

Czesław Domański\*

## WŁADYSŁAW GRABSKI (1874–1938)

Władysław Grabski was born on 6 July, 1874 in Borów, the Łowicz county, in the family of strong patriotic and independence traditions. The father of Władysław, Feliks Grabski on his own initiative granted freehold to peasants in his estate in 1859; he took part in the January Uprising of 1863 as a civil commissar.



Władysław Grabski graduated from the School of Political Science in Paris with honors, and then studied for four years in the field of history and economics at the University of Sorbonne. Until 1897 he also studied agronomy in Hague where he published his first papers: „*The agrarian issue in France*” and „*Knowledge and practice of farming in Germany*”.

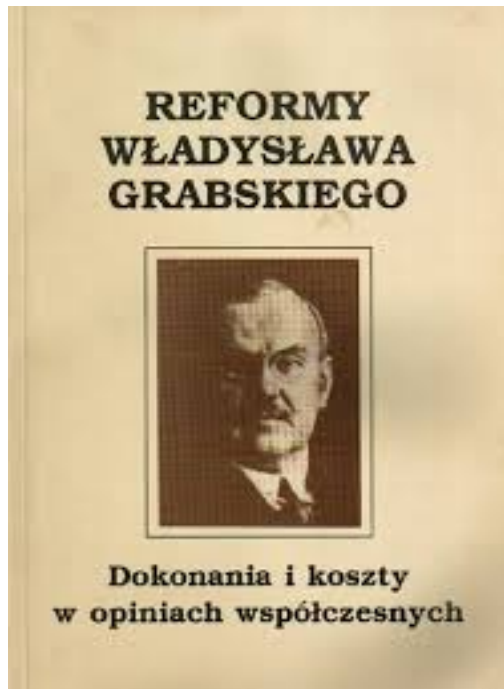
Władysław Grabski was unable to continue his studies due to the untimely death of his father and the necessity to take over the family – owned estate. He succeeded to 520 – hectare farm where he set up fishing ponds and increased the production of sugar beetroot. He combined successfully his farming duties with social activities – he was the co- founder of Section of Agriculture and Research in Kutno and one of the first in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, peasant farming co-operatives in Bocheń.

Along with Grabski’s activities aimed at dissemination of new farming methods and education his popularity in the local community was growing, so

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when in 1904 he came up with an idea of establishing the Łowicz county agriculture and trade company, his chairmanship came as a natural choice. Grabski was also the secretary of the farming section of the Agriculture Society. This activity resulted in his writing the monograph titled; *“The history of Agriculture Society in the Kingdom of Poland”* which was later awarded by the Academy of Sciences in Kraków.



Władysław Grabski became very active in politics, and consequently he was elected the deputy of the Łowicz county to Duma I (the Russian Parliament). In the years 1906–1912 Grabski served three terms as the member of Parliament representing the National Democracy Party in the Duma. He was involved in activities of the State Chamber and the Polish Circle, which represented Polish deputies of the Russian sector of the partitioned Poland.

He fought for the autonomy of the Congress Kingdom of Poland and made efforts to gain some economic concessions which would diminish the exploitation of the Kingdom by Russia. His efforts were successful and led to passing a bill granting credits to Polish associations and farming cooperatives as well as introducing appropriate amendments to the Russian Integration Bill which would also become law in the Congress Kingdom of Poland. Moreover he aimed at lowering the taxation in the Russian sector. In 1912 he resigned from running in elections to the Duma IV and returned to Poland.



The monument of Władysław Grabski in Borów

He became engaged in the Central Agriculture Society, whose committee member he was since 1907. In the years 1913–14 he was the vice – chairman of the Society and the head of the office. W. Grabski founded the Bureau for Social Work and became its director in 1913. The Bureau’s activities were aimed at providing public education and erecting school buildings. At that time he also worked on publishing the Statistical Yearbooks of the Congress Kingdom of Poland.

After the outbreak of World War I he became a member of the National Polish Committee, which was set up in Warsaw in 1914. He founded and headed the Central Civic Committee. After the Tsarist rule was overthrown he became a member of the Polish Liquidation Commission, where he protected the interests of refugees and the financial affairs of the Kingdom. He did not hesitate to express his anti- German opinions what led to his arrest by the German authorities and imprisonment in the Modlin Citadel.

On 26 October 1918 he was appointed the Agriculture Minister in the cabinet of Józef Świeżyński. Unfortunately, this government survived mere 13 days. After the war had ended and Poland regained its independence, W. Grabski

headed the Central Liquidation Office as the state organ responsible for settlement of financial accounts with foreign countries.

In 1919 W. Grabski was sent as the official delegate to the Peace Congress in Paris where, together with Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Roman Dmowski, he was to defend the economic interests of Poland. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of financial issues W. Grabski managed to oppose effectively the demands of the world powers. As a result, the financial burdens placed on Poland turned out to be not really heavy due to participation in indebtedness of the partitioning countries and regaining the independence as a result of war (the so-called freedom tax). The signature of W. Grabski can be seen at the text of the Versailles Treaty. He also signed the peace treaty with Austria in Petit Trianon. In the years 1919–1922 he served as a deputy for the constituent assembly where he represented the Peasant National Association.

Since 13 December, 1919 till 20 November, 1920 he fulfilled the duties of the Minister of Finance and in this capacity he conducted the process of unification of the Polish monetary system and introduced the Polish mark.

For a short period of 23 June – 24 July, 1920 he served his first term as the prime minister and appointed Gabriel Narutowicz to be the Minister for Public Works. When the Red Army attacked Poland and achieved spectacular successes, Grabski responded by setting up on 1 July, 1920 the Council for State Defence – the highest state authority for the time of war. He understood how important it was to gain the support of peasantry so on 15 July, 1920 the Sejm (Polish Parliament) passed the bill on the implementation of the land reform. Earlier that month on 4 July Poland officially acknowledged the independence of Lithuania, and on 11 July the plebiscite on Warmia, Masuria and Powiśle was held.

In the years 1921–1922 W. Grabski as the extraordinary government commissar was responsible for supervising the process of repatriation of Polish citizens from the USSR. He performed the function of the director of the Polish – American Committee for Children's Aid. Between 1923 and 1925, when he served his second term as the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, he implemented the monetary reform in Poland. In November 1925 W. Grabski resigned from his office. His work titled „*Two fundamental years of our statehood*” give a detailed description of his personal experience of the time.

Starting from 1926 he devoted all his time and energy to academic activity. He worked as lecturer of the Main School of Farming as early as 1923, but 3 years later he became the full-time professor of political economics at the faculty of Forestry of the Main School of Farming.

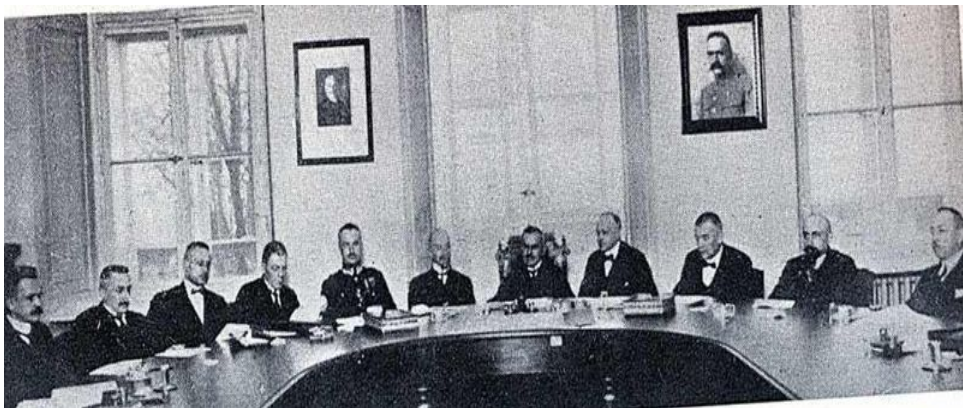
From 1926 to 1928 he fulfilled the function of the President of the School. In 1936 he founded the Department of Rural Sociology and initiated the publication of the „*Annals of Rural Statistics*” which still appear in print up to date. Grabski published at that time “*Country and Farming*” and “*Rural History*”

of Poland'. His political will was expressed in the publication called „*The idea of Poland*” which appeared in print in 1935.

Between 1926 and 1928 W. Grabski was the chairman of the Society of Polish Economists and Statisticians, and in 1934 he became the honorary member of the Society. He was also the full member – founder of the Warsaw Scientific Society.



On 12 April, 1924 W. Grabski was awarded the Great Ribbon of the White Eagle Order.



The Cabinet of Władysław Grabski – 1924.



Władysław Grabski died on 1 March, 1938 in Warsaw. The funeral ceremony was held on 4 March and Cardinal Kakowski officiated the funeral service in St. John's Cathedral. W. Grabski was buried in the Powązki Cemetery.