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The Attempts to Introduce Eugenic Legislation in the Second Polish Republic as Viewed from the Perspective of the Solutions Adopted in the United States of America

In his introductory paper from 1904 issue of *American Journal of Sociology* Francis Galton (1822–1911), father of eugenics¹, explained it as “a science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race (population)”². Galton, like many others eugenicists, was convinced that betterment of the race could be accomplished, as he put it, in and by “the useful classes” of the society³. The advocates of this view optimistically believed in the power of the positive eugenics, based on persuasion rather than coercion. According to Galton the positive eugenics only craved for “learned and active society”, ready to accept “national importance of eugenics”⁴. Galton enthusiastically wrote:

> It (eugenics) must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion. It has, indeed, strong claims to become an orthodox religious tenet of the future, for eugenics co-operate with the working of the nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly. As it lies within his power, so it becomes his duty to work in that direction⁵.

Not all eugenicists shared this view, and many considered it too optimistic, simply unfit for implementation in practice. Instead, they turned to the negative eugenics, which aimed at “checking the birth-rate of the Unfit”, understood as undesirable members of the society⁶. Due to several reasons it was the United States of America where the assumptions

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¹ From the Greek *eugenos* which means *well-born*.
³ *Ibidem*, p. 3.
⁴ *Ibidem*.
⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5.
of the negative eugenics first prevailed. In 1911, Charles Benedict Davenport the founder of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York (1910), wrote:

It is a reproach to our intelligence that we as a people, proud in other respects of our control of nature, should have to support about half a million insane, feeble-minded, epileptic, blind and deaf, 80,000 prisoners and 100,000 paupers at a cost of over 10 million dollars yearly to support [...] The general program of the eugenics [...] also includes the control by the state of the propagation of the mentally incompetent.

For the American leading eugenicists, like Davenport and his assistant director in the Eugenics Record Office, Harry Hamilton Laughlin (1880–1943), there were three best solutions to deal with “the propagation of the mentally incompetent” in USA: anti-miscegenation laws, immigration laws and, last but not least, sterilization laws. Although all of these had been in application in federal or state law before eugenic movement was formally organized around 1910, one should has also known that they were, and especially sterilization laws, strongly supported and significantly broadened by American eugenicists. In 1914, Laughlin as an Eugenic Associate of Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago prepared the Model Eugenical Sterilization Law as a form ready to fill by a state lawmaker. In his introduction to the Model from its 1922 publication, Laughlin explained that:

 [...] eugenical sterilization purports to prevent the reproduction by certain definitely and legally described and located cacogenic person. It claims that by so doing the race will be purged of some of its degenerate and defective stock. It (sterilization) is effective [...] It may be accomplished with little or no danger to life [...] While compulsory, still in most cases it is possible to secure the cooperation of the patient or the patient’s family [...] The cost to the state in maintaining in custodial institutions its anti-social citizens would probably be reduced considerably by eugenical sterilization, although the effects of such reduction would not be apparent until future decades. The science of eugenics has made sufficient progress to enable it [...].

The first of many American sterilization laws and the very first worldwide was enacted in the state of Indiana in 1907. It was An Act to prevent procreation of confirmed criminals, idiots, imbeciles and rapists passed by General Assembly and approved by Governor James Frank Hanley. According to the statute, every institution in the state, entrusted with the care of above mentioned individuals, was obliged to establish a committee of medical experts. Such a committee together with a board of managers of the
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Institution was allowed to decide whether a procreation of the examined inmate is unadvisable. If so, and if there was no probability of improvement of the mental and physical condition of the inmate, a surgeon could lawfully perform a compulsory sterilization in the safest and most effective way. According to official records, the Indiana sterilization law was put in operation over 2300 times. During its long legal life it was declared unconstitutional by the Indiana Supreme Court in the 1921 case of Smith v. Williams, re-enacted after the US Supreme Court Buck v. Bell decision in 1927, and eventually repealed in 1974.

Following Indiana, between 1907 and 1935, thirty US States implemented sterilization laws. Among them the most significant were those of California and Virginia. In California the first eugenic statute: An Act to permit asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals and the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children and of Convicts in the state prison was unanimously passed in 1909, twice amended in 1913 and 1917, and never found unconstitutional. Up to 1964 the California’s legislation was the legal base of the eugenic sterilization of nearly 1/3 of all of over 63.000 “unfit” Americans, who were lawfully asexualised in US from 1907 to 1981, when the last eugenic sterilization took place in Oregon. In Virginia, no sterilization law had been introduced until 1924 when General Assembly passed two statutes long expected by American eugenicists. First of which was a notorious piece of anti-miscegenation laws The Racial Integrity Act, declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in the 1967 landmark case of Loving v. Virginia. Second was An Act to provide for the sexual sterilization of inmates of State institutions in certain cases, known as The Sterilization Act, which implemented legal, administrative, and medical measures of Laughlin’s Model Eugenical Sterilization Law to Virginia legal system.

Shortly after its enactment Virginia Sterilization Act played an important role in one of the most infamous cases in the history of American judicature: the Buck v. Bell. Nowadays, it is beyond doubt that Virginia’s statute was not only the next piece of American eugenic legislation but also the first step in judicial campaign aimed at legalizing the eugenic sterilization both in Virginia and on the federal level. Only sev-

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14 Ibidem.
15 See below.
17 M. Musielak, Sterylizacja..., p. 137–143.
20 388 U.S. 1 (1967).
eral months after passing the law, on the motion of Albert Priddy, superintendent of the Virginia Colony for the Epileptic and Feebleminded in Lynchburg, the board of director of the Colony chose one of its patients Carrie Buck, a seventeen-year-old white woman, to test the constitutionality of Virginia’s legislation. The very reason of this selection was that there were members of three generations of the Buck family in the Colony’s custody: Carrie, her mother Emma and newborn, illegitimate daughter Vivian. According to the officials of the Colony and Harry Laughlin, who was appointed as an eugenic expert in the case, all three women were feeble-minded. This circumstance was at the same time the very proof of the validity of the principles of eugenics and main evidence against Carrie Buck in the expected trial.

Between 1924 and 1927 three courts: the Circuit Court of Amherst County, Virginia, the Supreme Court of Appeals of the State of Virginia and the United States Supreme Court gave their decisions in the case, which James Bell the successor of Priddy in the Colony brought in before the first of the above mentioned courts. No court found reasons to declare that Virginia Sterilization Act was “void under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution as denying to Carrie Buck due process of law and the equal protection of the laws”. All of them agreed “that Carrie Buck is the probable potential parent of socially inadequate offspring […]. that she may be sexually sterilized without detriment to her general health and that her welfare and that of society will be promoted by her sterilization”, and “ordered to perform the operation of salpingectomy upon” her. In his notorious final opinion in *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendel Holmes wrote:

> We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetence. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit for continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

Without a doubt, Virginia Sterilization Act and the *Buck v. Bell* decision were essential to the success of eugenics in the United States particularly in its “golden age” during the twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century. In 1922, prominent eugenicists associated with the Davenport’s and Laughlin’s Eugenics Record Office, established The American Eugenics Society whose main aim was to promote the eugenic ideas and centralize the diversified American eugenic movement. Although the Society did not manage to reach its aim, the list of its members, benefactors and sympathizers shows the

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24 The opinion was, at least in the case of Vivian, definitely incorrect – see S.J. Gould, *Carrie Buck’s Daughter*, New York 1985.
26 *Ibidem*.
27 *Ibidem*. It should be stressed that the precedent from *Buck v. Bell* has never been overruled.
power of eugenics in the contemporary United States. Having secured their position in the home country, American eugenicists were able to gain and maintain the leading position in the international eugenic movement. Up to 1925, Davenport with his colleagues dominated the largest worldwide eugenic organization the Permanent International Commission of Eugenics, which was renamed to the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations (IFEO) the same year. Moreover, while the first International Eugenics Conference was held in London, the second and the third took place at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, in 1921 and 1932 respectively.

Focusing on the negative eugenics, and strong support for the racist tenets led American eugenicists to cooperation with representatives of German racial hygiene. Many of the former, like Davenport, Laughlin, Madison Grant (1865–1937), the zealous promoter of the idea of “Nordic Race”, Ezra Seymour Gosney (1855–1942) and Paul Popenoe (1888–1979), the prominent advocates of enforcement of sterilization law in California, were widely recognised by German scientists. At the turn of the twenties and thirties, significant part of German racial hygienist led by Ernst Rüdin (1874–1952), Eugen Fisher (1874–1967), and Fritz Lenz (1887–1976) appreciated the achievements of the American negative eugenics, especially in the field of sterilization. All of them were familiar with the Laughlin’s Model Eugenical Sterilization Law and the Gosney’s and Popenoe’s enthusiastic book on the eugenic sterilization in California. Simultaneously all of them were involved in the preparation of German sterilization statute of 1933: The law for the prevention of hereditarily diseased offspring, which was the legal base for over 400,000 compulsory sterilization in the Nazi Germany.

The beginnings of the eugenics movement in Poland went back to the early years of the twentieth century and were associated with activities of the social hygiene, which was supported by the medical and scientific communities. The First World War, and the restoration of independence helped to develop an involvement of Polish eugenicists in the public sphere. In 1916, the eugenic section of Practical Hygiene Society in Warsaw became the Polish Association for Eradication of Prostitution and Venereal Diseases. In 1918, the Society began publishing the first eugenic magazine in Poland: Problems of Human Race from Social Health Point of View (later Problems of Human Race), and between 1921 and 1923 adopted the name of the Polish Eugenics Society (PTE). In the first years of its exist-

29 M. Musielak, Sterylizacja..., p. 110–112; 115–116. In the third group were Herbert C. Hoover, Alexander Graham Bell, and Margaret Sanger, the founder of the American Birth Control League.

30 Ibidem, p. 49–55. The First International Eugenics Conference was arranged by the British Eugenics Education Society under presidency of Leonard Darwin, son of Charles and one of the leaders of British eugenics movement.

31 Grant presented his theories in the one of most important works of scientific racism The Passing of the Great Race in 1916. The piece was broadly read in United States and Germany where it was much appreciated by Adolf Hitler and other Nazis – see M. Grand, The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History, New York 1936.


33 At the Second International Eugenics Conference Rüdin was chosen to succeed Davenport as president of the IFEO.

34 In 1936, Laughlin received an honorary degree at the University of Heidelberg for his work on behalf of the “science of racial cleansing” – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_H._Laughlin (access: 11.10.2011).

ence, the Society had developed significantly, which was mainly due to the participation of its members and supporters in the public authorities. Between 1918 and 1923, Witold Chodźko (1875–1954) and Tomasz Janiszewski (1867–1939), both associated with the PTE, alternately governed the Ministry of Public Health and Social Care, which was created under the influence of a leading Polish eugenicist, a longtime president of the PTE Leon Wernic (1870–1953). Unfortunately for Polish eugenicists their participation in the Ministry affairs and also the very existence of this institution did not last long. To some extent due to its eugenic-base connections and policies the Ministry of Public Health and Social Care was strongly opposed and soon closed down in 1924. It deprived the eugenic movement of its best chance to introduce eugenic legislation in Poland.

From its beginnings, the Polish eugenics developed under the influence of the European and American followers of betterment of the human race. Although the foreign ideas were spread in Polish intellectual community, its members had not participated in the international eugenic movement until 1926, when the PTE joined the IFEO. At the turn of the twenties and thirties, after the first European countries introduced the eugenic sterilization laws: Swiss Canton of Vaud in 1928 and Denmark in 1929, the American achievements in the field of the negative eugenics became known to a wider extent in Poland. But it was an introduction of the German statute of 1933 which brought greater interest in the eugenic sterilization in Poland. The law for the prevention of hereditarily diseased offspring was translated several times and widely discussed not only amongst Polish eugenicists but also in other circles. In such circumstances, the PTE decided to propose an introduction of sterilization law in Poland. In 1934 and again in 1935, Leon Wernic prepared two bodies of eugenic laws, which were officially submitted for consideration to the Department of Health Services of the Ministry of Social Care.

In his first piece entitled A Bill in the field of preventive eugenics Wernic proposed four measures of the negative eugenics (§ 8): 1) rational segregation, understood as same-sex isolation of individuals whose reproduction is undesirable (mentally ill, mentally retarded, criminals, professional vagabonds and beggars); 2) rational sterilization of individuals who may live freely and marry, but should not have offspring (physically and mentally ill, hereditarily burdened); 3) rational contraception, understood as prevention of pregnancy in certain cases (poor health of the mother, serious weakness after too frequent births, large number of children (over 4) in the case of lack of funds and with eugenic recommendation); 4) rational abortion medical treatment on the base of strict medical and eugenic recommendation.

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37 M. Musielak, Sterylizacja..., p. 227.
40 M. Musielak, Sterylizacja..., p. 247.
According to the bill, all of the presented measures should have been exercised following the executive regulations (§ 8 point 5). Only in the case of sterilization Wernic prepared more detailed regulations: 1) sterilization could be performed on the request of a doctor or a candidate himself; 2) the petition for the surgery had to be submitted to the Department of Heredity and Health of the proper Regional Court (§ 9); 3) each of those departments consisted of one professional judge as a chairman, and two doctors, both experts in the field of heredity and eugenics (§ 11); 4) proceedings of the court should be secret; 5) the court could order the sterilization only in a verdict and after a proper trial; 6) the candidate may appeal to the Appellate Court, and in some cases of great importance also to the Supreme Court (§ 12); 7) in case of the opposition of the candidate, the legally ordered sterilization could be performed compulsorily (§ 13)\footnote{Ibidem, p. 86–88.}

The second body of bills of 1935 was in fact the amended version of those of the previous year. Being aware of the critics, Wernic tried to persuade them by changing the title of the proposed negative eugenics law into \textit{A bill of the lightening the burden related to the Social Care}. In its first article, one could find the full list of those burdens which had been classified by the bill into a category of the severe hereditary burdens. They were: 1) innate mental deficiency; 2) hereditary epilepsy; 3) schizophrenia; 4) maniac-depressive insanity; 5) hereditary deafness; 6) hereditary blindness; 7) severe hereditary bodily deformity; 8) severe alcoholism. In contrast to the first bill, the second one did not mention contraceptives or abortion. In the case of compulsory sterilization, it should be noticed that its scope was narrowed only to the inmates of public facilities (art. 2). Moreover, every case of sterilization should be examined by special medical commission, which consisted of two doctors: eugenicist and psychiatrist and one sanitary officer. In the field of the judicial process, the Department of Heredity and Health was renamed to the Department of Heredity in the new bill (art. 6). Furthermore, the adjudicating panel of the latter was changed into the body of two professional judges and only one doctor. Also, the bill guaranteed the participation of an attorney and a defence counsel in the trial (art. 7)\footnote{Projekt ustawy o zmniejszeniu ciężarów związanych z opieką społeczną [in:] L. Wernic, \textit{O ustawach eugenicznych w Polsce}, \textit{Zagadnienia Rasy} 1935, no. 1–2, p. 49–52.}

In 1936, members and supporters of the PTE were not able to defend Wernic’s projects in the Superior National Council of Health (PNRZ), where they were submitted for opinion by the Department of Health Services\footnote{M. Musielak, \textit{Sterylizacja...}, p. 254–255.}. Up to the outbreak of the Second World War, at least four other projects had been put before the PNRZ\footnote{They were: 1) The eugenic act of B. Ostromęcki, 2) Propositions concerning sterilization and castration of W. Grzywo-Dąbrowski, 3) The inhibition of unwanted breeding of W. Łuniewski, 4) The inhibition of breeding of dysgenic individuals of L. Wernic.}. None of them was taken into serious consideration in the legislative process during the last years of the Second Polish Republic\footnote{M. Musielak, \textit{Sterylizacja...}, p. 255–258.}. The reason for the failure of Polish eugenicists was the fact that the presented bills were met with widespread criticism not only at the administrative level\footnote{Ibidem, p. 262.}
but also in the medical\textsuperscript{48}, legal\textsuperscript{49}, and, last but not least, Catholic community. The encyclical \textit{Casti connubii} of pope Pius XI of 1930 left little room for the Catholics to support the measures of the negative eugenics, especially the sterilization. The Polish Catholic Church and also Catholic doctors and scientists, like Stefan Dąbrowski (1877–1947), professor of Poznan University, openly objected the negative eugenics legislation\textsuperscript{50}.

It is difficult to disagree that it was the Catholic opposition which gave the endeavours of Polish eugenacists so little chance to succeed. On the other hand, one cannot neglect the fact that members and followers of the PTE inscribed themselves in the current of the negative eugenics which was developed by Americans and after 1933 was led by Germans. Presented bills from 1934 and 1935, formally prepared by Wernic, in the field of sterilization were adapted copies of the German \textit{Law for the prevention of hereditarily diseased offspring} of 1933 which in turn was based on the Laughlin’s \textit{Model Eugenical Sterilization Law} of 1922. The latter fact was not widely known in Poland in the thirties, but the racist background of German eugenics was without doubt “severe hereditary burden” for the introduction of the eugenic legislation in Poland.

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\textbf{Summary}

In the first decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, broad recognition of Francis Galton’s eugenics resulted in the implementation of its demands in the form of eugenic legislation. Particularly drastic form of the latter were sterilization laws, first introduced in the US State of Indiana in 1907, and later in most of the other states, and during the interwar period, several European countries. Between 1934 and 1936 under the influence of the Western “achievements”, especially the German law of 1933, the failed attempts to introduce compulsory sterilization were also undertaken in the Second Polish Republic. When analysing the regulations proposed by Leo Wernic, the president of the Polish Eugenic Society, it would be advisable to bring in the sterilization laws adopted and applied on a large scale in the United States of America. In the “homeland” of eugenics legislation, the model sterilization law had been already prepared in 1914, and the Supreme Court of the United States upheld its constitutionality in the notorious \textit{Buck v. Bell} case in 1927.

