

Józef Smetana Czech and Polish Teacher in Volhynia in the Twenty-Year Interwar Period

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The article is an attempt to reconstruct the biography of Józef Smetana during the twenty-year interwar period at public schools in Volyn. It is only possible to a certain extent taking into account the archive records found at the District Archive in Lutsk (Łuck). The archive contains a personal file from which useful material was taken while reconstructing family and teaching facts concerning Józef Smetana. Many questions concerning his biography still remain unanswered. Perhaps further research will allow researchers to establish what happened to Józef Smetana and his family after 1939.

Key words: *teacher; Józef Smetana; Volhynia; the twenty – year interwar period*

Since the mid 19th century Volhynia has become a place where quite a large number of the Czech population who arrived there both from areas of Poland, Królestwo Polskie, and Czechoslovakia settled down. They mostly worked in farming, but also pursued all sorts of other professions and jobs. There were also teachers among them. Based on Z. Cichočka's work Zbigniew Tobjański claims that in 1928 in Volhynia there were 36 Czech teachers.¹ A year later, in 1929, Józef Smetana also joined the group of Czech teachers. It is worth pointing out that this Polish and Czech teacher conducted his educational activities amongst children in Volhynia. Why is he called a Polish and Czech teacher? Because he was born in Poland (Królestwo Polskie), but was of Czech nationality.

As he wrote himself in his curriculum vitae, he was born on January 26, 1908 in Zelów. His father, Jan, was a farmer. His mother, Amalia, from

¹ Tobjański, Z. (1994). *Czesi w Polsce*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Czechów i Słowaków w Polsce, p. 74.

Howorków was a housewife. At the age of seven he was sent to a village school in Zelow. That school was divided into three sections and after completing it he began further learning – from grade IV – in a seven-grade school. In 1922 he graduated from it. Then he passed an examination and was accepted to the State Teaching Seminary in Ostrzeszów. But he gave up during the fourth course. There were two reasons for this decision: the first was the unexpected and untimely death of his mother; the second one was emigration. Józef's father emigrated to Czechoslovakia along with the whole family. Józef spent 1926 at home, but at the beginning of 1927 he went back to Poland, and for half a year he was a student at a junior secondary school in Łódź. During the holidays in 1927 he made the decision to return to education at the teaching college. He was convinced that the teaching profession was his destiny. He was admitted for the fourth course of the Ostrzeszowski Teaching Seminary. He finished the courses in 1929 receiving the diploma of a public school teacher.²

With the help of the Czech Schools Motherland in Volhynia he got a teaching post. On August 21, 1929 this institution sent a file of documents concerning Józef Smetana to the school inspectorate in Łuck applying for the position of a teacher in one of the schools with Czech language which was situated in the Łuck district.³ The inspector accepted the request of the Czech Schools Motherland (CSM), and the education office of the School District appointed him a teacher on September 1, 1929 at the public school in Kolonia-Szklín which was in the commune of Poddębno.⁴

Smetana made the official pledge on the following day, on 2 September, and began his duties on September 4. The commune provided him with free accommodation.⁵

As a teacher Józef Smetana asked the radio technical company "Radio Jar" for an instalment purchase of a radio set. This company turned to the School Inspectorate in Łuck with the following enquiry: "Mr Józef Smetana, a teacher at Szklín school, ordered a radio set to be repaid in instalments. Since Smetana's budget didn't allow him to pay it off quickly, therefore we decided to give him longer instalments. We learnt from the declaration of the radio set sent by him that Mr Smetana is

² State archiv of Volhynian District in Łuck (SA-VD), fond 38, op.1, sp.1645, k. 1, curriculum vitae.

³ Ibidem, k. 2, The document to the school inspectorate in Łuck from August 21, 1929.

⁴ Ibidem, k. 3, The document to SMC in Łuck from September 2, 1929.

⁵ Ibidem.

22, so he probably doesn't have a regulated attitude to military service and this could influence the repayments of the radio set. Considering these conditions we want to know if Mr Smetana has taken part in military service. With apologies to the Inspector for any trouble and with grateful thanks in advance we are faithfully yours".⁶

In his answer to this letter, the inspector asked the management of the school in Szklin for Smetana's service papers to be cancelled.⁷ But he didn't receive any answer and could not inform the company about anything. February 27, 1930 that company turned again to the inspectorate with a question about Smetana's military service.⁸ The inspector again applied for a copy of the service papers or an explanation concerning military service. In response he was informed that Smetana was ranked in "common moving with a weapon" by the Conscription Committee pursuant to article no. 38 of the act on common official duties.⁹

In December 1930 the company also asked about the place of Smetana's employment and whether he worked anywhere in the inspectorate area. The reason for this was that Józef Smetana wanted to get the loan in reference to the position of teacher.¹⁰ The inspectorate confirmed that Smetana was occupying the position of class teacher at the school in Kolonia Szklin, in the commune area of Łuck.¹¹

In November 1931 Józef Smetana got married, although the date of the marriage ceremony, according to the source materials, was a surprise for him. In the letter from 18 November 1931 to the inspectorate in Łuck he wrote to the attendance officer: "you are very welcome to justify my absence from school on November 16, this year. My marriage ceremony was held on that day but I was informed about this fact on November 15 of the same year. I did not have any time or possibility to ask for a day off".¹²

Less than a month later on December 15, 1931 the education office sent the marriage certificate¹³ issued by the evangelical reformed congregation in Vilnius, who were supposed to put in the record files.¹⁴

⁶ Ibidem, k. 4, The document to the Polish radiotechnical company Radio Jar from February 10, 1930.

⁷ Ibidem, k. 4a, The document to the company from February 19.

⁸ Ibidem, k. 5, The document RADIO JAR in Łuck from February 27, 1930.

⁹ Ibidem, k. 5a, The document to the company from March 13, 1930.

¹⁰ Ibidem, k. 10, The document to the company from December 30, 1930.

¹¹ Ibidem, k.10a, The document to the company from January 12, 1931.

¹² Ibidem, k. 11, The document to the school inspectorate from November 18, 1931.

¹³ It had numbers 1276 and it was issued on November 23, 1931.

¹⁴ SA-VD, k. 13, The document to the school inspectorate in Łuck from December 15, 1931.

It is necessary to mention that Józef Smetana was of calvinistic faith, why is why a marriage certificate was issued by the evangelical reformed congregation in Vilnius.

Helena Gusnar became Józef's wife and she was a Polish woman coming from a mixed Polish and German family. She was born in Stryj on August 17, 1909. As she wrote about herself: "I am of Polish nationality, of Roman-Catholic religion. My family is also of Polish nationality. My mother came from a purely Polish family and was Jan Malinowski's daughter, an insurgent of 1863 and officer of the Polish State Railways on duty in Bolechow, but who died in Stryj in 1921. My father, Fryderyk Gusnar, also an officer of the Polish State Railways and at present on a retirement pension, comes from a mixed family. His mother was a Pole, and his father was German. Our household was influenced by Polish tradition, therefore I learnt about my father's origin after many years when I grew up".¹⁵

Three years after the marriage ceremony Helena gave up her teaching activity of her own will. It was caused by the fact that she and her husband worked in two different districts, so functioning in their marriage and family was quite difficult. Apart from that Józef thought that on one teacher's salary they would be able to survive and he didn't want to block the working place for teachers who didn't have any funds to exist. However, Helena did not like this idea: "I could not accept that decision, because I was a born teacher and I regret missing out on this profession".¹⁶ So four years after being away from the teaching profession she tried to come back to it again.

Helena graduated from public school in 1924 and based on positive exam results she was admitted to a Private Polish Teaching College, a member of the state colleges in Stryj, which she graduated from in 1929. Immediately after that she got the job of temporary teacher in a one – grade public school in Łukówka, in the Horochowski district. At the beginning of 1930/31 school year, at her own request, she was sent to a three-grade school in Zofiówka, also in the Horochow district.¹⁷

When Helen gave up the teaching profession in October 1932 Józef Smetana applied for supplements to be granted to his wife. He wanted to be entitled to this allowance from October 1th, 1932. He referred the letter to the education office.¹⁸ That office accepted the request and on the day

¹⁵ Ibidem, k. 43–44, Helena Smetanowa's curriculum vitae from September 10, 1936.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem, The document to the education office from October 1932.

of August 31, 1932 they granted Smetana the monetary supplement to his wife amounting to 44 multiplicands monthly. The grant was supposed to be given from September 1st, 1932.¹⁹

In Smetana's family two children were born. A daughter called Lada was born on April 15, 1932 and a son – Libor on February 4, 1934.²⁰ Mrs Smetana was quoted as saying that the children were brought up in a Polish atmosphere: "we are running our household in a Polish way and the children are being brought up to be Polish patriots".²¹

When their daughter Lada was born Smetana applied for an economical supplement to the child. He was supposed to receive it from May 1, 1932.²² The amount of the supplement was identical to the one which his wife received, which means 44 multiplicands monthly.²³

In 1933 Smetana was classified for the IX group at grade "b". In January 1934 he was moved to the X group and was also given a supplementary benefit of 15 PLN monthly. Additionally he was entitled to 5% of the official addition.²⁴ But Smetana appealed against the education office's decision regarding the amount of the benefit. It is worth mentioning that originally the amount of the supplement was higher, as it was PLN 30 which was then cancelled and reduced by 50%. The appeal, to which he had been entitled, was received by the school inspectorate in Łuck within the time provided by law.²⁵

On 18 April 1934 Smetana turned to the school inspectorate in Łuck, with the request, sent by this inspectorate to the education office, asking to be paid the rent allowance. In the letter the inspector informed the education office about the details concerning Smetana's teaching profession.²⁶

On September 8, 1934 Smetana asked for a day off on September 12. On that day he was supposed to appear in front of the investigating magistrate in Łuck as a witness. Unfortunately the subject of the case was not known.²⁷

From a letter sent by the school inspectorate in Łuck to Czesław Szot the commune chef officer of Skobetka, it is possible conclude that

¹⁹ Ibidem, k. 15, The letter of the education office from October 25, 1932.

²⁰ Ibidem, k. 49, The extract from the list of the service and qualifying state, without the date.

²¹ Ibidem, k. 43–44, Helena Smetanowa's curriculum vitae from September 10, 1936.

²² Ibidem, k. 18, The document from June 2, 1933.

²³ Ibidem, k. 19, The document to J. Smetana from July 18, 1933.

²⁴ Ibidem, k. 21, The document to J. Smetana from January 20, 1934.

²⁵ Ibidem, k. 22, The document from March 19, 1934.

²⁶ Ibidem, k. 23, The letter to the education office from April 18, 1938.

²⁷ Ibidem, k. 24, The letter to the attendanceschool officer from September 8, 1938.

Smetana was then both a teacher, and manager of the school in Szklin. The inspector informed Smetana that there was a place where his wife should also have lived.²⁸ The chief officer of that commune searched for contact with her too and nobody knows why. It is quite interesting that he wrote in the letter to the inspectorate that Helena had been a teacher in Jadwinówka and that her maiden name was Guznara.²⁹ These two facts disagree. Firstly, the place of her employment was written down by the chief officer as Jadwinówka, but Helena claimed that she had worked in Zofiówka. Secondly, Helena's maiden name was misspelt by the chief officer.

In November 1934 the doctor filed an application with the attendance officer asking for a leave of absence for Smetana. He wrote: "As Mr Smetana (sic!) has just gone through an infectious illness which is not precisely defined I am applying for sick leave for him including five days from November 8, 1934 to November 13, 1934".³⁰

On June 18, 1935 Smetana informed the school inspectorate that he would be spending his holidays in Suchdol on the Odra River in Czechoslovakia.³¹ He left the school possessions under the care of both the village administrator – Wacław Hożasa and the school caretaker – Józef Wesela.³²

During these holidays the attendance officer sent a letter to the education office, along with Smetana's documents in order to issue a decree of the finding. As an attachment he sent the extract from the personal records.³³ In response to this request the education office informed Smetana that from June 25, 1935 he had become a permanent teacher of public schools.³⁴

In May 1936 Smetana wrote to the inspectorate with the request to be transferred to a parallel position in another school. He wanted to work in Niwy Hubińskie, a town situated in the Czaruków commune.³⁵ It turned out that the work there could be done by him but not before 1 December 1936.

²⁸ Ibidem, k. 25a, The letter to the chief officer of Skobelka, from June 11, 1934.

²⁹ Ibidem, k. 25, The letter of the chief officer of Skobelka to the attendance officer in Łuck, from June 1, 1934.

³⁰ Ibidem, k. 28, The letter of the doctor to the attendance officer in Łuck, from November 7, 1934.

³¹ It is most probably about Suchdol a small town on the Odra River. Probably his father lived there after he left Zelów in 1926.

³² SA-VD, k. 30, The document from June 18, 1935 to the school inspectorate in Łuck.

³³ Ibidem, k. 32, The letter to the education office from August 16, 1935.

³⁴ Ibidem, k. 33, The letter from the education office from September 2, 1935.

³⁵ Ibidem, k. 35, The letter to the attendance officer in Łuck, from May 6, 1936.

The financial considerations were an obstacle to gaining the target. By the end of November at this school a previous teacher called Nosek was supposed to get the briefing for the work.³⁶

A formal letter from the inspectorate concerning the same matter was received by Smetana and contained the following: "In relation to your application from May 6, 1936 I am notifying you that I cannot transfer you to the equivalent position to the school in Niwy Hubińskie, because the job at this school is occupied by Mr Nosek, who is to get the financial compensation. If you are interested in moving to the first year of the public school in Lipjany, Kiwerce commune please, using the return post, send an application asking to move to this town. Lipjany is about 5 km from Łuck (sic!). The school is Polish, and Russian and Czech are taught as facultative subjects. Please report the possible resignation from the proposed post".³⁷

Smetana made use of this proposal. He submitted an application with the request to be transferred to the school in Lipjany. The application was dated on September 22, 1936.³⁸ The decision to set him up as a teacher was taken by the education office on October 1, 1936. At the same time, apart from teaching, he dealt with the administration department of the school and he was therefore entitled to a financial allowance.³⁹

At this stage our knowledge about Józef Smetana's further life and educational activities ends. The file of personal records stored in the archive in Łuck doesn't contain any other information. We do not know anything about Smetana's family's history. It is not known whether after the Russian invasion or later after the German one he stayed in Volhynia or whether he left for Czechoslovakia. Perhaps a further preliminary survey of the library holdings and archives from Suchdol on the Odra River will show us some other tracks of Józef Smetana and his family. This article has not closed this issue, but rather it opens the doors to further research in order to draw up the biography of this Polish and Czech teacher more precisely and widely.

³⁶ Ibidem, k. 36, The J. Smetana's letter to the attendance officer in Łuck from May 6, 1936. The information about this fact marked with green ink, on the left side of the document, written in the slanting italics.

³⁷ Ibidem, k. 38, The letter of the attendance officer from September 11, 1936.

³⁸ Ibidem, k. 39, The Józef Smetana's letter to the school inspectorate in Lutsk (Łuck) from September 22, 1936.

³⁹ Ibidem, k. 41, The letter of the attendance officer from September 23, 1936.



1. Identical Card of J. Smetana.