer, a law adept, who stood "guard and watched over the safety of students sleeping in the Auditorium building, after an attack by a leftist militia, while armed with a slat coming from an old window frame",<sup>28</sup> or a student from the Faculty of Humanities, who "entered the University premises in the morning of the second day of the blockade to support the action, claimed that she had worked in the blockade's provisions and so far didn't want to see [it] as an illegal act".<sup>29</sup> Thus, the strike had a certain pull, and the Fraternal Aid facilities, such as the canteen, gave it a firm foundation.

#### IV GENDER COMPOSITION OF THE BLOCKADE

Women's large-scale participation evidences the democratic legitimacy of the blockade and its widespread appeal. Female students in both the 'active' and 'passive' groups accounted for about 25 per cent, which is much less than the percentage of women at the University of Warsaw at that time, which was 39.8 per cent of the total number

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<sup>28</sup> AUW, 50289, Guttmejer Sławomir, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Commission of 24 Feb. 1937.

<sup>29</sup> AUW, 43007, Drewnowska Halina, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Commission of 3 March 1937.

of students. This disproportion would suggest that women were less likely to engage in radical activities, such as an occupational strike. However, this would be an exaggerated conclusion because law students were the largest group, and women made up only 21.1 per cent of the Faculty of Law at that time, which may explain the lower numbers of females among the protesters.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, after the rector's appeal for the end of the blockade and the announcement that the police would enter the university premises, several groups of mainly female students left the Auditorium Maximum building and walked out of the campus through a side gate. This was not necessarily due to the lesser involvement of women in the whole action but rather to the prevailing norms and patterns belonging to the cultural gender, which mandated the protection of women from violence. Firstly, in the reports of the rector and the vice-rector, there is a vital concern for the female students and the way they were treated by the police, which could have resulted in some women being exempted from the responsibility after their arrest.<sup>31</sup> It is also possible that the police handled the female activists more leniently and let some of them get away when recapturing the Auditorium Maximum from the students. Secondly, the habitus of interwar corporatists, among whom many members of nationalist organisations were recruited, strongly featured the ethos of chivalry. It may have prompted the blockade organisers to release some of their female comrades from the occupied building and kept most of remaining woman out of the fight.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, this ethos and honourable behaviour were subject to double standards and did not apply to Jewish female students, who were treated ruthlessly by far-right students and beaten with the same ferocity as male Jews. These standards often led to paradoxical situations, where nationalistic-minded female students attacked Jewish students brutally, so their male colleagues did not have to dishonour themselves.<sup>33</sup> A gendered order of violence was thus created.

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<sup>30</sup> Majewski, 'Społeczność akademicka', 135.

<sup>31</sup> AUW, RP-69, Report of the Rector, 13–23; *ibid.*, Testimony of the Prorector, 24–31.

<sup>32</sup> Sabrina Lausen, *Hüter ihrer Nationen: Studentische Verbindungen in Deutschland und Polen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Wien–Köln, 2020), 296–9.

<sup>33</sup> Natalia Aleksion, 'Crossing the Line. Violence against Jewish Women and the New Model of Antisemitism in Poland in the 1930s', *Jewish History*, 1 (2020), 133–62; Natalia Judzińska, 'Po wykładzie wysłuchanym na stojąco. Strategie uciszania

**Table 2:** Gender of students taking part in the blockade

	Active		Passive		Resistance		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
<b>Men</b>	37	75.5	143	73.3	6		186	73.8
<b>Women</b>	12	24.5	52	26.7	2		66	26.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>

## V

## SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF THE BLOCKADE

The criterion for determining the social roots of male and female blockade participants is the occupation of their fathers or guardians, as reported in the questionnaire completed at the beginning of each academic year.<sup>34</sup> The collected data can only provide some information about the social background of the strike members. Firstly, in many cases, the questionnaires were not preserved; secondly, the data taken from them is very sparse. There is little comparative material in the form of ego documents, which makes their interpretation and verification difficult.<sup>35</sup> For example, the categories of civil servants or white-collar workers are very broad, and the salary range between state functionaries of various classes was extensive in the interwar period. In turn, some professions may belong to very different categories – for example, a ‘pharmacist’ may cover both an owner of a pharmacy and its employee so that he may be classified both as (petty) bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. The collected data, however, allow us to generally assign the protesters to one of the social strata, distinguished based on the type of occupation, employment relationship, and position in the social hierarchy, and to confront these data

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głosów żydowskich studentek wobec getta ławkowego’, *Autobiografia*, 14 (2020), 275–91, <https://doi.org/10.18276/au.2020.1.14-14>.

<sup>34</sup> There were sixteen orphans in the study group, whose fathers were killed during the border wars of 1918–21 and the Polish-Bolshevik war, or died in the subsequent period. Their guardians were stepfathers or older brothers; sometimes the students were dependent on single mothers.

<sup>35</sup> In a dozen or so cases, there was a possibility to access published memoirs or biographies of participants in the blockade, which helped to dispel many doubts.

with the statistics of the social origin of all students at the University of Warsaw in the mid-1930s.<sup>36</sup>

**Table 3:** Last known occupation of father/guardian

Father's occupation		Active		Passive		Total	
		Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Agriculture	Landowners / Peasants > 50 ha	2	6.1	2	1.8	4	2.7
	Peasants 15–50 ha	1	3.0	3	2.7	5	3.4
	Peasants 5–15 ha	2	6.1	7	6.3	10	6.7
	Peasants < 5 ha	1	3.0	6	5.4	8	5.4
	Peasants – unknown acreage	-	-	3	2.7	3	2.0
	White collars	1	3.0	2	1.8	3	2.0
Industry, trade, communication	Larger entrepreneurs	2	6.1	4	3.6	6	4.0
	Smaller entrepreneurs	2	6.1	13	11.7	16	10.7
	White collars	5	15.2	22	19.8	27	18.1
	Workers	2	6.1	12	10.8	14	9.4
Public service and liberal professions	Civil and local government servants	4	12.1	15	13.5	20	13.4
	Professors and teachers of public and private schools	1	3.0	6	5.4	7	4.7
	University professors	2	6.1	-	-	2	1.3
	Liberal professions	3	9.1	4	3.6	7	4.7
Others	Pensioners, invalids, disability pensioners	3	9.1	11	9.9	14	9.4
	Unemployed	2	6.1	1	0.9	3	2.0
<i>Unknown</i>		<i>16</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>49</b>	<b>(33)*</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>(111)*</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>(149)*</b>

\* In brackets the number of known records is given.

<sup>36</sup> Findings and statistics by Piotr M. Majewski and Małgorzata Pleskaczyńska are consulted here. See Majewski, 'Społeczność akademicka', 156–7; Małgorzata Pleskaczyńska, 'Struktura społeczna młodzieży UW w okresie międzywojennym (na podstawie danych z roku akademickiego 1934/35)', *Roczniki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*, xi, 2 (1971), 41–52.

Among 'active' and 'passive' participants of the blockade, the majority is formed by students from intelligentsia families – civil servants and employees. Their percentage share in the strike is similar to the share of these groups in the student population at the University of Warsaw. Children of civil servants make up 12.1 per cent of the 'active' participants and 13.5 per cent of the 'passive' ones, compared to 12.7 per cent of the total number of students. In comparison, children of white-collar workers are 15.2 per cent of the 'active' participants and 19.8 per cent of the 'passive' ones, compared to 19.8 per cent of the total number of students. These groups should also include those whose fathers received retirement or disability pensions because they were primarily entitled to social security in their old age. Their percentage among strikers (9.4 per cent) was slightly higher than the university average of 8.9 per cent.

Among the 'active' ones, the percentage of students whose guardians worked in liberal professions and children of professors from schools of different educational levels was also significantly higher than the university average. Apart from the Kopeć siblings mentioned above, they were mainly children of local elites – school headteachers and teachers in smaller centres, such as Henryk Jaślan,<sup>37</sup> son of the head of a primary school in Ostrowiec Kielecki, or Adam Szeworski,<sup>38</sup> son of a professor of a secondary school in Nowy Sącz. Socialised in the environment of the provincial intelligentsia, they had a higher social and cultural capital than their colleagues, so they could feel a calling to partake in social activity. And those students, having been brought up in a nationalistic spirit by national ideologues, such as school teachers<sup>39</sup>, could be more susceptible to the slogans of the radical nationalists. At the same time, the material situation of the provincial intelligentsia was often difficult, as in the two cases mentioned above, which could give rise to frustration and a sense of relative deprivation and thus contribute to the radicalisation of views and a desire to change the existing order.

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<sup>37</sup> AUW, 47212, Jaślan Henryk, Certificate of the Municipal Authority in Ostrowiec of 24 Oct. 1935.

<sup>38</sup> AUW, 47127, Szeworski Adam, Testimony of indigeneity.

<sup>39</sup> Following Michał Łuczewski, I define national ideologues as all social actors involved in the spread of national ideology, understood as a set of statements, images and symbols associated with the nation. See Michał Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród: Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Toruń, 2012), 64–7.



In the liberal professions, on the other hand, the second half of the 1930s saw a campaign against Jewish doctors and lawyers, aiming to introduce the Aryan paragraph in professional organisations and self-governing bodies.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that Lechosław Roszkowski, the son of a barrister from Łódź, who was the president of the Christian Bar Association, took part in the blockade. In this case, the son's involvement corresponded perfectly with the father's activities. Analysis of the composition of the blockade also reveals social networks of far-right organisations, e.g. one of the 'active' participants of the blockade was Anna Staryszak, a daughter of Józef Staryszak, a lawyer, a respected specialist in local government law, who wrote his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor Bohdan Wasiutyński, a lecturer in law at the University of Warsaw and, until 1935, senator of the National Party, and a protector of right-wing students at the university.<sup>41</sup>

However, a notable percentage of peasant children is much higher than the average university level. Their involvement in the protest is much more noteworthy than the participation of intelligentsia children. While children of farmers with less than 50 hectares of land and smallholders accounted for 8.5 per cent of the total number of students, this figure was 12.1 per cent among the blockade organisers and as high as 17.1 per cent among its 'passive' participants. The intelligentsia and peasant background of the blockade is also confirmed by the students' place of residence before they enrolled at the university. The two largest groups of both 'active' and 'passive' participants in the blockade were students living in Warsaw, 27 per cent and 25.4 per cent respectively, and academics brought up in the countryside, 24.3 per cent and 23.8 per cent, respectively. These two groups accounted for more than half of the strike's participants, and far behind them was another group, i.e. participants from towns of 20,000–50,000 residents (13.9 per cent of all strikers). The large share of young people from peasant families was probably related to their high percentage in the Fraternal Aid Society. Students from the countryside often

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<sup>40</sup> Szymon Rudnicki, 'Walka o zmianę ustawy o adwokaturze w II Rzeczypospolitej', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 1 (2002), 49–61; Jolanta Żyndul, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935–1937* (Warszawa, 1994), 73–5.

<sup>41</sup> See Ewa Maj, *Komunikowanie polityczne Narodowej Demokracji 1918–1939* (Lublin, 2010), 37.

had to make their living, and the financial support of the association helped them a great deal.<sup>42</sup> Thus, mutual aid organisations had become an essential platform for political agitation and mobilisation, and the populist propaganda of the far-right in that area was successful.

The foundation for this was the accelerated process of acquiring national consciousness by peasants in the Second Polish Republic, mainly due to the public education of the newly created nation-state and Polish Catholicism, strong in the countryside, permeated with ethno-nationalist notions. In fact, 25 per cent of the blockade participants who came from peasant families graduated from Catholic schools. Among those 'active', there was, for example, Eugeniusz Nierychły, a pupil of the Pius X Catholic Gymnasium in Włocławek and previously a student at the Catholic University of Lublin. Among the 'passive' ones there were Wiktor Dymowski and Stefan Ołdakowski, who had attended the Salesian Gymnasium in Sokołów Podlaski.<sup>43</sup> The police authorities also paid attention to the participation of students from unprivileged strata, anxiously observing the populist dimension of the student movement: "SA SN [is] sparse, ... leading a non-intellectual host of academics, can lead to various transgressions. There is a significant lack of seriousness and reason among the leadership".<sup>44</sup> This observation reflects as much the radicalising potential inherent in young people from the popular classes as it does the authorities' fear of the political subjectivity of the socially subordinated strata. At the same time, however, the national state created a space for identity emancipation of the peasant classes, and this potential was perfectly exploited by activists from the National Party and the national-radical movement, often supported by youth chaplains.

In the light of fascist studies, the much lower participation of students of petty-bourgeois origin may come as a surprise. Strikers, whose fathers could be classified as smaller entrepreneurs (independent craftsmen, shopkeepers or stall owners), constituted 6.1 per cent of the 'active' participants and 11.7 per cent of the 'passive' ones. In contrast,

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<sup>42</sup> According to a report of the Fraternal Aid's Statistical Section, 27 per cent of the society's members reported that their parents' occupation was agriculture. See Jerzy Kurcysz, *Sprawozdanie Towarzystwa "Bratnia Pomoc" Studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego za rok 1931/32* (Warszawa, 1932), 214.

<sup>43</sup> AUW, Dymowski Wiktor, 51189; Ołdakowski Stefan, 49119.

<sup>44</sup> APW, KIKR, 356, Information Circular no. 139 from 26 Nov. 1936, 696.

in the entire student population of the University of Warsaw, this category of father's occupation was declared by 15.7 per cent. Almost the same percentage was recorded in its ranks by the Fraternal Aid Society.<sup>45</sup> This disproportion is surprising since a large part of the anti-Semitic economic propaganda of the National Party and the national-radical movement was directed at these social circles, and the boycott of Jews was supposed to work in favour of Polish trade and crafts. However, given the weakness of the Polish (petty) bourgeoisie, radical groups directed their message to workers and peasants, which, as can be seen in the case of the young, was effective.

The analysis sheds light on the social base of the academic far-right, which consisted not only of intelligentsia groups but also the modernising peasantry, which has so far been rarely mentioned in the historiography. The significant participation of female students and peasant youth shows that the demands of radical nationalists had emancipatory potential, and protest actions such as the blockade were in line with the social change dynamics. For students from groups excluded until recently, both women and youth from the popular classes, political participation could have a compensatory character and be a form of overcoming the feeling of weakness and subordination; thus, it became an element of empowerment and gaining agency.<sup>46</sup> The occupational strike itself, a form adopted from the repertoire of protests in the labour movement, was not only an instrument of articulating political demands but also of building a sense of solidarity among the strikers and a bond which made further joint action possible.<sup>47</sup> Przetakiewicz writes in his memoirs about the integrating effect of the action on the RNR milieu and the influx of volunteers to the militia after the blockade.<sup>48</sup> The protest also created an imagined community of radical-nationalist students, embracing all higher education institutions of the Second Polish Republic, a fact well illustrated by declarations of support for the Vilnius blockade and the actions of the

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<sup>45</sup> Kurcysz, *Sprawozdanie Towarzystwa*, 214.

<sup>46</sup> See Krystyna Skarżyńska, *Człowiek a polityka. Zarys psychologii politycznej* (Warszawa, 2005), 38.

<sup>47</sup> See Wiktor Marzec, *Rising Subjects: The 1905 Revolution and the Origins of Modern Polish Politics* (Pittsburgh, 2020); the page references are to the Polish edition: *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne* (Łódź–Kraków, 2016), 66–77.

<sup>48</sup> Przetakiewicz, *Od ONR-u do PAX-u*, 35.

Lwów/Lviv youth, as well as the academic house blockade announced on 25 November 1936 in Poznań and aimed at the academic authorities or the 24-hour demonstration blockade at the Jagiellonian University as a gesture of solidarity with Vilnius and Warsaw.<sup>49</sup>

## VI FACULTIES OF RADICALISM

The examination of the social composition of the blockade enables me to positively verify popular theories about the distribution of political involvement in the academic community. The clearly dominant group among members of the blockade were students of the Faculty of Law (46.9 per cent of the ‘active’ and 36.4 per cent of the ‘passive’ participants), followed by students of the Faculty of Humanities – 24.5 per cent and 22.8 per cent, respectively. The third were those attending the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, i.e. 22.4 per cent and 22 per cent. However, the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Humanities were of comparable size, while the Mathematics one was much smaller. Thus the percentage share of science students could be, in fact, greater than that of humanists. The type of studies and a low academic workload, and the ethos of a lawyer-activist established at this faculty weighed on the high political activity of law students.<sup>50</sup> As early as 1925, Kazimierz Mamrot, editor of a legal student magazine and a member of a socialist student organisation, wrote:

Adherence to a specific political direction is an entirely natural (and for us lawyers even necessary) impulse of our developing psyche; it is an awareness of the social world around us, it is the courage to set a straightforward social programme for ourselves. Whoever lacks such a programme either does not have enough understanding or interest in social matters or does not dare to proclaim them in public.<sup>51</sup>

This legal ethos, combined with a radical generational habitus, created fertile ground for far-right influences.

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<sup>49</sup> See Rudnicki, *Falanga*, 194; ‘Blokada Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego’, *Gazeta Polska* (26 Nov. 1936), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Majewski, ‘Społeczność akademicka’.

<sup>51</sup> Kazimierz Mamrot, ‘Parę słów o polityczności Kół Naukowych’, *Biuletyn Koła Prawników SUW*, 5 (1925), 3.

**Table 4:** Faculties of the University of Warsaw

	Active		Passive		Resistance		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Law	23	46.9	71	36.4	5		99	39.3
Humanities	12	24.5	44	22.8	1		57	22.6
Mat.-Sci.	11	22.4	39	20.2	1		51	20.2
Medicine	1		9	4.7	–		10	4
Pharmacy	2		8	4.1	–		10	4
Veterinary	–	0	24	12.3	1		25	9.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>

Historians' hypothesis about the participation of mainly lower-year students in demonstrations, political gatherings and acts of violence is also confirmed by collected statistics.<sup>52</sup> During the blockade, the first fiddle was played by first-, second- and third-year students, who probably found it easier to become politically involved because they likely had not yet started their own families and were less commonly burdened with domestic responsibilities and professional work. They could also be less afraid of the possible consequences of participation in the blockade, e.g. getting a degree or finding a job after graduation. It is worth noting that first-year students were not only 'passive' observers of the events but also co-creators. They accounted for as much as 36 per cent of 'active' participants. For first-year students, active participation in the protests was a way of gaining acceptance by the group and establishing themselves in it. Joining the strike could have reflected proactive predispositions and personality traits such as extroversion, curiosity, and need for control and influence. For some, it was also a natural extension of social and political activity from the time they attended secondary school. Among the youngest strikers, some very efficient and committed individuals listed their numerous youth activities in university applications. A good example was a nineteen-year-old Jan Adamek, from 1928 a member of the Polish Scouting Association, where he had risen to the position of member

<sup>52</sup> Majewski, 'Społeczność akademicka'; Andrzej Garlicki, *Piękne lata trzydzieste* (Warszawa, 2008), 207.

of the scout headquarters. In the Jan Chreptowicz Gymnasium in Ostrowiec Kielecki, he belonged to the League of Air and Chemical Defence, the Maritime and Colonial League, self-education circles and the Fraternal Aid Society, and in 1935 he completed a glider course.<sup>53</sup> His youthful enthusiasm and drive to act manifested themselves also in co-organising the blockade.

The school played a crucial role in political socialisation, and the attitudes formed there often translated into the involvement of first-year students. Of the 66 participants who matriculated in the autumn of 1936, 48 came from the provinces (73 per cent), and 18 were brought up in Warsaw (27 per cent). However, as many as 21 people graduated from secondary schools in Warsaw, i.e. 32 per cent of first-year students. Among them there were Jan Zamoyski Gymnasium (2), Catholic Marian Fathers' Gymnasium in Bielany (3) and the Władysław IV State Gymnasium in Praga (3). The first two were known for their close links with the national camp, and later, in the 1930s, with the National-Radical Movement. Many Zamoyski's alumni were RNR members, including Bolesław Piasecki, the organisation's leader. The Marian Fathers, in turn, published *Pro Christo* monthly, with which RNR activists also collaborated. The school in the Bielany district willingly accepted boys from impoverished families and from the countryside, providing them with material support. My research also shows that Salesian educational institutions, especially the secondary school in Sokołów Podlaski, became a hotbed for nationalists. It had been attended by three first-year students who took part in the strike, and two more students had been educated at Salesian secondary schools in Aleksandrów Kujawski and Daszów near Stryj. This raises the question of what role ethno-nationalism and anti-Judaism played in the Salesian apostolate among the youth. Research on the interwar discourse of the Catholic Church and the Catholic press argues that anti-Semitic content occupied a prominent place in their teachings.<sup>54</sup> Besides, there were 14 graduates of Catholic schools, which constituted 21.2 per cent of the newly matriculated participants of the blockade,

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<sup>53</sup> AUW, 52317, Adamek Jan, Application to the Rector for admission to university – curriculum vitae, 15 Sept. 1936.

<sup>54</sup> See Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Anti-Semitism. Poland 1933–1939* (Routledge, 2000); Anna Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu: koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939* (Warszawa, 1998).

while Catholic schools constituted about 9 per cent of all secondary schools in the country at that time.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, many supporters of the SA SN and the national-radical movement at the secondary school stage belonged to the illegal National Gymnasium Organisation [Narodowa Organizacja Gimnazjalna, NOG], affiliated with the *Endecja*. Of the members of the blockade committee, all but Przetakiewicz had belonged to the NOG in the past. However, it was more challenging to determine which of the first-year students could belong to this organisation because they did not boast about illegal political activities in secondary school in their university applications. For instance, Tadeusz Łabędzki, son of a landowner and Siberian exile, undoubtedly belonged to this organisation in the course of his education at the Mikołaj Kopernik Gymnasium in Łódź.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, he had been well-acquainted with the chauvinist agenda of the far-right already in his school days, and his involvement in student political action was a natural extension of that activity.

**Table 5:** Year of enrollment at the University of Warsaw

Year	Active		Passive		Resistance		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
1929	1		-	-	-	-	1	
1930	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1931	1		3	2.3	-	-	4	2.3
1932	1		4	3.1	-	-	5	2.8
1933	6	16.7	14	10.8	-	-	20	11.4
1934	8	22.2	20	15.4	3		31	17.7
1935	6	16.7	39	29.5	2		47	26.8
1936	13	36	52	39.4	2		67	38.3
<i>Unknown</i>	13	<b>100</b>	63	<b>100</b>	1		77	<b>100</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>(36)*</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>(132)*</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>252</b>	<b>(175)*</b>

\* In brackets the number of known records is given.

<sup>55</sup> See Barbara Gromada, 'Szkoły Sióstr Nazaretanek w Warszawie w latach 1919–1944', *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 2 (1999), 33.

<sup>56</sup> See Mysiakowska-Muszyńska, 'Tadeusz Łabędzki', 188.

My examination of the social composition of the blockade confirms the findings of historians regarding the leading role of both the Faculty of Law and first-year students in forming a mobilisation base for political action. The dominance of law students among activists and politically active students is a simple consequence of the profile of law studies in the interwar period. They attracted all those interested in public service and political life, combining the education of strictly legal competencies with knowledge about international relations, local government and politics. This further strengthened the ethos of the lawyer-activist. The participation of first-year students, in turn, shows that their role was not limited to passive assistance to their older colleagues but also included active participation in various undertakings, which was undoubtedly fostered by the excitement stemming from their new social situation and promotion experienced by recent high school students, as well as by the desire to implement the values brought from schools, family homes and gymnasium organisations.

## VII MOTIVATIONS

In student files of the Special Disciplinary Commission, there is a brief description of the grounds for individual decisions to participate in the blockade. Out of 195 'passive' participants, 83 depositions of individual students were kept. This material requires careful analysis because the students belittled their role in the events of 23–25 November 1936 before the disciplinary court and tried to explain their participation in the strike in such a way as to avoid punishment or at least minimise it. Therefore, I treat their unequivocal declarations that they 'did not sympathise' with the blockade as not very reliable and omit them in the analysis. Testifying that they did not support the aims and demands of the blockade, they guaranteed themselves the status of a 'passive participant' and a milder punishment. However, additional reasons given by students for the fact that they were present in Auditorium Maximum when the police pacified the blockade seem to be entirely credible, and their variety reflects well the varying motivations for engaging in political participation. While the transcripts of their testimonies are admittedly schematic, the linguistic diversity within these short justifications could indicate a fairly faithful (stenographic transcription) rendering of the testimonies. In addition, the collection



of depositions presents a unique value as source material, allowing me to discover some motivations of 'passive' participants in the November events. It enables me to look at the functioning of the student community involved in political action.

The personal motives of political participation of students correspond well with the expectations distinguished by Bert Klandermans: (1) goal motives, i.e. the expectation that the involvement will help achieve the goal of the action; (2) social motives focusing on the reactions of significant others; and (3) reward/risk motives focusing on the costs and benefits of participating or not participating in the action.<sup>57</sup> The largest group of 'passive' participants testified that they stayed at the Auditorium Maximum until the end because they were afraid of violence, were terrorised and were forced to stay at the University of Warsaw campus, so they feared the risk of withdrawing from the protest. In fact, Leszek Gryzik, a first-year student of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, who came from Żyrardów, testified that he "did not sympathise with the blockade and tried to leave after it was announced, but he was beaten, got a haemorrhage as a result and was unable to get out afterwards".<sup>58</sup> In the testimonies of other female and male students, the fear of being beaten,<sup>59</sup> receiving insults from other blockade members,<sup>60</sup> and the respect they felt for the security guards are mentioned.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the following phrase is repeated like a mantra: "she wanted to get out, but succumbed to violence/coercion", "retreated from violence", and "succumbed to physical terror". It is difficult to accept all of these testimonies as credible; probably, some students adopted this defence strategy before the court to prove their innocence; they could have also responded to the expectations of the disciplinary judges.

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<sup>57</sup> Bert Klandermans' expectancy-value model of a decision to participate in a specific political action is described by Sara Breinlinger and Caroline Kelly, see Sara Breinlinger and Caroline Kelly, *The Social Psychology of Collective Action* (London, 2014), 30–4.

<sup>58</sup> AUW, 50381, Gryzik Leszek, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 19 Feb. 1937.

<sup>59</sup> AUW, 34943, Wojczal Antoni, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 15 Feb. 1937.

<sup>60</sup> AUW, 51025, Dawid Wiesław, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 8 Feb. 1937.

<sup>61</sup> AUW, 48204, Kulka Stanisław, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 19 Feb. 1937.

We must remember that some of the strikers were intimidated by the organisers of the blockade and militants. There was an apparent pressure from them when the blockade was formed and when they were preparing to clash with the police on the final evening. However, the organisers voluntarily let the group of female students leave. Additionally, Zbigniew Zdrójkowski, a second-year law student, recalled the first day of the strike:

I wanted to leave the university through the main gate at Krakowskie Przedmieście. ... I noticed that in front of the gate, organised students were trying to persuade those who wanted to leave the campus. Outside the gate, the *Falanga* militia was mercilessly pummelling those who left. Wishing to avoid a severe beating or even disability, I decided not to exit the University grounds through that gate. I found a different safe way out. For a fee of 50 zlotys, an acquaintance of the caretaker lets out those interested through a little-known side gate, camouflaged with bushes in the wall neighbouring the convent of the Church of Visitation Nuns. I took advantage of this opportunity, and in the evening, for 20 zlotys, I managed to leave the campus.<sup>62</sup>

On the one hand, those reluctant to participate in the blockade were indeed forced to stay by violence. On the other hand, as the memorialist showed, there were also opportunities to leave the University of Warsaw campus. In the light of the testimonies, the rector's appeal and the ministerial announcement about the withdrawal of students' rights and the entry of the police seem to be a turning point: that was when some strikers decided to leave the blockade. At that time, a group of male students was locked by the organisers in one of the halls of the Auditorium Maximum, and female students were released.<sup>63</sup>

Another large group of witnesses (11 people) spoke of "pressure" and "moral compulsion" exerted by the organisers of the blockade and the youth at the spot, which partially corresponds to the risk/reward motive, but above all, indicates social reasons. The majority of the strikers adopted a particular definition of the situation, and the values of the far-right – ethnic unity, exclusion of the Other and solidarity

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<sup>62</sup> Zbigniew Zdrójkowski, '1935–1942', in Grażyna Bałtruszajtys (ed.), *Wydział Prawa w relacjach i wspomnieniach pracowników i studentów (1918–1950)* (Warszawa, 1990), 140. In 1936 in Warsaw, one kilo of bread cost 0.3 zloty.

<sup>63</sup> Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe*, 108; AUW, RP-69, Report of the Rector, 17.

with the Vilnius blockade demanding a bench ghetto, anti-fee solidarity – were considered not only desirable but also worthy of support. The strikers acted within the framework of these slogans as if no other choice was possible, and that understanding of the situation was also imposed on those who expressed doubts.<sup>64</sup> The blockade organisers also became the reference point and disposers of the moral right. “Yielding to moral pressure”, although indicative of coercion on the part of the organisers, was *de facto* evidence of adopting a conformist attitude and submitting to the majority’s will. Despite its negative connotations, conformism usually remains one of the key attitudes ensuring the maintenance of social order, in this case it resulted in public disorder.

Another dimension of this conformism is complete lethargy and assuming the role of a passive observer. Quite a sizeable group (12 students) confessed to a lack of courage and energy to take any action. For example, Marian Cześniak simply explained that “he considered leaving the University from the very beginning to be impossible”.<sup>65</sup> Such an attitude was not directly connected with support for the blockade; some students from this group explicitly said that they did not identify with its slogans, and it cannot be ruled out that they remained indifferent to the extreme-right agenda. However, their passivity and willingness to submit to the majority’s will co-created a convenient situation for the organisers of the blockade and allowed the latter to advance the narrative of representing the majority of university youth. Nevertheless, these negative motivations were in minority because most of the ‘passive’ participants in the strike presented positive attitudes and indicated good intentions behind their decision to get involved. A large group of female and male students (11 people) declared that they stayed on the University campus and participated in the strike for the sake of personal ties or entrusting their colleagues’ decisions. Therefore, they pointed to social motives and the value of interaction with others. For example, Alicja Borawska

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<sup>64</sup> See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1959); the page references are to the Polish edition: *Człowiek w teatrze życia codziennego*, ed. by Jerzy Szacki, transl. Helena Datner-Śpiewak and Paweł Śpiewak (Warszawa, 2000), 111–15.

<sup>65</sup> AUW, 49967, Cześniak Marian, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 8 Feb. 1937.

stated that “she remained after the blockade was announced voluntarily, out of solidarity with her fellows”.<sup>66</sup> While Jerzy Karpiński explained that he had stayed “looking out for his colleagues”,<sup>67</sup> Zygmunt Naczas stated, “that he trusted his fellows’ explanations too much”.<sup>68</sup> On this occasion, first-year students often declared their presence in the blockade by the lack of experience and political sophistication and by the fact that “as a first-year student, he was not entirely familiar with his duties”.<sup>69</sup> In fact, most of those who referred to peer solidarity were students who had been matriculated just a few weeks earlier. So it was not so much a question of deep friendships with fellow students, as such attachments had not yet been formed, but of a certain collective bond and thinking in collectivist terms. Although, of course, it cannot be ruled out that it could also have been about solidarity with secondary school friends who found themselves in the same environment. These phrases also reflected the gradual development of the student community as an important reference group for the first-year students. Students who had just entered universities tried to adapt to the situation and sought a sense of security in the group.

Social motives were also mentioned by the students who testified that they had been misled by the behaviour of the chairman of the Fraternal Aid, and that they had been convinced that the main self-governing organisation had consented to the blockade and that the action was legal. Some justified their participation to the end with the assurances of the blockade leader that the strike would be peaceful. These explanations may, of course, be an attempt to shrug off responsibility simply. Still, they also point to authority – that of the Fraternal Aid Society and significant others that the student leaders gradually have become. Their attitude allowed less-informed peers to define the situation and set values, norms and patterns of participation in the public life of the university. Thus, they were ensuring a sense

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<sup>66</sup> AUW, 50719, Borawska Alicja, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 22 Feb. 1937.

<sup>67</sup> AUW, 49996, Karpiński Jerzy, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 26 Feb. 1937.

<sup>68</sup> AUW, 49591, Naczas Zygmunt, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 8 Feb. 1937.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* Similar wording can be found in Alicja Borawska, Wiktor Dymowski (AUW, 51189), and Mieczysław Niedziński (AUW, 50717).

of security and belonging.<sup>70</sup> Through the mutual aid organisation and its leaders, they accepted beliefs and slogans taken for granted in the academic environment and gained a specific cognitive perspective, while in the environment of the Fraternal Aid, the postulates of the far-right were dominant. This search for regulators of behaviour external to the individual, as well as subordination, obedience and respect for authorities, along with the reading of the situation in terms of a hierarchical structure, may explain the adoption of authoritarian attitudes by some students. Moreover, it is often combined with a strong identification with their community, and intolerance for deviations.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, emphasising the legality and legitimacy of a blockade may refer to democratic mechanisms and the resolution of the general meeting. To those less familiar with the political divisions of the academic political scene, it might have seemed that an elected democratic representation decided within the framework of a self-governing organisation. Nevertheless, each of these motives indicates that the Fraternal Aid played a vital role in the process of political socialisation and building up a world image for itself.

Some testimonies mentioned ideological and political motivations, i.e. motives of purpose, though not in the first place. They declared explicit support for the strike and student demands, often emphasising that they stayed until the end of the blockade out of their own free will. These proved a strong identification with the group and concern for its cohesion and could also counterbalance accusations of coercion and terror on the part of student leaders. For instance, Jadwiga Tuszyńska, a second-year pharmacy student, testified that “she sympathised with the blockade and remained voluntarily until the end of the events”.<sup>72</sup> Three

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<sup>70</sup> See Maria Łoś, ‘Grupy odniesienia – propozycja modyfikacji zakresu pojęcia’, *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4 (1976), 107–15; Jan Turowski, *Socjologia. Małe struktury społeczne* (Lublin, 1993), 118–19.

<sup>71</sup> The research on authoritarian personality, which has its roots in the experiences of interwar authoritarianism and totalitarianism and the analyses of Theodor Adorno, Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, are relevant in this case. Although contemporary psychologists take a cautious approach to the theory of the ‘authoritarian personality’, ‘authoritarian attitudes’ are still a handy tool for describing social behaviour. See Theodor W. Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950); Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, 1941); Skarżyńska, *Człowiek a polityka*, 43–58.

<sup>72</sup> AUW, 47638, Tuszyńska Jadwiga, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 19 Feb. 1937.

students, in turn, stated that they did not sympathise with the blockade only because they found it ineffective; in other words, they approved of strike demands and slogans while not supporting the methods used.

Among 83 testimonies, only four evoked economic motives to participate in the blockade. As an example, Marian Kargul avowed that “at first he had tried to leave, and then he was attracted by the slogan of lowering fees, as, being a worker’s son, he was not well-off and earned a living by tutoring”.<sup>73</sup> In addition, Bolesław Tomiec, Franciszek Olszak and Zdzisław Jurkowski also referred to the demand to lower tuition fees and the anti-fee campaign.<sup>74</sup> All of them came from the peasant classes and, like Kargul, struggled with financial difficulties. Tomiec started his studies in 1934, but due to financial problems had to interrupt them for a year and then applied for reduced fees and subsisted on giving private classes. Olszak repeatedly applied for loans from the Rector’s Office and the Fraternal Aid Society, while Jurkowski, the son of a stall seller, made a living with his own earnings and undertook various odd jobs. Including economic demands in the agenda of the blockade attracted a specific group of underprivileged youth for whom participation in the protest was a way of relieving frustration and gaining individual agency.

In the testimonies of students who took a ‘passive’ part in the blockade, there is also a mention of involvement in the action out of curiosity, the satisfaction of which can be treated as an element of reward motivation in the Klandersman’s model. In the report of Stanisław Brzeski, there is an explanation that “he did not sympathise with the blockade, and he did not leave the university on time out of curiosity to observe the further course of events, he did not actively participate and did not destroy university property”.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, for some of the strikers, participation in the action had a cognitive function and allowed, especially newcomers, to enrich their political experience and, at the same time, to find themselves in the centre

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<sup>73</sup> AUW, 50113, Kargul Marian, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 24 Feb. 1937.

<sup>74</sup> AUW, 46149, Tomiec Bolesław, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 26 Feb. 1937; 47749, Olszak Franciszek, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 10 March 1937.; 48934, Jurkowski Zdzisław, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 24 Feb. 1937.

<sup>75</sup> AUW, 49185, Brzeski Stanisław, Decision of the Special Disciplinary Committee of 5 Feb. 1937.

of public life in the capital.<sup>76</sup> All this, in turn, might have constituted a moment of political initiation.

The Government Commissariat of 26 November 1936 summed up the occupation strike at the university that ended that night: “The leaders of this blockade have mixed up the matter of this inauguration with stereotyped anti-Semitic demands and the matter of a reduction of tuition fees to such an extent that a considerable number of the participants in this brawl are completely unaware of its background”.<sup>77</sup> Cezary Kunderewicz, in turn, in 1936 a doctoral student at the seminar of prof. Eugeniusz Jarra, a historian of law and political thought, reminiscing about the blockade called its participants “fanatical supporters of national-radical views”. Between these polar statements – the confused masses and the conscious fanatics – there is a whole spectrum of individual and collective motives that drove participants’ behaviour in the protest of November 1936. Many of these mechanisms and motivations correspond to individual and collective processes that guarantee the maintenance of normative order and ensure the cohesiveness of the social group.

## VIII CONCLUSIONS

The University blockade responded to the protesters’ diverse psychological and social expectations, such as the need for belonging, security, curiosity, and cooperation, going far beyond simple political goals. These needs were strongly associated with commonly accepted values such as patriotism, conscientiousness, and the common good. One of the desires of both the children of Warsaw’s intelligentsia and the children of peasants striving for social advancement, of both female students who saw in education a path to emancipation and young lawyers believing in their public mission, was to become decent citizens of Poland as a nation state. An adoption of socially acceptable roles usually allow for the successful implementation of civic duties and the co-creation of the social order. The academic far-right succeeded in responding to these expectations and presenting its definition of the

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<sup>76</sup> See Andrzej Garlicki (ed.), *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1939* (Warszawa, 1982).

<sup>77</sup> Kunderewicz, ‘1932–1939’, 108.

situation as corresponding to the interests of the whole student community. James M. Jasper pointed out this mechanism: “Protest actions are an excellent opportunity for the formation of collective visions of morality – with good and evil at the same time. In modern society, they are one of the few remaining spheres in which an individual can meet people developing a new moral, emotional and cognitive sensibility”.<sup>78</sup> The blockade of the University of Warsaw allowed the chauvinistically-oriented youth to develop their vision of morality.

*proofreading Krzysztof Heymer*

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<sup>78</sup> James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago, 1998), XVII.