



**Pascal Trees.** *Wahlen im Weichselland: Die Nationaldemokraten in Russisch-Polen und die Dumawahlen 1905-1912.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007. 448 pp. ISBN 978-3-515-09097-1.



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## Wahlen im Weichselland

The Russian revolution of 1905 had special consequences for “Vistulaland” (*privislinskii kraj*), as the province of Russian Poland had been called since the process of russification and integration began in the last third of the nineteenth century. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the province was still influenced by the conditions of being a partitioned state as well as by the failed uprisings of nineteenth century, demographic growth, the liberation of the peasants, the industrial revolution and, last but not least, an enormous Jewish population, especially in towns. The masses had been politically activated through agitations and demonstrations during the revolution. Therefore, the four election campaigns to the Duma (in 1906, 1906-1907, 1907, and 1912) are well suited to an analysis of social mobilization and changes in Russian Poland. Through these parliamentary elections, the Polish party system received an important stimulus, although the socialist groups boycotted the elections in 1906 and began to interest themselves only gradually in electoral politics. The National Democrats with their chauvinistic, anti-Semitic program

provided the overwhelming majority of Polish members of the Duma. Therefore, the history of the elections to the Duma in Poland is closely linked with the rise of the National Democrats. The National Democratic Party—the Endecja in Polish—developed from an underground organization into the most powerful legal party in Vistulaland. Although there were signs of decay before 1914, the Endecja was one of the most powerful parties in the newly born Polish republic after World War One and its ideology has influenced Polish political thought until today.

Surprisingly, the Duma elections in Poland as well as the history of the Endecja have not been discussed in detail yet. The existing gaps in historiography led to the subject of this revised PhD thesis. Pascal Trees shows in his interesting and well-informed study how the National Democrats used the elections to become the most important party on the political right in Russian Poland. His analysis of the elections and their campaigns offers a glance into a process in which the old elites had to share political influence with the “ordinary people” and

in which the people could participate in public affairs for the first time. Even under the preconditions of a census, elections can be regarded as an indicator of and yardstick for measuring active political participation.

Opening the book with a presentation of the historical background, Trees describes the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions of Russian Poland and the foundation and development of the National Democratic Party prior to the revolution. The first, mainly analytical, chapter deals with the consequences resulting from the establishment of the Duma for the Vistulaland. The author shows that the way the election law was formulated suggests that the central government tried to defuse public unrest in Poland. The government's discussions on the position of the Polish peasants show that the specific situation in Vistulaland and its social and legal differences from "inner Russia" were taken into consideration. Therefore, the election law allotted thirty-six seats in the Duma to Russian Poland, and pragmatically permitted its voters to vote in Polish.

The next three chapters describe the first campaign and election in 1906, the mobilization of the peasants, and the campaigns and elections—including those in towns—of 1906 and 1907. Attempting to use legal methods to defend national rights, the National Democrats regarded the first Duma election as an unexpected chance to convert their aims into reality. The election campaigns for the first as well as the second Duma revealed their differences from the socialists, who had boycotted the first elections. It became clear that the population, i.e., at least the electorate, was willing to accept the elections as an opportunity for political expression and as a tool for political change. Despite competition from smaller parties, the National Democrats won the majority of electors and seats in the Duma. The primary difference from other non-socialist parties lay in the anti-Semitic ideology which was expressed openly during the election campaigns. Although Jews were a majority or near-majority in towns, they were unable to gain their own seats, because they lacked unity and because they formed alliances with Polish progressive parties too late in the game. The Endecja's claim to represent the Polish nation exclusively was the main reason the clergy began to think about a Christian party, even though many priests were members of the National Democratic Party. The Endecja also gained the support of landowning or wealthy voters because the party presented itself as a national bulwark against the Russian central government during the revolutionary years of 1905 and 1906 and because radical ideas of overthrowing the existing social order were

not inherent in its program. It was only in 1907 that the National Democrats began to orient themselves toward Russia (in the sense of aiming at an autonomous status for Vistulaland).

A further chapter discusses the third Duma election in 1907. Appropriately, the author characterizes it as an election without a campaign. As in "inner Russia," the Polish voters were resigned because the Duma lacked power. Moreover, the number of seats reserved for Vistulaland was reduced to eleven. The other non-socialist progressive parties believed that the Endecja would get the support of the peasants, and only a few Jewish activists agitated in the south and center of Vistulaland during the election campaign. But the victory of the Endecja opened possibilities for a political realignment, because the clergy criticized the Endecja's mostly conformist actions in the Duma. The National Democrats began to decline in the face of new agitation by the losing parties among workers, and because they continued to ignore rural interests. These problems were evident during the election campaigns to the fourth Duma in 1912, which another chapter discusses. It became clear that while National Democratic dissidents were gaining acceptance, the Endecja was nevertheless able to win due to the "mechanic" (p. 393) support of the peasants and the failure of its critics to vote. With its explicit anti-Semitic campaign, the Endecja evolved from a political movement based on the peasant population into a political force sustained almost exclusively by anti-Semitic resentments.

The author concludes that the Endecja achieved overwhelming victory only because of the support of the peasants, and that the election campaigns of 1906-07 represented the peak of its political influence. In comparison, the election result of 1912 constituted a defeat, one that resulted from the party's performance in the Duma, its increasingly single-minded focus on anti-Semitic agitation, and its deviation from the concerns of peasants—who had long functioned as a gauge of the political significance of Polish parties, especially the Endecja. Trees analyzes the party's fortunes as evidence the political maturation of Polish society, which was "catapulted" (p. 394) by the revolution of 1905 and by the election campaigns into the political modern age.

This is essentially the story of the political evolution of the National Democrats, although the author does touch briefly on other non-socialist political organizations as well as—and in quite a bit more detail—the attitudes and behavior of the Jewish population. Although it is a well-informed study based on research in Polish and

Russian archives, the author only describes the rise of the National Democrats and not of all political parties which took part in the elections. Unfortunately, the author's final conclusion regarding the rapid political modernization of the Polish society through the Duma elections, is not well explained with reference to other processes

and theories of modernization. Political modernization is thus only understood as a party development. Nevertheless, Pascal Trees' study is an important contribution to the political history of Russian Poland before World War One.

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