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**JAN LEMBAS (1914–2000). CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDUM  
OF THE VOIVODSHIP NATIONAL COUNCIL IN ZIELONA GÓRA  
(1956–1973) AND THE VOIVODE OF ZIELONA GÓRA  
(1973–1980)**

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Słowa kluczowe: komunizm, Polska, województwo zielonogórskie, wojewoda

**Introduction**

The aim of this publication is to present the figure of Jan Lembas – a man who had a significant influence on the post-war history of the region nowadays called Ziemia Lubuska. In the years 1956–1980, he headed the local administration at a regional level. In editing the article, the authors used the documentation held by the State Archive in Zielona Góra, articles from the regional daily newspaper “Gazeta Zielonogórska” and information obtained from interviews with Jan Lembas’ former associates.

Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła – one of the founders of scientific life in the Lubuskie region – met Jan Lembas many times, as a long-term councillor of the Voivodeship National Council in Zielona Góra, and in the years 1969–1973 when he was a member of the Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council.<sup>1</sup> Józef Grzelak started working in the Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council in

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author.

Zielona Góra in 1955. In 1968, he became chairman of the Voivodeship Economic Planning Commission which was the unit playing a major role in the Presidium. In 1973, Józef Grzelak took over as Deputy Chairman of the Presidium, and later became the Deputy Governor. He was one of Jan Lembas' closest associates<sup>2</sup>. In addition, Marian Kopij had regular contact with Jan Lembas since 1960, when he started working in the state administration in the Zielona Góra Province. In 1973, he became a member of the Voivodeship Economic Planning Commission in the WRN Presidium, and in 1978 he became its chairman. Similarly to Józef Grzelak, he was one of Jan Lembas' closest colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

### **The beginnings of Jan Lembas' career**

On 28 June 1950, the National Assembly of the Republic of Poland passed a law changing the administrative division of the entire country. Three new voivodeships were created: Koszalin, Opole and Zielona Góra. Zielona Góra voivodeship was shaped from seventeen counties, which were previously part of Poznań and Wrocław voivodeships. It covered the area of 14,500 km<sup>2</sup>, representing about 5% of the country and was inhabited by about 556 thousand people.<sup>4</sup> The city of Zielona Góra became the headquarters of the Voivodeship National Council (WRN), which was the highest local authority. Out of 102 councillors of the first term of the WRN in Zielona Góra, 55 belonged to the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), 21 to the United People's Party (ZSL), 5 to the Democratic Party (SD), and 21 were officially non-party members.<sup>5</sup> Both the ZSL and SD were "satellite" parties in relation to the PZPR, recognising the primacy of this biggest party in the political life of Poland. The first session of the WRN in Zielona Góra took place on 8 July 1950 in the hall of the Zielona Góra theatre. During the session, the Bureau, which was the executive and governing body of the National Council, was established through internal election. The Bureau consisted of the President, his deputies, a secretary and members. The Bureau acted collectively and the number of its members was not determined. A special role was assigned to the Chairman of the Presidium, who was the highest representative of state authority

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Marian Kopij, conducted on 15 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Hieronim Szczegółka, „Powstanie rad narodowych na Ziemi Lubuskiej”, *Rocznik Lubuski* XI część 1 (1981): 127.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 128–129.

in a province.<sup>6</sup> During the communist rule in Poland, however, the real centres of power were shifted from those National Councils to the local structures of PZPR.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the most important figure in any Polish voivodeship was not the Chairman of the Presidium of the WRN, but the 1st Secretary of the Voivodeship Committee (KW) of the PZPR.<sup>8</sup>

The composition of the MRN Bureau in Zielona Góra, which emerged on 8 July 1950, changed several times thereafter. During the WRN session in Zielona Góra on 26 April 1952,<sup>9</sup> Jan Lembas was elected Secretary of the WRN Bureau. The characteristics of the candidate were then presented to the local councillors.

“Citizen Lembas Jan was born on 16th May 1914 in Słosowicze, the county of Krakow. His father worked as a carpenter until 1939 and belonged to PPS (Polish Socialist Party). Citizen Lembas had an incomplete secondary education. After completing four grades of the Junior High School, he started working in the Life Insurance Company in Kraków as a messenger, janitor and then as an office assistant. He worked there until 1937, i.e. until his appointment to the military service, which he did in Kraków from 1937 to 1938. After his return from the army, he worked as a stoker in the State Industrial School in Kraków, from where he was released after six months. In 1939, after the outbreak of WW2, he took active part in the fight against Germany. He was taken prisoner by the Germans near Tomaszów. After escaping from captivity, he stayed in Słosowicze for the whole period of the occupation, working there as a stoker in the Metropolitan Bath Factory, and then in a margarine factory followed by a nail factory. After the liberation he was called up to the newly established Revived Polish Army, from where he was demobilized in December 1945. From 1946 to 1949, he worked in the former

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<sup>6</sup> Act of 20 March 1950 on local authorities of the single state authority, Dz. U. 1950, no. 14, item 130, article 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ewa Nowacka, *Samorząd terytorialny w systemie władz publicznej w Polsce. Studium politycznoprawne* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994), 31; Hubert Izdebski, *Historia administracji* (Warszawa: LIBER, 2001), 58; Wojciech Witkowski, *Historia administracji w Polsce 1764–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), 428.

<sup>8</sup> Bohdan Halczak, „Podstawy prawne funkcjonowania administracji terenowej w Polsce w latach 1950–1956”, in: *Prawo samorządu terytorialnego – doświadczenia, wyzwania i perspektywy*. Lubuskie Forum Prawa Samorządu Terytorialnego, ed. Andrzej Bisztyga, Anna Chodorowska, Anna Feja-Paszkiwicz (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2019), 557.

<sup>9</sup> The State Archive in Zielona Góra (hereinafter: APZG), Presidium of the Voivodship National Council in Zielona Góra (hereinafter: PWRN), Minutes of the 4th Session of the Voivodship National Council in Zielona Góra, held on 26 April 1952. The minutes of the 4th Session of the Voivodship National Council in Zielona Góra, held on 26 April 1952, ref. 160.

local council, and from 15 February 1949, he held the position of Deputy County Governor in Koźuchów. He held this position until 7 June 1950, i.e. until he was elected chairman of the Presidium of the Koźuchów County National Council, a position he has held to this day. In February 1945 he joined the Polish Workers' Party in Cracow, and since the reunification he has been a member of the Polish United Workers' Party."<sup>10</sup>

A biographical note by Jan Lembas, identical in content to that given during the session of the WRN on 26 April 1952, was published on 30 April 1952 by the local newspaper 'Gazeta Zielonogórska'.<sup>11</sup> However, this biography was not fully accurate. Jan Lembas was not born in 'Słosowicze' but in Swoszowice (now the County of Kraków). Also, quite an important episode from Jan Lembas' biography was omitted. During the occupation, he was involved in underground activity with Związek Walki Zbrojnej (the Union of Active Resistance), and then in Armia Krajowa (AK – Home Military Resistance).<sup>12</sup> However, this episode of his biography was effectively hidden by Jan Lembas for many years. Undoubtedly, he had reasons for this. Until 1956, inside the PZPR organisation in Zielona Góra, any affiliation of party members during the occupation period revealed resulted in an immediate exclusion from the PZPR party membership.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, such exclusion greatly limited the possibility of any career in the country ruled by the communists.

For example, in 1951 the case revealed that the head of the Education Department of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra belonged to the AK.<sup>14</sup> On February 9th, 1951, there was a stormy discussion on this subject during the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Poland in Zielona Góra.<sup>15</sup> A motion was made to remove the person from his post, which was justified by the observation that: "As far as belonging to the AK is concerned, we have one

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> „Ob. Franciszek Grocholski – przewodniczącym WRN w Zielonej Górze – tow. Jan Lembas – sekretarzem”, *Gazeta Zielonogórska*, 30.04.1952, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Marian Pietrzak, „Jan Lembas – wieloletni Przewodniczący Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, Wojewoda Zielonogórski (1914–2000)”, *Studia Zielonogórskie VII* (2001): 288.

<sup>13</sup> Bohdan Halczak, *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza w powiecie. Funkcjonowanie powiatowych instancji PZPR na przykładzie Zielonej Góry (1949–1989)* (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2011), 75.

<sup>14</sup> APZG, Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR w Zielonej Górze (hereinafter: KW PZPR), Protokół nr 7 posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW PZPR w Zielonej Górze dnia 9.II.1951 r., sygn. 193.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

line of action...”<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, without the approval of the Executive Director of the Polish United Workers’ Party (KW PZPR) the head could not perform his function. The Chairman of the WRN Presidium present at the meeting tried to defend him, explaining that his political attitude did not raise any objections and that he performed his duties very well. He argued that running the Education Department requires competence, and that he currently does not have a suitable replacement candidate for the post. Ultimately, the Enforcement agreed to leave the manager in his current position, but only until a suitable candidate was found. There is no doubt that if Jan Lembas’ affiliation to the AK was revealed, he would, at best, be only tolerated as an employee in the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra, with no career opportunities in the future.

Jan Lembas was not the only person in the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra who concealed certain episodes in his biography from the authorities. In 1956, the Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra and the head of the Voivodeship Board of Internal Affairs was removed from his position because, as stated in the minutes of the WRN meeting: “...recently some inaccuracies have emerged regarding the activities of the Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the WRN (...) during the Nazi occupation”.<sup>17</sup> There have also been cases of “adding” fictional episodes to the biographies. For example, Wiktoria Hetmańska – deputy chairman of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra, in the years 1954–1956 claimed in her official biography that during the occupation period she conducted underground activity in the structures of the PPR (Polish Labour Party) in Poznań, and in the meantime, according to Anna Hekert, she started her political activity only in 1945, after the city was captured by the Red Army.<sup>18</sup>

In the years 1950–1956, the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra consisted of 22 officers in total, 14 of whom belonged to the PZPR, 5 to the ZSL, 2 to the SD and one was non-party. The function of Secretary of the WRN Presidium was performed exclusively by members of the PZPR. As far as education was concerned, 7 officers showed higher education (full or incomplete), 9 secondary

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> APZG, PWRN, Protokół z przebiegu I-ej Sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze odbytej w dniu 28 lutego 1956 t., sygn. 167.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Hekert, „Działalność Wiktorii Hetmańskiej w strukturach Polskiej Partii Robotniczej”, in: *Studia z historii najnowszej Polski*, ed. R. Łatka, M. Szumiło (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018), 77.

(full or incomplete), and 6 elementary. Most of them came from the County of Poznań and the former eastern provinces of pre-war Republic of Poland, which were annexed to the USSR after World War II. Two functionaries started their political activity in the interwar period, in the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). On a kind of “opposite pole” to them there was a non-party doctor Stanisław Dzieciuchowicz, since 1950 the Head of the Health Department, and in the years 1954–1956 also a member of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra. When during the meetings of the WRN Presidium, other officers declared their support for the idea of building a socialist system in Poland, Stanisław Dzieciuchowicz remained silent. He was tolerated, however unenthusiastically, as a member of the WRN Presidium due to his high qualifications<sup>19</sup>. According to Łukasz Bertram, in Poland, in the years 1949–1956, even on high government positions, there were a number of non-party “loyal experts”, not related to communism in any ideological way, but distinguished by a high level of genuine and practical knowledge<sup>20</sup>. Most of the members of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra, from 1950 to 1956 until the outbreak of World War II, were low-level officials or manual workers. After the war, they joined the ranks of the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR), or the People’s Party (SL – Stronnictwo Ludowe) or Democratic Party allied with it, which enabled them to have a fast career in state administration, sometimes significantly disproportionate to their qualifications. Jan Lembas’ biography then, was quite a typical one for this environment.

As mentioned earlier, the key feature of the communist power state apparatus was the domination of the PZPR party over the state administration at all levels. This dominance was ensured primarily by the system of filling supervisory positions in the administration with party representatives<sup>21</sup>. Jan Lembas also owed his rapid career in administration since 1945 to this nomenclature. According to Andrzej Friszke’s findings, the members of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) were, in the first twenty years of the party’s existence, a rather poorly

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<sup>19</sup> Bohdan Halczak, „Skład i zarys funkcjonowania Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze w latach 1950–1956”. *Studia Prawnoustrojowe* 48 (2020): 25.

<sup>20</sup> Łukasz Bertram, „Towarzysze podróży. Bezpartyjni w polskiej elicie rządowej (1949–1956)”, in: *„Polska Ludowa” 1944–1989 – wybrane problemy historii politycznej i społecznej*, ed. Dorota Litwin-Lewandowska, Krzysztof Bałękowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe TYGIEL, 2016), 51.

<sup>21</sup> Andrzej Friszke, „Próba portretu zbiorowego aparatu partyjnego”, in: *PZPR jako machina władzy*, ed. Dariusz Stola, Krzysztof Persak, (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012), 57.

educated group of functionaries, especially in the local context.<sup>22</sup> In 1953, among the 12,231 full-time employees of the PZPR's political committees, one third had incomplete primary education, and half had full primary education. Only 84 officers had completed their studies. Approximately 69% declared a worker background, 28% a peasant background, and only 1.6% an intellectual background.<sup>23</sup>

Jan Lembas was therefore quite a typical representative of the regional government apparatus in Poland in the 1950s. His position was somewhat weakened by the fact that he could not show any links with the communist movement in Poland before 1945. He was not a member of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) operating on Polish soil in the interwar period. He also did not belong, during the occupation period, to the underground structures of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) or to its armed organization – Gwardia Ludowa (GW-the People's Guard) and since 1944 to the Armia Ludowa (AL – People's Army). In the leadership elite of PPR and later PZPR, veterans of the pre-war KPP had a strong position.<sup>24</sup> They were not a large group. Nevertheless, in 1953 almost half of the secretaries of KW PZPR (County Committee of PZPR) belonged to the KPP even before it gained power in Poland after WW2.<sup>25</sup> The issues of party affiliation before the war, or in the first post-war years, lost importance in the party apparatus of PZPR much later in the 1970s.

Jan Lembas served as Secretary of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra until 1954, when he was sent to the Central School at the Central Committee (KC) of the PZPR in Warsaw, which he completed in 1956. This opened up new promotion opportunities for him.

### **Jan Lembas in October 1956**

In 1956, the People's Republic of Poland experienced a serious political crisis, which culminated in October 1956.<sup>26</sup> This crisis caused strong political tension

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ISKRY, 2003), 173; Mirosław Szumiło, „Kierownictwo Polskiej Partii Robotniczej (1944–1948) – portret historyczno-socjologiczny”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 2 (2014): 300.

<sup>25</sup> Friszke, “Próba”, 70.

<sup>26</sup> Andrzej Friszke, „Rok 1956”, in: *Centrum władzy w Polsce 1948–1970*, ed. Andrzej Paczkowski (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2003), 201–202.

also in the Zielona Góra County.<sup>27</sup> During the meetings held in different factories the relations prevailing in the whole country were openly and very seriously criticized. They demanded the improvement of living conditions, the rehabilitation of political prisoners, the change of Polish-Soviet relations and the state policy towards the Church. The assumption of the function of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR), the most important position in the country, by Władysław Gomułka, was met with an enthusiastic reaction in the Zielona Góra County with many enthusiasts of the new reforms there. Support for Władysław Gomułka was immediately declared by the local PZPR apparatus.<sup>28</sup> Meetings were held in the workshops, during which support for Władysław Gomułka was declared. The unconditional support for the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR was also declared by officers of the security apparatus in Zielona Góra.<sup>29</sup>

After the replacement of the 1st Secretary of the KC PZPR, also the 1st Secretaries at the voivodship level were being immediately substituted. According to Marcin Markiewicz: "...in this way the party authorities wanted to quickly prove to the enthusiastic (but also impatient society) their democratic zeal. The immediate removal of certain functionaries, often discredited and hated, was relatively easy, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it met social expectations."<sup>30</sup> The former First Secretary of the County Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KW PZPR) in Zielona Góra – Feliks Lorek was accused of practising "cult of personality" and forced to resign from his function during the board meeting of the KW PZPR in Zielona Góra on the night of 22–23 October 1956.<sup>31</sup> Tadeusz Wieczorek took over the function of the First Secretary of the PZPR Headquarters in Zielona Góra. Interestingly, he was not previously known in the Zielona Góra region. He was brought "as a puppet" from Warsaw, which, according to Marcin

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<sup>27</sup> Czesław Osękowski, „Październik 1956 r. w województwach zielonogórskim i szczecińskim”, in: *Październik 1956 na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński (Wrocław: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1997), 98.

<sup>28</sup> Ryszard Zaradny, *Władza i społeczność Zielonej Góry w latach 1945–1975* (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2009), 188; Halczak, *Polska*, 118.

<sup>29</sup> „Rezolucja pracowników Wojewódzkiego Urzędu do Spraw Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego”, *Gazeta Zielonogórska*, 25.10.1956, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Marcin Markiewicz, *Odwilż na prowincji. Białostoczczyzna 1956–1960* (Białystok–Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej Oddział w Białymstoku, 2019), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Zaradny, *Władza*, 188; Halczak, *Polska*, 118.

Markiewicz was a common practice in the whole country: “It was probably due to the fact that it was difficult to find staff for all voivodship committees *ad hoc*...”<sup>32</sup>

The “October breakthrough” also brought about personnel changes in national councils at all levels across the country.<sup>33</sup> The changes did not bypass Zielona Góra County. During the WRN session in Zielona Góra, on 25–26 October 1956, the councillors severely criticised the Head of the Presidium, Szczepan Jurzak, for what was, in their opinion, his excessive submission to the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Poland (PZPR), Feliks Lorek. At the end of the meeting, a resolution was passed, demanding, among other things, “certain personnel changes in the composition of the Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council (WRN).”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Szczepan Jurzak sent a letter to the Executive Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) asking for the President of the Voivodeship National Council: “to agree to resign”. The Executive body gave their consent during the meeting on 15 November 1956.<sup>35</sup>

The new composition of the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra was initially established at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the PZPR on 24 November 1956:<sup>36</sup> “It was decided to put forward comrade Lembas, who was scheduled for this post while he was still at school, as the Chairman of Presidium WRN.”<sup>37</sup> There was no information that other nominations would be discussed. However, a problem arose as the candidature caused strong resistance on the part of the provincial leaders of the allies of the ZSL (Polish People Party) and SD (Social-Democrats). As it was stated during the session of the Enforcement on November 30, 1956, ZSL put forward its own candidature, in the form of the Chairman of the Voivodship Committee (WK) of ZSL Jerzy Rumianek and: “SD came out with some serious accusations against Mr. Lembas, which were made by people from the area who knew him from the past (...) where he is accused of committing obstruction (or embarrassment) to people when he worked in councils

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<sup>32</sup> Markiewicz, *Odwilż*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 91.

<sup>34</sup> APZG, PWRN, Protokół Nr VI/56 z przebiegu VI-ej Sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniach 25 i 26 października 1956r., sygn. 168.

<sup>35</sup> APZG, KW PZPR, Protokół nr 51 posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW PZPR w Zielonej Górze z dnia 15.XI.1956 r., sygn. 236.

<sup>36</sup> APZG, KW PZPR, Protokół nr 52 posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW PZPR w Zielonej Górze z dnia 24.XI.1956 r., sygn. 236.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

in Nowa Sól and surrounding areas.<sup>38</sup> Jan Lembas, present at the meeting of the Enforcement Officer, when asked to respond to the accusations, stated: "...that he doesn't recall in his business that there were any facts of the obstruction there could be signs of a verbal confrontation but nothing more than that..."<sup>39</sup> From a contemporary perspective, it is not clear what events were involved in these allegations. It is characteristic that Jan Lembas did not deny that he had committed the acts, but merely stated that he "does not remember" such cases. Instead, he openly confessed to the "verbally loud."

There was a lively discussion between the members of the local PZPR decision-making group. There were many critical comments about ZSL. It was admitted that this opposition is quite strong in Zielona Góra County, and there were "Mikołajczyk-like" tendencies there. In the opinion of the members of the local decision-making group of PZPR members, ZSL allied with SD and aimed at intercepting power in the province by taking over the national councils. Their way to achieve this was to "undermine" local PZPR activists. The charges against Jan Lembas were also considered a manifestation of this policy. At the same time, the members of the Enforcement admitted that the propaganda spread by ZSL and SD activists was also propagated by some councillors of the PZPR club in the Voivodeship National Council therefore the outcome of a possible vote on Jan Lembas' candidacy for the Chairman of the Presidium would stay uncertain.

The position of the First Secretary of the Communist Party (KW), Tadeusz Wiczorek, was decisive in this case. He stated that in a situation where the Polish People's Party (ZSL) and the Social-Democrats (SD) are trying to discredit "our activist", it is absolutely impossible to resign from Jan Lembas's candidacy for the chairmanship of the WRN Bureau. The executive decided to hold talks with WRN councillors from the PZPR club and to offer SD the position of deputy chairman of the WRN Presidium and to remove from the Presidium members of the PZPR not liked by ZSL and SD activists. During the meeting a proposal was made to establish a "reserve" candidate for the post of Chairman of the WRN Presidium in case the candidacy of Jan Lembas was not accepted by the WRN. However, this proposal was finally rejected.

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<sup>38</sup> APZG, KW PZPR, Protokół nr 53 posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW PZPR w Zielonej Górze z dnia 30.XI.1956 r., sygn. 236.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

On 5 December 1956 the 7th Session of the Voivodeship National Council in Zielona Góra took place.<sup>40</sup> The main purpose of the session was to make changes in the composition of the Presidium of the WRN. The resignation from the position was submitted by President Szczepan Jurzak and two other officers who were members of the PZPR. The resignation was accepted by the councilmen. Election of a new Chairman of the Presidium took place. The PZPR Councilors' Club nominated Jan Lembas. This candidacy was also supported by the ZSL councillors' club, and the SD councillors' club did not object. A vote was held, as a result of which out of 83 councillors present at the session, Jan Lembas received 72 votes. No one voted against Jan Lembas' candidacy, but 11 councillors abstained. At the same WRN meeting, two representatives of SD were also elected to the WRN Bureau. One as deputy chairman and the other one as member. This was probably the "price" paid by the Executive Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) to regional authorities from SD for refraining from protesting against the election of Jan Lembas as Chairman of the WRN Presidium. In December 1956, Jan Lembas became not only the Chairman of the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra, but also became a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party (KW PZPR) in Zielona Góra, which significantly strengthened his position in the province.

According to Tadeusz Dzwonkowski, the appointment of Jan Lembas to the post of Chairman of the WRN Presidium "as a local" was intended to counterbalance the nomination of Tadeusz Wiczorek, who was "brought in a briefcase" from Warsaw to Zielona Góra.<sup>41</sup> Jan Lembas could be considered as "local" by the inhabitants of Zielona Góra County because he had been associated with the region for a long time. Nevertheless, in the course of his activity in the Zielona Góra Province, Jan Lembas gained the opinion of a man practising the so-called "verbally loud" approach in relation to his subordinates.

According to Marcin Markiewicz, changes in national councils at the level of communities and districts were usually forced from the bottom up, but in voivodship national councils they were the result of the clash of fractions.<sup>42</sup> The election of Jan Lembas to the post of Chairman of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra

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<sup>40</sup> APZG, PWRN, Protokół Nr VII/56 z przebiegu VII-ej Sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 5 grudnia 1956 r., sygn. 168.

<sup>41</sup> Tadeusz Dzwonkowski, *Wydarzenia Zielonogórskie w 1960 roku* (Poznań–Warszawa–Zielona Góra: Wyd. Katolickie Stowarzyszenie "Civitas Christiana", 2010), 39.

<sup>42</sup> Markiewicz, *Odwilż*, 91.

was undoubtedly not the result of “grassroots” pressure, but the result of a clash of fractions on the political stage. The decisive factor was the strong support given to Jan Lembas by the First Secretary of the Communist Party’s Committee of the Communist Party (PZPR) Tadeusz Wieczorek.

### **The “Host” of Zielona Góra Region**

Jan Lembas held the position of Chairman of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra until 1973. The institution of the collegial WRN Presidium was then replaced by the voivode. Jan Lembas took over this position and held it until his retirement in 1980. For many years, Jan Lembas’ figure had become so strongly “rooted” with the County that there was even a joke circulating in the country that the Zielona Góra province was: “Lake, forest and Lemborest”. In the reality of communist Poland, the fact that the voivodeship was nationally associated with the Chairman of the Presidium of the National Council and then the Voivode was extremely significant. In the existing political realities, the most important figure in the voivodeship was – as mentioned earlier – the First Secretary of the Voivodeship Committee of PZPR. Jan Lembas gained, however, a very strong position in the region over the years.

Jan Lembas had very good relations with the First Secretary of the Voivodship Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (KW PZPR) Tadeusz Wieczorek. According to Hieronim Szczegóła and Józef Grzelak, they were even privately friendly.<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that President Lembas had equally good relations with the whole Voivodship Committee (KW). According to Józef Grzelak, some of the so-called departmental secretaries were reluctant to respond to him.<sup>44</sup> The “decision-making procedure” in the WRN Presidium was that if a certain matter was referred to in a meeting of the WRN Presidium, it meant that the “political authorities” allowed it to be considered, or simply ordered it. Clearly, every resolution adopted by the Presidium had to be accepted by the “political authorities” beforehand. More detailed issues were agreed on an ongoing basis by the heads of WRN departments with the respective secretaries of KW PZPR. In fact, the structure of the KW divisions was duplicated by the Presidium. More important matters were personally agreed by the Chairman of the WRN

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author; interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

Presidium with the 1st Secretary of the KW PZPR.<sup>45</sup> Jan Lembas strictly followed this “decision-making procedure”. In general, however, he was able to convince Tadeusz Wieczorek that he was right in many cases.

The WRN Presidium was in the nomenclature of KW PZPR, as were the managerial positions in the Presidium departments. Some of the posts were filled by the “departmental secretaries”, and in other cases by the 1st Secretary of the KW PZPR, or by the whole Enforcement. The Chairman of the WRN did not actually have the opportunity to pursue his own personnel policy. However, Jan Lembas managed, in most cases, to fill those posts with the people he wanted, or at least accepted. According to Józef Grzelak, he tried to ensure that the people holding managerial positions in the offices subordinate to him had the appropriate substantive qualifications.<sup>46</sup> However, this opinion is difficult to verify. The substantive level of the managerial staff in the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra increased significantly after 1956. It cannot be stated unequivocally to what extent this was the result of Jan Lembas’ efforts and to what extent it was the result of the modification of the personnel policy of the “political authorities” which paid more attention to the qualifications of candidates for managerial positions after 1956 than before 1956.

In 1968 Tadeusz Wieczorek was replaced by Mieczysław Hebda as First Secretary of the KW PZPR. Officially, the reason for the change was due to a serious accident that Tadeusz Wieczorek suffered from. In fact, it was part of the purge of Jewish activists accused of favouring Zionism, which was carried out in the PZPR at that time. This purge was carried out on the initiative of the circle of the so-called “partisans”, gathered around Mieczysław Moczar. According to Czesław Osękowski, in 1968, about seventy managerial positions were changed in Zielona Góra Province, which can be linked to the political situation in the country at that time<sup>47</sup>. Mieczysław Hebda – the new First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in Zielona Góra was considered a man of Mieczysław Moczar.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>47</sup> Czesław Osękowski, „Marzec 1968 na Ziemi Lubuskiej”. *Studia Zachodnie* nr 4 (1999): 238.

Mieczysław Hebda, like Jan Lembas, came from Małopolska.<sup>48</sup> However, they did not find a “common language”. There was an antagonism between the First Secretary of the Communist Party and the President of the Presidium of the Communist Party. According to Hieronim Szczegóły and Józef Grzelak, the antagonism was not caused by Jan Lembas, who tried to maintain the best possible relations with Mieczysław Hebda.<sup>49</sup> Nor was the antagonism between Jan Lembas and Mieczysław Hebda based on differences in political views. Jan Lembas unconditionally supported the policy of the PZPR leadership. He did not oppose the purge of Jewish activists carried out in 1968 and even supported it.

At the WRN session in Zielona Góra on 26 April 1968, Paweł Puterman was removed from his post as Deputy Chairman of the WRN Presidium.<sup>50</sup> Jan Lembas personally submitted this request. In support of the request, he accused his deputy of never having condemned: “...the international Zionism, which attacks and defames the entire Polish nation. Such an attitude from citizen Puterman has provoked fierce criticism in many circles, both among members of the Party, activists and employees of national councils, as well as plants and institutions in our county.”<sup>51</sup> Paweł Puterman argued in his speech that although he is of Jewish descent, he feels like a Polish communist and condemns Zionism. However, his speech did not make a great impression on the participants. 74 councillors voted in favour of the dismissal of the deputy chairman of the WRN and two abstained from voting.

According to Marian Kopij, the antagonism between Mieczysław Hebda and Jan Lembas was primarily due to personality differences.<sup>52</sup> Mieczysław Hebda was not as good as the President of the WRN in terms of his potential for intelligence, organisational skills, hard work and efficiency. However, he was very sensitive about his prestige in the local area. He simply perceived Jan Lembas as a rival. In 1971, Mieczysław Hebda tried to remove Jan Lembas from the post of President of the WRN Bureau.<sup>53</sup> Such a change, however, required the approval of

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<sup>48</sup> Dariusz Śmierczalski-Wachocz, *Partia komunistyczna wobec przejawów wiary katolickiej w swoich szeregach na Środkowym Nadodrzu 1945–1970* (Ząbki: APOSTOLICUM, 2004), 114.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóły, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author; interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>50</sup> APZG, PWRN, Protokół Nr XV/68 z przebiegu obrad piętnastej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 26 kwietnia 1968 r., sygn. 199.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Marian Kopij, conducted on 15 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

the Central Committee of the PZPR, which Hebda ultimately did not receive and so Jan Lembas remained in his post until retirement.

According to his former colleagues, Jan Lembas was a passionate communist by conviction.<sup>54</sup> In his public and private statements he repeatedly expressed his belief in the superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist one, in the inevitable victory of socialism all over the world and in the permanent Polish-Soviet alliance. According to his former collaborators, these statements were sincere. From the contemporary point of view, Jan Lembas' communist beliefs had a somewhat 'nationalistic' tone, according to his co-workers. He combined his own faith in communism with a strong but peculiar Polish patriotism. He was also, (according to his collaborators), emotionally connected with the Lubuskie region and sincerely wanted the inhabitants of the province to live better.

For some reason Jan Lembas did not like the Catholic Church and the actions of the communist authorities against the Church were strongly supported by him. In 1959, on the initiative of Jan Lembas, a list of 113 religious' buildings in the province was created, under various circumstances prepared for demolition.<sup>55</sup> The list included many valuable monuments (e.g. the Pope's Synagogue in Gościków). Only for technical reasons the mentioned objects were not demolished. In 1960, Jan Lembas was eagerly involved in the efforts to collect the parish of St. Hedwig in Zielona Góra of the Catholic Social House at Wielkopolski Square.<sup>56</sup> The consequence of this decision was a protest of the inhabitants of Zielona Góra on May 30, 1960, which turned into street riots which were brutally suppressed by the militia.

According to the opinion of his former colleagues, Jan Lembas' relations with the local environment did not go well. According to Hieronim Szczegóła, Jan Lembas was a disliked person in the local environment.<sup>57</sup> He did not participate in social life preferring to spend his free time in the company of his wife and daughter, with whom he was strongly connected. He was unpleasant and rude towards people, however, if he cared about a person, he was able to convince

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author; interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author; interview with Marian Kopij, conducted on 15 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>55</sup> Dzwonkowski, *Wydarzenia*, 69.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 76–77.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author.

them of his good intentions. The discussion with the voivode Lembas was hard. He was stubborn, but if the interlocutor presented concrete, factual arguments, he could accept them. However, even among people who did not like him, according to Hieronim Szczegóła, Jan Lembas aroused respect with his diligence and good organization.

For Józef Grzelak, the voivode was, above all, a very efficient clerk. He had extensive experience of working in state administration in various positions. As far as Jan Lembas' attitude towards his surroundings is concerned, Józef Grzelak stated of the voivode "He had his sympathies and aversions." And sometimes "He was abrupt".<sup>58</sup> According to Marian Kopij, Jan Lembas was choleric by nature. When he got nervous he easily lost control over himself, screamed and called out. His outbursts of anger were felt mainly by clerks in the departments of the WRN Presidium and later in the Voivodship Office.<sup>59</sup> Jan Lembas had a habit of organising 'raids' on the canteen in the basement of the main office, where the clerks regularly drank coffee, and in sharp words would chase them back to their offices. The effect of these activities was that the "social life" of the office moved to... women's toilets, where the voivode could not enter. The clerks hid kettles, coffee and glasses in the toilets. According to Marian Kopij: "There's no clerk around the world who wouldn't start work by drinking coffee and exchanging gossip with her friends."<sup>60</sup> Prof. Janina Stankiewicz – a contemporary valued specialist in the field of management worked as a clerk in the Presidium of the WRN in Zielona Góra from 1967 to 1970.<sup>61</sup> In her opinion, Jan Lembas was indeed the fear of the office employees. He easily fell into anger and was then absolutely unpredictable. The anecdotes about "angry Lembas", who challenged the clerks in a "non-parliamentary" way, still function today in the local environment of Zielona Góra.

However, regardless of the difficult nature of Jan Lembas' character, the people who cooperated with him stressed his great effectiveness during the interviews. According to Marian Kopij Jan Lembas' substantive preparation for his function was quite weak. In many important matters he was almost a dilettante. However, his high inborn intelligence and organisational skills partly compensated for his lack of substantive knowledge. Of great importance was the fact

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Marian Kopij, conducted on 15 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Prof. Janina Stankiewicz, conducted on 7 September 2017, held by the author.

that he had a long seniority in administration in various positions. He knew the functioning of the state administration “from the inside out”, and he was able to use his knowledge effectively.

The years 1950–1956 were a time of great “stagnation” in the Zielona Góra Province. No major investments were made in the province. The years 1957–1980 were a period of quite dynamic development of Zielona Góra and the whole province<sup>62</sup> and the region was developing economically, cultural life revived and universities were established. The reasons for the development of Zielona Góra in the years 1956–1980 varied. In the years 1950–1955, during the implementation of the so-called “six-year plan”, the communist authorities neglected the western and northern lands in economic terms.<sup>63</sup> In the years 1957–1980 many investments took place in the western and northern lands. The development of Zielona Góra Province was therefore an element of a wider process.

Nevertheless, according to Hieronim Szczegóła, Józef Grzelak and Marian Kopij, Jan Lembas’s contribution to the development of Zielona Góra Province in the years 1957–1980 is hard to overestimate. The voivodeship authorities were convinced that Jan Lembas was ‘their’ man to solve any problems directly in Warsaw. The effectiveness of his actions was very pronounced. Before taking up a case, Jan Lembas first analysed the problem well with people he considered to be experts in the field and then the actual trip to the capital took place hence he was often accompanied by Marian Kopij, as an expert in economic matters on his business trips to Warsaw. According to Marian Kopij, after arriving, when in Warsaw, Jan Lembas underwent a complete metamorphosis where he transformed from a local dignitary into a humble requester, the rudeness towards people disappeared and he became a nice, extremely pleasant old man: “He had a huge number of friends in many institutions, sometimes they were managers and sometimes lower-level officials, who could do a lot. He attached great importance to good contacts with secretaries and he knew perfectly well who to turn to for a case he wanted to deal with obviously having an excellent contact with his interlocutor. He usually started his conversation with questions about the family, having a perfect memory he was always well aware of the problems of his

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<sup>62</sup> Hieronim Szczegóła, *Zielona Góra. Rozwój miasta w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1984), 92–224; Zaradny, *Władza*, 322–458.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Skobelski, *Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne Polski w okresie realizacji planu sześciolatniego 1950–1955* (Zielona Góra: Redakcja Wydawnictw Humanistyczno-Społecznych Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2002), 180.

interlocutors' family life and he did not regret small gifts. Visits to Warsaw were often exhausting marked by long kilometres of walking along the corridors of various institutions and sometimes his legs hurt from walking, but Lembas never showed any tiredness. On the way back, in the car, he would tell us what things he managed to. He showed clear happiness sometimes. He was a completely different man from the one I knew in Zielona Góra".<sup>64</sup> To this day the belief that Jan Lembas was able to do everything he wanted to in Warsaw has been preserved in the local community of Zielona Góra. There is certainly a lot of exaggeration in this opinion. Nevertheless, in the light of the quoted relation of Marian Kopij, one can indeed describe Jan Lembas as an efficient "lobbyist".

Among Jan Lembas' numerous Warsaw friends, the most important figure was undoubtedly Piotr Jaroszewicz (1909–1992).<sup>65</sup> In the years 1952–1970, he was Deputy Prime Minister, and in the years 1970–1980, the Prime Minister. Because of his intervention the First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, Mieczysław Hebda, did not obtain the consent of the PZPR Central Committee to change the Chairman of the WRN Presidium in 1971. Piotr Jaroszewicz intervened personally with Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee.<sup>66</sup> According to Józef Grzelak, Jan Lembas was also helped by the fact that the Zielona Góra County was considered very peripheral in Warsaw and did not arouse much interest. Jan Lembas did not bother anyone in the capital.

Privately, Piotr Jaroszewicz was an avid hunter and this factor was used by Jan Lembas to make a closer acquaintance with him. For the needs of the Deputy Prime Minister and later the Prime Minister, a numerous series of hunts were organized in the Zielona Góra's forests, and Piotr Jaroszewicz was always very happy to respond positively to such invitations. For Jan Lembas it was an excellent opportunity to talk to the Prime Minister of the government on topics that interested him. Paradoxically, Jan Lembas did not like hunting at all.<sup>67</sup> He carried a shotgun on his shoulder when he accompanied the Prime Minister during the hunt, but probably did not fire it once.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author; interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author; interview with Marian Kopij, conducted on 15 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Prof. Hieronim Szczegóła, conducted on 24 November 2016, held by the author.

What Jan Lembas considered as the most important of his achievements was his major plan – the opening of the Combined Heat and Power Plant in Zielona Góra.<sup>68</sup> In the autumn and winter period, heating in Zielona Góra was provided by numerous small heat plants. Tractors with trailers filled with coal were constantly circulating along the city streets. Above all, however, coal dust floating from the chimneys of the heating plant polluted the air. In winter the atmosphere in Zielona Góra often resembled industrial cities in Silesia. It was necessary to build a large central heat source in Zielona Góra. Unfortunately, the regulations of the communist Poland allowed such investments to be made only in large industrial centres, and Zielona Góra was not one of them.

In 1964, however, the WRN Bureau made efforts to build a CHP plant in Zielona Góra. The project caused strong resistance from the central authorities, especially from the Ministry of Mining and Energy. A specific battle for the central heat source in Zielona Góra was extensively presented by Robert Skobelski and Ireneusz Wojewódzki in their monograph on the history of the Zielona Góra CHP Plant<sup>69</sup>. In their opinion, Jan Lembas and the then Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz were very strongly involved in this project<sup>70</sup>. The Deputy Prime Minister officially explained his involvement in this matter by the fact that he was a member of the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic from Zielona Góra Province. However, even the support of the Deputy Prime Minister was initially unable to overcome the resistance of the central authorities to this investment. The situation changed in 1970, when Piotr Jaroszewicz's political position increased significantly. He became Prime Minister of the government. The resistance of the central authorities to the construction of the Combined Heat and Power Plant in Zielona Góra began to disappear. On May 28, 1971, the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Poland passed Resolution No. 106 qualifying the Zielona Góra Heat and Power Plant as one of the most important newly commenced investments in 1971<sup>71</sup>. The commissioning of the CHP plant took place in 1974. A monograph by Robert Skobelski and Ireneusz Wojewódzki indirectly confirms the opinions of Hieronim Szczegółka, Józef Grzelak and Marian Kopij on the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Skobelski, Ireneusz Wojewódzki, *Z prądem i pod prąd. Historia zielonogórskiej Elektrociepłowni* (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, 36.

effectiveness of Jan Lembas' "lobbying" activities in the central authorities in Warsaw and on his relationship with Piotr Jaroszewicz.

According to Józef Grzelak's account, the finalisation of the consent for the construction of the Combined Heat and Power Plant did not go without some complications. When the matter was almost settled, an unpleasant episode occurred during the hunt with the Prime Minister's participation: "Piotr Jaroszewicz shot the boar that was chased especially for him by everyone who participated, but he missed. The boar escaped. The Prime Minister turned the matter into a joke, but it was clear that he was dissatisfied. When the Prime Minister went back to Warsaw Lembas ordered the foresters to shoot some similar boar and 'preserve it. Then he ordered me to take the head of this boar to Warsaw and personally give it to Jaroszewicz. I was supposed to tell the Prime Minister that he actually did not miss and the injured boar ran a certain distance, before it fell down and was found by forest workers. I went very reluctantly. I had more important things to do than delivering hunting trophies, and most of all I was afraid that I would look like a fool. I didn't believe that the Prime Minister could buy such a naive fairy tale. To my surprise, Piotr Jaroszewicz believed in everything. He was happy like a child with his trophy."<sup>72</sup> Soon afterwards, the Council of Ministers adopted the aforementioned resolution no. 106.

### Summary

Jan Lembas died on 6 May 2000 in Zielona Góra. His memory lasts in the local environment of Zielona Góra. The house in the city centre where he had an apartment is called "lembasówka" by the Zielona Góra inhabitants. In the memory of the inhabitants of Zielona Góra, Jan Lembas remained primarily an anecdotal figure ("the screaming voivode"). Nevertheless, he is also mentioned as an operative host of the province, who was able to "do everything" in Warsaw. In the reality of an extremely centralised state such as the People's Republic of Poland, this ability was very important. It is hard to resist the reflection that Jan Lembas resembled former Galician officials. However, a servant who was often unpleasant to the environment and absolutely loyal to the central authorities, tried in his own way to take care of the province. He was an ambiguous figure.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Józef Grzelak, conducted on 8 December 2016, held by the author.

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#### ABSTRACT

The article shows the complex figure of Jan Lembas (1914–2000). A family member of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), a member of the Home Army (AK), who came out of the family traditionally associated with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) during the occupation, turned into an ardent communist after the war. He became a member of the party's “nomenclature” and quickly made a career. As the head of state administration in Zielona Góra Province, in the years 1956–1980 he proved to be a good host. To a large extent thanks to his efforts, the previously neglected voivodeship developed. However, Jan Lembas was a widely disliked figure in the local community due to his difficult, despotic character and reluctant attitude towards the Catholic Church.

**JAN LEMBAS (1914–2000). PRZEWODNICZĄCY PREZYDIUM  
WOJEWÓDZKIEJ RADY NARODOWEJ W ZIELONEJ GÓRZE (1956–1973)  
I WOJEWODA ZIELONOGÓRSKI (1973–1980)**

**ABSTRAKT**

W artykule ukazano złożoną postać Jana Lembasa (1914–2000). Wywodzący się z rodziny związanej tradycyjnie z PPS, w okresie okupacji członek AK, po wojnie przeobraził się w żarliwego komunistę. Wszedł w skład partyjnej „nomenklatury” i szybko robił karierę. Jako zwierzchnik administracji państwowej w województwie zielonogórskim, w latach 1956–1980 okazał się niezłym gospodarzem. W dużej mierze dzięki jego staraniom zaniedbane wcześniej województwo rozwijało się. Jan Lembas był jednak postacią powszechnie nielubianą w lokalnym środowisku z racji swojego trudnego, despotycznego charakteru oraz niechętniej postawie wobec Kościoła katolickiego.