

Doubravka Olšáková, *Věda jde k lidu! Československá společnost pro šíření politických znalostí a popularizace věd v Československu ve 20. století* [Science goes to people! The society for dissemination of political and scientific knowledge and the popularisation of sciences in Czechoslovakia during the 20th century], Praha, Academia, 2014, 678 pp., series: Edice Šťastné zítřky, 10.

The book series, bearing an ironic title *Šťastné zítřky* – ‘Happy Tomorrows’, may seem familiar to the Polish, or German, reader. Quite similar editorial and publishing projects appeared after 1989 in Germany and Poland (and elsewhere too), based on cycles of publications on diverse aspects of the history of real socialism, mostly based on the most recently completed doctoral dissertations. The ‘Academia’ publishing house, belonging to the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, followed the path of the Böhlau Verlag’s *Zeithistorische Studien* or the (now discontinued) *W krainie PRL* series of the Warsaw ‘Trio’ publishers. The new publishing cycles was initiated with a re-edition of the classical study in the symbolism of Czechoslovak communism by the outstanding semiotician Vladimír Macura.¹ The *Šťastné zítřky* series endeavours to make up for its time delay, relative to the neighbouring historiographies, with reliability of elaboration and editorial standard of its publications. Most of these books are voluminous, conceptually sound, nicely edited, lavishly illustrated, and furnished with indexes; a clear layout of the text facilitates the reading.

Věda jde k lidu! by the Prague historian Doubravka Olšáková offers all the advantages of the series, additionally combined with a clarity of style and transparent chronological structure. The book’s twenty-one chapters report on aspects of the history of science popularisation in Czechoslovakia and offer their interpretation. This apparently not-too-sensational topic (talks held at countryside clubrooms and community centres, or projections of educational films, would not be generally considered a fascinating raw material for a historical bestseller) gained a unique importance in post-war Czechoslovakia, the country where an adult education system attained an extraordinary size, not only by the Eastern Bloc standards. The post-war slogan ‘Learn from the Soviet Union!’ was completely, if not excessively, implemented there in a relatively short time. Olšáková argues that it was in the Czech territory (not as much in Slovakia) that the extensive popularisation of exact and natural sciences has made a durable impact on the population’s worldview; traces of this influence are still identifiable these days.

¹ Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk a jiné studie o socialistické kultuře* (Prague, 2008).

Science popularising organisations have a long tradition in Bohemia. In 1948, the social democratic *Dělnická akademie* (Workers' Academy) and the Masarykian *Volná myšlenka* (Free Thought) were forcibly united with their communist counterpart. The 1950s saw a strengthening ideologisation and massification of the new organisation. Olšáková skilfully describes the paradoxes of the period. On the one hand, Czechoslovak authorities feared ideological sabotage from Polish and Hungarian 'fraternal' organisations; on the other, calls were made – especially in Slovakia – for intensified contacts with Western European scientists and scholars who had the professional knowledge which was in demand in Czechoslovakia. The dynamism of the political system fostered the centralisation of the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (*Společnost pro šíření politických a vědeckých znalostí*), which in turn reinforced the influence of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences as the main supplier of lecturers and experts in the field of educational activities. The trend was epitomised by the entrustment of the Society's management, in 1957, to Josef Macek, the then-director of the Institute of History, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. It was to his credit that the organisation reached the peak of its development in terms of quantitative as well as qualitative measures. The periodicals edited by its staff, some of them issued till present, were its pride. Olšáková reasonably discusses at length the most widely read, and the most controversial, of them – the cultural-historical review *Dějiny a současnost*. People's universities and academies, attended by adult students, enjoyed remarkable popularity. Ideologically, the greatest achievement of the Society run by Macek was its propagation of atheism. The most spectacular form of this propagation was the planetariums which served as 'museums of atheism' (museums of this sort otherwise never appeared, as such, in Czechoslovakia – in spite of incessant references to the Soviet models). Paradoxically, it was in this area of the Society's activity that problems appeared in the former half of the 1960s, which finally led to the fall of this institution.

Although in the real socialist circumstances popularisation of science was, virtually, an intrinsically political exercise, Macek's activities added a new dimension to the phenomenon. Atheism was propagated also through visits of Western Marxists, notably Roger Garaudy and John Desmond Bernal, as well as materialist philosophers from other Eastern Bloc countries (Adam Schaff from Poland among them). In the perception of communist-party conservatives, the discussions held by those thinkers about potential coexistence of Christian and Marxist outlooks were more menacing than an open critique of the system. Hence, a few years ahead of the Prague Spring and the invasion of five Warsaw Pact armies storm clouds began gathering over the Society. In 1965, Ivan Málek replaced Macek as the chairman and set limits to scientific exchange with Western Europe. The swap-overs among the organisation's executives was accompanied by a 'weathering' action at the lower levels,

the editorial team of *Dějiny a současnosti* being particularly affected. These developments were symbolically sealed by the new name attached to the organisation: Socialistická akademie (Socialist Academy).

The events taking place on the eve of the Prague Spring within a big social-political organisation are of interest as they preceded, in a sense, the developments taking place in the other areas of life. Olšáková stresses that 'the purge' carried out in the Academy after 1965 foreshadowed in many respects 'the normalisation' – the process that brutally suppressed the spontaneous activities of the Czechoslovak intelligentsia. The year 1968, which saw the Socialist Academy join the reformatory movement and demand that the organisation (and other like organisations) be apolitical, caused a brief caesura between the initial and the 'proper' phase of the normalisation. The 1970s witnessed one more turning point, with the Academy becoming (for a while) the arena of faction fighting as a radical leftist milieu within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia attempted at taking over the organisation. The latter was eventually pacified and dead calm prevailed till the end of the 1980s, which meant an intellectual stagnation and gradual decrease of the organisation's importance and influence. Signs of animation, which were connected, for instance, with appearance of ecological topics in the organisation's publications, became visible in the last years of its existence.

Even with this brief outline of the content of Doubravka Olšáková's book, one can appreciate the significance of its subject-matter. First of all, it concerns a really mass-scale organisation. At its most dynamic stage, it had more than 30,000 active members; almost 220,000 lectures or displays were held countrywide in a year. Under Josef Macek, the Society set up its own publishing house. Even in the stagnant years, which came once Macek was dismissed, the organisation continued to impress a profound stigma on the Czechoslovak education and scientific as well as social life. Secondly, owing to its popularising role, the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge found itself at the centre of several phenomena of utmost importance to the functioning of the communist system – not only in its country. The atheistic propaganda seems extremely important in this context; but there is more to it. In the 1950s, it was via the Society that Lysenkoism was disseminated across the Republic, alongside the much useful ideas of modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture. The latter was the underlying factor for the extension of the network of 'technology houses' and the powerful movement of amateur constructors. And it was thanks to the Society structures that the country's technological intelligentsia could use the conditions, a little better as they were compared to those in the neighbouring countries, to join the development of cybernetics, among the other areas of science and technology.

The third thing is that the history of the Society is a vivid and interesting illustration of the political history of the whole country. Beginning with

the late 1940s and the extorted union of several organisations dealing with education of adults and popularisation of science, through the development and the liberalising trend in the 1960s, with a short recurrence in 1968–9 (when the concept of a federalisation of the organisations, also discussed at the central level, was put on the agenda), through to ‘the normalisation’ and stagnation typical of Gustav Husák’s time, the organisation shared the overall trends, with its stages and crises. But there was one significant, and particularly interesting, exception: the Society’s ‘normalisation’ began a few years before the military intervention and suppression of the Prague Spring. This circumstance might attest to a larger-than-hitherto-believed power of the conservative faction within the communist party and to a lesser support of the reformative leadership group, with Alexander Dubček at the head. This, in turn, would enable us to better understand why the reformers were so quickly removed, or at least put in order, after the entry of the troops – not so much within the Academy but on the country’s scale.

A positive aspect of Olšáková’s book are the references to the histories of the neighbouring countries – mostly, Poland and the GDR, where similar organisations were active, albeit to a smaller scale – which she capably ‘administers in dosages’. These references are all the more valuable that, rather than limited to reference literature, they have also been based on the author’s archival queries in Poland and Germany. This author is, furthermore, sensitive to the moments in the history of Czechoslovak popularisation of science where the ordinary transfer of experiences was, at some points, disturbed or reversed. I have already mentioned the dissatisfaction of the Party-affiliated conservatives which was allegedly triggered by excessive contacts with Western European scholars; another instance of exceeding the limits of the standards set for the Eastern Bloc was the Soviet imitations of the patterns and structures originally appearing in Czechoslovakia. On such occasions, with the narrative thread departing from the Czechoslovak context for a while, some minor errors appear (mainly in the spelling of Hungarian titles or names) in this otherwise genuinely edited book. The biographical notes of activists and scientists cooperating with the Society is a considerable advantage of this study. Not limited to the major or best-known figures (the subsequent heads of the organisation, for instance), these notes extend to certain persons being typical, in a way. The documents attached at the end of each chapter not always meet the author’s conjectured expectations: some of them are so lengthy that having them discussed as part of the author’s argument would make the message clearer.

The summary section asks how the results of the Society’s activities should be evaluated. While incomplete, her own proposed answer is interesting as it deviates from the simplified pattern whereby the society either resists or submits itself to an ideological indoctrination. Olšáková concludes that the efforts of this organisation should, in certain respects, be regarded

as successful in the long term. True, the society largely accepted atheism, which was facilitated by the secularisation applied earlier and to a much more advanced degree than in Poland or Hungary, though Slovakia remained less affected. Yet, the Society had some identifiable educational achievements to its credit – such as the popular consent, in Bohemia and Slovakia alike, for development of nuclear power. Such observations, juxtaposed with the situation in the other Eastern Bloc countries, open interesting prospects for historians; in more general terms, the study proves that an apparently marginal subject-matter may be used to communicate an important message that encompasses the past and the present.

trans. *Tristan Korecki*

Maciej Górny

Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–1956*, Ithaca and New York, Cornell University Press, 2013, 233 pp.

Katherine Lebow's study is part of research in Poland's social history after WWII, undertaken more and more often by Western historians nowadays. The interest in the period when the foundations of communist system were constructed and the subsequent Stalinist years becomes increasingly wider among them; interesting studies authored by Padraic Kenney,¹ Małgorzata Fidelis,² or Barbara Nowak,³ have appeared as a result of such research activities.

This time, the author set an ambitious task for herself to investigate the areas of social concern in Nowa Huta (literally, The New Steel Mill), the industrial district of Cracow, in the Stalinist period. She sought to confront the socialist vision of a urban utopia and 'social justice' that provided ideological justification for the creation of a socialist town in close proximity to Cracow, with the realities of its functioning. Nowa Huta, Lebow says, was a symbol of national revival and a social revolution, one that drew its power "not only from Soviet Communist ideology, but also from memories of Poland's past dependency on, and recent destruction by, foreign enemies, not least, the Soviet Union itself." (pp. 2–3) In her opinion, it is impossible to comprehend

¹ See, above all, Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communism* (Ithaca and London, 1996).

² Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2010).

³ Barbara A. Nowak, 'Serving Women and the State: the League of Women in Communist Poland', Electronic Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2004, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=osu1091553624&disposition=inline> [Accessed: Nov. 20, 2014].

the effects of the Stalinist attempt at transforming Poland's economic, cultural and political landscape without taking this heritage, and its diverse effects, into consideration.

The author's considerations are meant, however, to far exceed a mere interpretation of phenomena bracketed within the interval of 1949–56. Lebow does realise that in post-communist Poland, the history of Nowa Huta and its resistance against the authorities after 1956, particularly after the imposition of the martial law (in December 1981), has been interpreted as an "ultimate proof of Communist hubris": according to this view, those who settled down in the new city clearly notified the authorities that they did not want to be 'new people' ready to be moulded in line with the communist pattern. Lebow proposes a different hypothesis: it was the Stalinist experience of the late 1940s and early 1950s, combined with efforts taken to create a new, better and more egalitarian civilisation, that shaped a breeding ground for protests organised around 'Solidarność' movement in the subsequent years.

These research objectives and arguments helped select the study's underlying sources and structure. The author has primarily made use of archival documents kept at the Central Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych, funds: Housing Institute, Head Command of the Universal Organisation 'Service to Poland', Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Supreme Oversight Office, National Commission for Economic Planning, League of Polish Youth) and in Cracow archives (National Archive, Archive of the City Administration, Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Office for the Preservation and Dissemination of Archival Records in Cracow/Wieliczka). The reference literature comprises a wealth of published scholarly studies and journalistic commentaries on Nowa Huta and the period covered by the book. Since one of the major aims has been to reconstruct the attitudes and behaviours of Nowa Huta dwellers, Lebow has made efforts to trace all the autobiographical documents she could find helpful for her task. Thus, her study makes use of published as well as unpublished memoirs and diaries. Of prominence among the latter are the materials submitted for the memoirist competition by former Nowa Huta builders (a selection of these texts was published, as manuscript, in 1984).

The study consists of six chapters, the first of which ('Unplanned City') analyses the location concept of Nowa Huta, problems related to the construction of this conglomerate of factories and their adjacent residential estates. Chapter 2 ('New Man') focuses on rural migrants who settled down in 'the socialist town' and developed it. Lebow tries to reconstruct their living conditions, the difficulties of their daily lives. Chapter 3 ('The Poor Worker Breaks his Legs') deals with the working conditions in Nowa Huta, encompassing aspects such as labour competition, internal division and conflicts between workers, and the Stalinist propaganda encouraging ever-increased

productivity. The fourth chapter ('Women of Steel') focuses its argument on the contradictions inherent in the Stalinist solutions to the female question, using to this end the symbolic figures of 'Countrywoman' (*Baba*) and 'Comrade'. The same chapter comprises remarks on problems related to employing Romani people at Nowa Huta and attempts made to force them to switch to a sedentary lifestyle. The main subject-matter in Chapter 5 (titled 'The Enlightenment of *Kasza*', which refers to Adam Ważyk's *Poemat dla dorosłych* [A Poem for Adults]) is hooliganism and emergence of youth lifestyles (*bikiniarze* – the beatniks) opposing the officially propagated ones. The author also considers the realities of cultural dissemination in Nowa Huta, analysing the ways of spending leisure time. Finally, the last chapter ('Spaces of Solidarity, 1956–1989') attempts to answer the question asked at the very outset, regarding the role of Stalinist experience for the shaping of resisting attitudes toward the authorities of Nowa Huta in the later periods.

As is apparent based on this brief survey of the monograph's content, the spectrum of the issues it touches upon is quite extensive. It is moreover worth stressing that the narrative proposed is diverse: the language typical of academic lecturing is interspersed with numerous quotations from a few selected memoirs of Nowa Huta residents and industrial complex workers. These fragments, thematically selected and matched, are quoted in the consecutive sections. This method, applied frequently and with success in social history studies,⁴ causes that the history is *told* not only from the standpoint of the authorities (central or local) but also on a 'bottom' level, filtered through the personalities of 'common people'.

What new elements does K. Lebow's monograph contribute to our previous knowledge on Nowa Huta in the Stalinist years? It does not seem that the author has found any materials which would broaden the hitherto-known facts to an essential degree. The history of this flagship project of the Six-Year Plan have already been the subject of extensive detailed investigation whose results have been taken advantage of by the author. A more meticulous query of the funds specified in the references would have enriched the source material by including information of relevance from the standpoint of the topic embarked on.⁵

⁴ See, i.a., the studies by Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1917–1924* (London, 1996); *idem*, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York, 2007).

⁵ This is true, i.a. with respect the files of Nowa-Huta District National Council kept at the State Archives in Cracow, containing some extremely interesting information on the residents' opinions on the infrastructure of local housing estates and everyday-life problems. One finds there minutes of 'economic conferences' attended by housing estate residents, dated 1952 (ref. no. 76), or files of Petitions & Complaints Handling Section, containing letters from locals to the district authorities, dated 1956 (ref. no. 6), among other items.

Doubts might arise because of the method in which the autobiographical material is used and conclusions drawn based thereon; according to the assumed research concept, this material is a source of primary importance. To draw certain far-fetched and generalising conclusions based upon single utterances traced and found (some of them being emotion-imbued and not-quite-nuanced) does not seem legitimate in each particular case. This is so, for instance, with a quote from a diarist who happened to be a member of the Universal Organisation 'Service to Poland' (Powszechna Organizacja 'Służba Polsce') which built Nowa Huta, whilst his brother, at the same time and within the same organisation, cleared the destroyed Warsaw of rubble. The reminiscing individual makes a comparison with his father who in 1918 fought for Poland's independence, and concludes: "We, his sons, exchanged rifles for shovels, because after 1945, Poland was soaked not in blood, but in work and sweat." Does this statement reflect the awareness of the once-member of a youth labour brigade, or rather, of a broader group of young men of Nowa Huta? Lebow seems to incline to the latter option. To what extent does this record attest to the time it refers to, versus the time in which the diary was written? I would not doubt that the researcher is aware of the difficulties involved in criticism of the source she takes advantage of; still, the impression one may get is that some of her conclusions are somewhat misconceived.

According to K. Lebow, historians dealing with problems of Polish 'new industrial workers' in the Stalinist period describe their attitude toward the authorities in terms of conformism and indifference – whereas this actually calls for in-depth research, one that would show their identifications and enthusiasm. Newcomers from countryside areas, this author says, had the right to believe – and they did believe – that employment at Nowa Huta was a turning point in their biographies: "from backwardness to modernity, dependency to adulthood, isolation to fellowship, and disenfranchisement to citizenship." (p. 80) The problem is that this argument is evidenced, primarily, by use of the recurring excerpts from a few diaries written by some 'model' workers of the conglomerate.

But it is not new facts that are responsible for the primary value of this book. Lebow is namely capable of using extremely brilliant mental shortcuts to describe the phenomena she analyses. I would moreover identify the central advantage of this study in the author's ability to express interesting and original interpretations – even though one might still find the arguments not fully satisfactory.

Due to a limited framework of this review, rather than analysing all the arguments proposed by the author, I should like to indicate some of them. Setting the Nowa Huta experience in a European context is a very interesting concept, first of all. In Lebow's opinion, the historiography that highlights the European desire for normality and private life after WWII, tends to neglect

the rush for participation in a significant and productive work – with its accompanying conscious or semi-conscious belief that life might be made better for oneself and the others – as a peculiar dimension of post-war experience. In fact, “the continent’s remarkable postwar recovery, east and west, depended on such energies being channeled and mobilized by political and economic actors of various kinds.” (p. 72)

The example of Nowa Huta shows, in K. Lebow’s opinion, that the mass appearance of rural immigrants in towns after the war constituted a genuine social revolution. In spite of the one-and-only experience of Polish Stalinism, in a social sense the Nowa Huta project has more in common with European new cities (Eastern and Western too!), she believes, than one would have been inclined to expect.

The book under review is extremely interesting intellectually, and it incites one to think over the social experience of Nowa Huta anew. Even though not all of the points proposed have been reliably evidenced, the study is no doubt one of the most intellectually challenging propositions in the social history of Polish Stalinism.

trans. Tristan Korecki

Dariusz Jarosz

Yaman Kouli, *Wissen und nach-industrielle Produktion. Das Beispiel der gescheiterten Rekonstruktion Niederschlesiens 1936–1945*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014, 320 pp.

The study by Yaman Kouli deals with importance of knowledge as one of the key factors rendering individual states and economic systems competitive – an issue of importance but, incidentally, not too well recognised in economic and social history studies. Such research is part of a much ampler current of analyses pursued by economists with respect to the importance of so-called human capital in economic development. In this latter case, the concepts proposed are usually mathematised, ones that try to determine not only the value of human capital (understood as the body of knowledge, abilities, skills and qualifications, attitudes and incentives, and health) but also the influence of investment (such as in education, scientific research, vocational training for adults, healthcare, access to information) on its value.

Due to the apparent deficit of sources, the possibilities for historians to carry out such analyses are limited. Y. Kouli’s study thus appears all the more respectable; it is precursory, particularly with regard to Poland-related issues. Let us remark that this author is well known to Polish researchers focusing on economic issues of the People’s Republic of Poland. Not only

was he a scholarship holder with Poznań's Adam Mickiewicz University when a doctoral student in 2006–7 but also made contributions to scholarly conferences organised by Polish economic historians. He successfully defended his PhD thesis entitled 'Die materielle Illusion oder Ohne Wissen ist alles nichts – die Bedeutung von Wissen für industrielle Produktion am Beispiel Niederschlesiens 1936–1956', in 2012, at the Technische Universität Chemnitz. The book under review is based on this dissertation. At present, Y. Kouli is member of staff of the Institut für Europäische Geschichte at the same university.

Methodologically, the study in question represents the economic and social history current. The book's undisputable value, compared to a rather abundant literature on the Stalinist period in Poland (authored also by foreign researchers), is perception of the phenomena under investigation in a perspective of two different political, economic and social systems. The case of Lower Silesia has offered the author a pretext that has enabled him to research into the fundamental economic problem – the association between 'knowledge' and existing technological resources; more precisely speaking, the author sought to analyse what, namely, "happens when fixed assets of economic usability become separated from 'cooperating knowledge'".

Success of such a research project was largely dependent on the scale and thoroughness of source-based research – and high appreciation is owed to the book in this respect. The author used documentation from central archives (the query at the Warsaw-based Central Archives of Modern Records extended to the archival funds of the Ministries of: Industry and Trade; Recovered Territories; Public Administration; Central Planning Office; Central Office for Urban and Land-Use Planning; State Economic Planning Committee) as well as regional ones (at the State Archives of Wrocław, the query encompassed the funds of State Planning Office, Wrocław Provincial Office, the Board of Provincial National Council). The source research has been complemented by penetrating analysis of the literature. Importantly, as for the latter, not only monographic studies have been used but also articles and studies on various detailed problems.

The study's central argument whereby the knowledge created by science is key to the development of industrial production is not to be challenged. The author validates it in an original and interesting way, using Lower Silesia after WWII as an example. The history of this region is a peculiar case in point: an area that is relatively well developed economically becomes, at some point, part of a different state, which implies an almost complete exchange of the population. The important fact is that the region has been acquired by a country whose economic system lacked sufficient qualified personnel. This is the context in which Y. Kouli analyses the economic consequences of the deficit of highly-skilled staff, as otherwise necessary for industrial production to function. A number of detailed issues have moreover

been analysed, and the legitimacy of certain commonly held perceptions verified. Especially the proposed analysis of the Lower-Silesian economic situation in the period 1936–45 is worth the reader's attention. As the author convincingly argues, the conviction about the region's relative backwardness within Germany's economic system is not supported by the research. Also the conclusions with respect to overstating, in the existing literature, of the adverse consequences of wartime destructions and Soviet infrastructure dismantling actions for the local potential of industrial reconstruction and development seem justifiable. Analysis of industrial output volumes in Lower Silesia between 1945 and 1960 leads the author to the conclusion that failure to attain the production levels of the year 1936, in some sectors, meant that the new hosts proved incapable of efficiently managing and developing the area. He even goes as far as concluding (in a too strongly-worded manner, perhaps), in the end section, that the takeover brought about "die soziale Katastrophe voll auf die wirtschaftliche Ebene".

In his search for the sources of the problems being identified, the author deems lack of qualified personnel, resulting from the displacement of local German people, to have been the central reason. Altered migration policy with regard to German people was, to Kouli's mind, evidence that this particular factor was of importance and as such was appreciated by Polish policymakers. While the authorities wanted to get rid of the Germans as soon as practicable in the first stage, subsequently, after 1950, efforts were taken to hinder the migration. Kouli interprets this as a proof that German employees' knowledge was key for the functioning of Lower-Silesian industry.

The findings discussed in this book, like any valuable and original research, provide incentive for discussion and open up new research fields. I would like to express some complementary and polemical remarks in this context. I should make it clear, to begin with, that I find most of the author's findings pretty convincing – which is particularly true for his conclusion regarding adverse consequences of low qualifications and skills among the locally available white and blue collar workers for the functioning of the Lower-Silesian industry. Detailed research of the worker milieus in so-called Recovered Territories has shown that those groups represented definitely worse qualities compared not only to their pre-war German counterparts but even to Polish workers employed after 1945 with establishments in so-called 'Old Territories'. Enough to say, based on research covering workers of Wrocław area, for instance, that among those taking up employment in the years 1945–56, as many as 43 per cent did not have their primary education completed and only 23 per cent continued their education on a secondary level. There was also a small percentage – a mere 7 per cent – of those with pre-war experience in factory work. The share of workers of rural origin was considerable: in terms of residence as of August 1939, their proportion equalled 53 per cent, rising to above 60 per cent in regard of birthplace. These

ratios fared definitely worse even if compared to blue collars employed in the 'Old Territories'.¹

I would however be more cautious about the stance, implicitly assumed by the author, whereby this situation had to remain unchanged. It is worth highlighting that during the two interwar decades Poland managed to prepare appropriate industrial personnel within a rather short time. A 1936 questionnaire tells us that skilled workers accounted for 39.2 per cent of all the working people, another 25.9 per cent standing for semiskilled workers; unskilled workers amounted to less than a third (29.8%). The average education of blue-collar workers (which is mostly true for males) was above the primary; workers employed in the thirties were usually expected to have graduated from a vocational high school. As a comparison, there were 16.5 per cent unskilled workers employed in England in 1931, the respective figures for the United States and Germany equalling 29 per cent (1930) and 35 per cent (1933). It would also be useful to recall the positive appraisals expressed about Polish workers by foreign entrepreneurs and observers. Henry Ford emphasised the extraordinary innovativeness of Polish workers employed in his factories; Max Weber mentioned the Polish female workers' ability to modify 'their entire nature' when put under new economic conditions.

Hence, the headhunting and worker education methods elaborated before 1939 could be adapted after the war (let us remark that numerous studies compiled by Polish Underground State experts envisioned introduction of an extensive system for education of qualified personnel once the war was over). For political reasons, a different and, to my mind, deficient staffing system was applied, which was based on mass employments of low-skilled and low-paid workers. As a result, the extensive economic development model efficiently pathologised the labour relations, leading to a destroyed work ethic. These developments were universal, extending to most of the socialist countries. In analysis of the difficulties that appeared, one cannot ignore the general determinants of functioning of the economic systems in the so-called real socialist countries.

In this respect, it should be noted that the solutions accepted by most Eastern Bloc countries after WWII were contrary to the overall changes that were affecting the worker milieu's characteristics in the twentieth century. Ralf Dahrendorf notes that until the late nineteenth century a tendency of deteriorating employee qualifications prevailed, the clearly dominant group being unskilled labourers. The trend had to do with the specificity of the

¹ Research on Cracow worker population employed in 1945–56 has shown that 23% of them did not have their primary education completed, 54% having a higher-than-primary education background. 10% of local workers had a pre-war factory experience. 44% workers-to-be resided in the countryside as of 31 August 1939. As for white-collars, the disproportions between those of Wrocław and Cracow were similar.

industrialisation processes which were based, at the time, on a narrow division of labour and heavy industry. The twentieth century, particularly beginning with the 1930s, saw a reverse trend – with the numbers of qualified workers growing and the emergence of ‘underqualified worker’ category, against the shrinking role of unqualified workers. This was connected with dissemination of technological innovations and a new philosophy of industrial organisation. The East Central European countries where the Soviet – or, essentially, nineteenth-century – model of industrialisation was imitated after WWII witnessed a resumption (as a retrograde step) of the pattern of functioning of the worker milieu adequate to this phase of development, with low-skilled and inexpensive blue-collars prevailing in industry.

Given this context, I am not completely certain whether the exemplary countries where ‘an economic miracle’ actually took (or did not take) place are explainable based solely on employee qualifications. I would ignore the discussion whether any ‘economic miracle’ could ever be referred to in the case of Hungary or Russia. The paradoxical thing is that as far as the per-capita GDP is concerned, being the most synthetic economic development indicator, the Eastern Bloc countries that were the best-developed before the war (including Czechoslovakia and Hungary) did not see a convergence with Western countries at all; on the contrary, a divergent trend occurred. It is moreover worth emphasising that a slower development extended to all the decades of functioning of the socialist economy. (Angus Maddison’s estimates have it that the mean annual increase in GDP per capita in 1950–73 equalled 3.6% for Hungary, 3.08% for Czechoslovakia and 3.36% in the case of the Soviet Union – thus faring lower than the East Central European average of 3.79%, to say nothing of the clearly higher average for the Western Europe.)

I also have doubts whether the example quoted by Kouli regarding the difficulties in making use of the production potential of Sudetenland is interpretable in terms of outcome of the deficit of qualified personnel. The pre-war Czechoslovakia was a relatively well-developed country, with efficiently functioning industries, mostly concentrated (apart from textile and glass industry) in regions not covered by mass deportations of local German speakers after the war.

Another interesting question touched upon in this book is the reasons for the turn in migration policy applied to local German residents after 1950. On the one hand, the observation is certainly apt that economic considerations were a major incentive (albeit the actual skills of German workers is unknown to us: the sources quote diverse evaluations, and adverse changes occurred in this sphere resulting from the war and the escape of Germans). On the other hand, it has to be taken into consideration that the communist authorities pursued at that time an unprecedentedly extensive surveillance of industrial workers, along with cleansings on political grounds. It is paradoxical that experts whose experience dated back to pre-war time were made redundant in the first place, and replaced by politically submissive subjugates.

The functioning of the Wałbrzych (German, Waldenburg) coal district illustrates the situation (the author emphasises poor hard-coal mining output in Lower Silesia). A politically motivated mass purge of qualified workers was carried out there, effectively disorganising the production conditions. Pre-war miners, incidentally, were an elite among Polish workers: their proven performance exceeded that of their German, English or Belgian peers; moreover, 100,000 Polish miners formed the core of the blue-collar staff in French coalmines. In spite of this, after the war, with the new systemic conditions in place, it was not until the 1960s that Polish mines attained the pre-war productivity.

Given the data quoted, incomplete use of the economic potential of Low Silesia and the entire area of Western and Northern Territories taken over from Germany is not completely explainable in terms of lack of qualified staff. While this factor was important, I am certain there were other reasons too. Generally, the reasons for the problems are traceable in the overall conditions of the economic systems of 'real socialist' countries.

The remarks I have made in this review do not affect my high appraisal of the book. I consider Y. Kouli's study an important research achievement, as it enables one to better understand the causes of the poor condition of Polish economy in the post-war period. Some problems related to the integration of the Polish Western and Northern Territories, seized at the war's end, have been identified, which is not commonplace among Polish historians. Therefore, I am positive that the book will become an important point of reference for researchers: investigating Polish economy and society in the latter half of the twentieth century will be much facilitated through references to Yaman Kouli. Yet, there is a wider dimension to the study under review, as it contributes importantly to the discussion about the importance of human capital to economic development. In regard of the past developments it describes, this is a rare instance of a significant contribution to a historiographer's professional knowledge.

trans. *Tristan Korecki*

Jędrzej Chumiński

Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki zwrot. Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956–1976* [The big change: An evolution of the Left and a revival of the idea of civil society in 1956–76], Kraków, Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2013, 382 pp.

It has been twenty years that we have waited for a book comparable to the now-classic study by Andrzej Friszke.¹ The book by Dariusz Gawin deals with the political opposition (dissidents and dissenters) in Poland after the October

¹ Andrzej Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL 1945–1980* (London, 1994).

1956 breakthrough not in its entirety but focusing on its left-inclined current, the one which Friszke also credited with most of the merit. According to what the author declares in the introduction, his study describes an evolution in the thinking about political action under totalitarian pressure. Thus, it attempts to trace the emergence of the theory of social self-organisation, which the author believes to be an original concept elaborated by the democratic opposition. Gawin argues that the oppositional thought unfolded evolutionally, from an attachment to the (traditional) idea of revolution to a concept of developing civic structures independent of the state. In contrast to Friszke's excellent job, Gawin does not seek to describe the concrete actions taken by the dissenters, focusing instead on the "movement of thoughts recorded in the texts." (p. 12) Thus, the narrative is woven around a variety of policy papers, such as pieces of journalism, manifestos or declarations. The book thus represents the history of ideas; the researcher has well embedded his arguments in the historical knowledge accumulated to date with respect to various circles of the opposition.

Chapter 1, entitled 'Październik 1956. Rewolucja po polsku' [October 1956. A Polish-style revolution], describes the style of political thinking pursued by 'the October Left' – a multifaceted generational formation gathered around *Po prostu*, the young intelligentsia's weekly. This circle, whose name, 'October Left', referred not only to October 1956 but also to October 1917 – the Bolshevik upheaval in Russia, was formed of student and worker youth groups and clubs. The political strivings of the October Left were expressed by publicists, economists and philosophers – Leszek Kołakowski, Ryszard Turcki and Eligiusz Lasota among them. The young activists considered themselves to be a community of revolutionaries, an avant-garde of progress and genuine communism, struggling against the Stalinist remains in the state and society. In the author's opinion, industrial democracy (workers' councils) was the key point in their political agenda; these structures were expected to replace, some day, the state apparatus, which, according to the Marxist-Leninist theory, was doomed to gradual fadeout. Man was supposed to fulfil his or her potential entirely at the workplace, the sphere of production and politics merging into one, in line with what Karl Marx postulated in his early writings. Democracy, or self-government, in workplaces became the foundation for the postulated political and social utopia. Gawin does not deny that 'the October Left' made a real contribution to restoration of the rule-of-law and protection of the civil rights of individuals; but he makes a critical remark that the far-reaching objectives of the concept crossed over those of liberal democracy.

Chapter 2 is entitled '1957–1968. Erozja marksizmu i rewizjonizm' [1957–68. Marxism eroding. Revisionism]. The communist propaganda attached a stigmatising label to the notion of revisionism, and its use was subject to strictly political criteria. The author focuses on description of two

forms of revisionism, the ones appearing in philosophy (based on essays and articles of Leszek Kołakowski) and in politics (based on Jacek Kuroń's and Karol Modzelewski's 1965 *Open letter to the Party*²). The author added his own definition of revisionism to the numerous existing ones:³ according to Gawin, revisionism should be described "not so much in terms of a political programme but rather as a kind of critical attitude toward the reality: it was a critique that mostly indicated, in this case, a direction, rather than a clearly defined objective of the action, oriented or purposeful cogitation, etc. ... This attitude was founded on a negation of the existing and encountered reality, on critique of every form of dogmatism." (p. 68) The description of Kołakowski's philosophical revisionism is twice as long as the discussion of the *Open letter*, which no doubt reflects the author's suggestion with respect to the importance of both identified currents. Kołakowski postulated the need for intellectuals to contribute to the creation of the communist movement and, in parallel, the primacy of thought over current politics; he considered the distance kept by intellectuals towards the instances of authority to be a right thing (while it was natural for him to be a member of the communist party, as the latter implemented the objective rights governing the development of history). For this Warsaw thinker, socialism was not a project with respect to a political system but rather an ethical imperative not to be shunned: the imperative of involvement.

With a number of valuable observations, the subchapter on Kołakowski seems longish. The question comes to mind: how broad was the influence of his officially published texts? The serious political effects, veritably avalanching ones, ensued from Kołakowski's open lecture on the tenth anniversary of the October 1956 events (delivered at the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw), which in a political commentary form described the spiritual condition of Polish society of the period (the assessment extended to healthcare and intellectual freedoms). This was his first public appearance in many years; Kołakowski was already then a scholar and commentator of enormous authority. The content of this address is regrettably not analysed, being merely mentioned (in the subsequent chapter). The memorial by Kuroń and Modzelewski is presented in detail, for a change. This document diagnosed the state and the communist rule in Poland in an extremely leftist fashion. Its authors observed that the relations of production remained under the authority of bureaucrats alienated from the society. As Gawin aptly remarks, workplace continued to be the source of politicality for the memorial's authors. The critical reference for both revisionist dissenters was parliamentary democracy

² Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, *List otwarty do partii* (Paris, 1966) (English edn.: *idem, An open letter to the Party* [London, 1970]).

³ See Magdalena Mikołajczyk, *Rewizjoniści. Obecność w dyskursach okresu PRL* (Cracow, 2013), *passim*; on the definitions, cf. pp. 25–94.

(bourgeois/Western-type democracy, as it was described then): they rejected it *a limine*, as they were attached to the Marxist dogma highlighting the property of the means of production. Gawin is obviously critical in his approach: he finds that “there was a radically totalitarian potential to the project of a future society” that was drawn in the *Open letter*, as it heralded an abolishment of tripartition of power and establishing the political rights as proprietary for the working class (p. 116).

The two separate subchapters of Chapter 2 describe the threads in the political commentaries of the emigration monthly *Kultura* which concerned revisionism, ‘October Left’, and the domestic Right. The monthly was an important mirror of the major domestic debates – but Gawin’s superficial analysis of its contents (particularly, the political writing of Juliusz Mieroszewski) is not a satisfactory take. Apart from the periodical, the Paris-based Institut Littéraire published political books which were passed from hand to hand and read in Poland too. These books entered the circulation of the domestic revisionists’ thought, even if not always directly reflected in the texts they wrote. Among these books were Milovan Đilas’s *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, first edited in a Polish version in Paris in 1957; a collection of documents *Program Związku Komunistów Jugosławii. Krytyka “Komunista”* [Programme of the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia. A critique of *Komunist*] (Paris, 1959); and a Prague Spring programme documents collection *Komunizm z ludzką twarzą* [A human-faced communism] (with an introduction by J. Mieroszewski; Paris, 1969). The main critical objection I should voice with respect to this chapter is that Kořakowski’s thought has been somewhat extracted from the political debates involving the European Left in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the same is actually true for Modzelewski. As a matter of fact, their thinking developed in dialogue with the other currents of non and anti-Stalinist communism: Trotskyism on the one hand and Western social democracy – and, later on, Euro-communism – on the other (to name the major trends).⁴ Włodzimierz Brus, the man and his activities, is also neglected in this book (apart from his name being mentioned a few times). In the field of economy, always of importance to Marxists, Brus did what Kořakowski did in philosophy. The views of W. Brus reflect the evolution of the Left: from a favourable acceptance of the Yugoslav economic model⁵ to its rejection, on equal grounds with the statist Soviet system. Brus criticised both those models as they did not ensure democracy,

⁴ Michal Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce. Zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě 1953–1960* (Prague, 2009) offers an excellent discussion of the leading Marxist philosophers in Central Eastern Europe.

⁵ As clearly visible in the reportage by Szymon Jakubowicz and Włodzimierz Brus, *System jugosłowiański z bliska* (Warsaw, 1957), esp. pp. 3–53.

understood as the society's influence on government – including the right to replace the government.⁶

Chapter 3: 'Rok 1968. Szok Marca' [Year 1968: the March shock] diverts from the initially declared trailing of the policy texts: 'the Commandos' Gawin endeavours to portray (the name refers to a group of Warsaw University students gathered around Adam Michnik, Józef Dajczgewand and others) had produced almost no discursive utterances (apart from a few leaflets) before March 1968. Their attachment to the *Open letter*, which is much highlighted by the author (pp. 156, 161), was of a very specific sort: while they did not contribute to its content, 'the Commandos' took successful efforts to smuggle it out and have it published by the Institut Littéraire. In his attempt to show 'the movement of thoughts', the author had to analyse concrete activities taken by the young dissidents. His selection of specific actions is, of necessity, marked with arbitrariness. For instance, A. Michnik's 1964 visit to the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, which came as a mental breakthrough for 'the Commandos', is omitted. It should be seen as the author's merit that he has managed to point out to certain contradictions in the stance of those students, and reproaches them for not willing to assume a critical position in the communist party's dispute with the Catholic Church in connection with the millenary of the baptism of Poland vs. one thousand years of Poland as state (1966). He identifies their incapacity to comprehend the views and opinions of religious believers (who formed a majority of Polish society) and their consequent fear of Polish nationalism which effectively determined their attitudes. Since the narration has departed from focusing on texts only, the specific determinants informing the ideological evolution of 'the Commandos' have been taken into account (the anti-Zionist campaign in state-owned mass media, police repressions). Yet the author is, regrettably, not consistent in this lack of consistency as he omits, for instance, the Skewed Wheel Club (Klub Krzywego Koła), a hub where the Warsaw Left-inclined intelligentsia waged serious discussions for several years about the state and society. The other such omission is Jan Józef Lipski, an extraordinary figure who united the various circles of the dissatisfied.

Chapter 4: '1968–1976. Czas przewartościowań. Lewica laicka i katolicy otwarci' [1968–76: The time of re-evaluation. The secular left-wing and open-minded Catholics] describes the encounters of the disobedient from both sides of the political barricade – the parties that had been rather mutually adverse before 1968. They first met in the Warsaw monthly *Więź*, then in Warsaw's Club of Catholic Intellectuals (KIK) and, lastly, in the

⁶ Włodzimierz Brus, *Uspołecznienie a ustroj polityczny. Na tle doświadczeń socjalizmu wschodnioeuropejskiego* (Uppsala, 1975); for a comparison of both models, see pp. 49–142 (English edn., *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*, trans. R. A. Clark [London and Boston, 1975]).

Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. The *Więź* team, Gawin argues, considered Marxism to be “the disposer of modernity in the Polish conditions” (p. 203), and thus decided to enter into a dialogue with representatives of this ideology. The author describes Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s achievements in this respect, in light of his journalistic pieces. Mazowiecki’s background was the PAX Association, a long-term ally of the communist party. A nontrivial question arises, to what extent such background could determine the Catholic activists’ attitudes toward the Left. One should be mindful of the fact that a number of former PAX members could be found in the so-called ‘Znak’ movement after 1957 (incl. the Parliamentary Circle ‘Znak’, the KIKs, and *Więź* editorial team). It is really a pity that Gawin’s narrative almost neglects Jerzy Zawieyski, the man who was truly excited about his mission of an intermediary between Catholicism and the ruling Left (his name is only mentioned twice throughout the book). That a whole subchapter is devoted to Jan Strzelecki, the man and his output, is commendable, for a change. Strzelecki’s involvement in building bridges between various milieus and thought currents, including between Catholics and socialists, had begun in the 1940s. Gawin particularly focuses on his book *Próby świadectwa* [Attempts at testimony] (1971) which dealt with brotherhood Strzelecki had himself experienced in the conspiratorial environment during WWII and showed that an ethical community encompassing believers and non-believers was possible. While the Strzelecki’s book was unique, the opinions he had voiced earlier on had a bearing on the debates of Polish left-wingers. I would particularly refer here to his diary notes, *Zapiski 1950–1953* [Notes, 1950–3] (published in *Twórczość* 1957, no. 2), which documented the author’s intellectual process of departing from Marxism. This same chapter interprets Bohdan Cywiński’s once-celebrated book *Rodowody niepokornych* [Genealogies of the indomitable] (Warsaw, 1970), which considered the paths and forms of involvement of Polish intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and a questionnaire of the emigration periodical *Aneks* concerning Christianity and socialism (1976, no. 12). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the message proposed in A. Michnik’s collection of essays *Kościół, lewica, dialog* (Paris, 1976).⁷ As Gawin finds, the closer relations observable in the former half of the 1970s between people of the Left and of the Catholic Church (KIK activists, for instance) were of a moral and intellectual, rather than political, nature (p. 269). However, there were certain until-then-clear limits, generally based on the progres vs. reaction demarcation, that became blurred: the emerging opposition was becoming “a community of good-willed people

⁷ Published quickly in French (*L’Eglise et la gauche* [Paris, 1979]), and then in English as *The Church and the Left*, ed. and trans. David Ost (Chicago and London, 1993).

who bore witness to the truth and were building an archipelago of isles of freedom amidst the darkness of a totalitarian ocean.” (p. 276)

The last, fifth, chapter – entitled ‘1968–1976. Czas przewartościowań. Lewica na nowej drodze – odrzucenie tradycji marksistowskiej i teoria samoorganizacji’ [1968–76: The time of re-evaluation. The Left enters a new path. Rejection of the Marxist tradition. The self-organisation theory] – resumes the thread of Leszek Kołakowski, in an attempt to show the importance of his work *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution* (first published in Polish, 3 vols. [Paris, 1976–8]), particularly for the Western Left. Through the many years of his studies, this political thinker came to the conclusion that Marxism originally proposed a reply to the essentially religious human striving for self-redemption – a secular theodicy. Proletarian revolution was a myth, in his opinion. In other words, Kołakowski positioned Marxism within the great Western metaphysical tradition, leading back to neo-Platonism. The thinker’s political commentaries from the mid-1970s, which he resumed after a dozen-or-so years, comprised many indications to dissenters. In exile since 1968, Kołakowski warned against Sovietisation of culture, called upon people to live a life of dignity and, moreover, proposed a new language of politics, which would be rooted in the values. The dissolution of Marxism did not mean, to his mind, a collapse of the ethos of the Left (social democracy) as such. He has also reevaluated the notion of nation, concluding that nations have, so far, proved to be an indefeasible element in human history.

The narrative ends with the year 1976 and the establishment of the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR). Gawin analyses three important voices of the founders of the political opposition: A. Michnik (‘New evolutionism’, first delivered as a paper and published by *Aneks* quarterly in 1978⁸); Antoni Macierewicz (‘Refleksje o opozycji’ [Some reflections on the opposition], *Aneks*, 12 [1976]) and Jacek Kuroń (‘Polityczna opozycja w Polsce’ [The political opposition in Poland], *Kultura* [Paris], 11 [1974]; ‘Myśli o programie działania’ [Some thoughts on the programme of action], *Aneks*, 13–14 [1977]). Let us remark that Macierewicz appears there as one of the three important theoreticians of the oppositional praxis somewhat as a *deus ex machina*: we are not told what, in specific, was the leftist inspiration behind his doings (apart from a general mention in p. 350).

Gawin compares the positions of these three men, then on friendly terms with one another, discussing Kuroń’s theory of political action in the largest amount of detail. It was Kuroń who first regarded the Polish political system of the 1970s as totalitarian, the primary issue, to his mind, being lack of sovereignty of the society and the nation (defining sovereignty as the ability

⁸ In English as ‘New Evolutionism’, in Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and other Essays* (Berkeley, 1985).

of a society, formed of free individuals, to get self-organised). The notion of opposition he used was extensive: any individual whose behaviours exceed the scenarios written by the authorities was regarded an ally. Kuroń propagated the building of a dynamic network of social movements and communities which would function out of the communist state's control. A new dichotomy: totalitarianism vs. democracy appeared in his writings, replacing the former: progress and revolution vs. reaction (Right vs. Left, etc.). For the emerging opposition (the KOR), democracy became an axiological, rather than institutional or system-wide (Kuroń was the only one who pondered about the form of the statehood). In Gawin's view, the credit for the revival of the opposition goes to the ethical radicalism of the young dissenters (p. 343), which prevented them from coming to terms with the social reality. It may be added that the postulate to build social bonds was anchored in the insight of the society of the 1970s, which was undergoing a progressive atomisation.⁹ In 1976, in the course of the debates among KOR members, a pragmatics evolved based on the concept whereby the germs of opposition should be non-ideological and non-institutional (without a structure, organisation, or hierarchy). The objective was to change the totalitarian character of the state through social self-organisation of 'isles of freedom' which would, some day, gave rise to a real opposition. This was the rationale behind the social self-organisation theory, which topped out the developmental lines of the Polish Left.

Dariusz Gawin has proposed a survey of policy texts from 1956–76, the ones he finds the most important. My major objection concerns the form of this book. Its author rarely weaves a problem-centred argument, often limiting himself to simply discussing the texts, by order of their appearance. He is moreover overly Polonocentric: he rarely shows the filiations between the concepts and the ideas, and mostly omits the international context of the enunciations under analysis. One would not learn, for that matter, in what ways the left-wingers were possibly informed by the increasingly numerous and available, in Polish, testimonies concerning the Gulag and information on the activities of Russian dissidents (the name of Andrei Sakharov is mentioned only once, in an irrelevant context!). The reader may furthermore be disturbed with a certain vagueness of the notions, but this is perhaps inseparable from the history of ideas. Yet, a historian of ideas could have been expected to take account of the relevance of other cultural texts as well. These would include historical studies, literary or motion-picture works, which – albeit not always explicitly political in content – not infrequently contributed to Polish ideological debates at home and in the émigré communities. Among them was, for instance, the important dispute about how much national, or native, the communism in Poland might be. Having read the study, one

⁹ The process was noticed by sociologists; cf. the famed article by Stefan Nowak, 'System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego', *Studia Socjologiczne*, 19 (1979), no. 4.

would not become clearer about the meaning of its subtitle: it is hard to guess where and when the idea of civil society perished (or, whether it had come to being in the Polish leftist thought ever before 1956). Nonetheless, in spite of these shortcomings, Dariusz Gawin's book should be ranked among the most important contributions to the history of the democratic opposition in the People's Republic of Poland. In the light of this study, the movement appears as the Left-oriented thinking coming to fruition.

trans. *Tristan Korecki*

Bartosz Kaliski

Cristina Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote: Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2013, 432 pp.

In his recently published volume of recollections, Karol Modzelewski, an illustrious mediaevalist and veteran of the democratic opposition to the communist Poland, is critical of the 'dissident formation' description used at times in reference to the Workers' Defence Committee [KOR]. To his mind, it is misleading to juxtapose the KOR with Czechoslovak Charter 77 or Soviet dissidents – primarily because of the Polish organisation's incomparably larger social and political influence: "While KOR people sometimes did use some of the methods elaborated by dissidents, held demonstration meetings with [signatories of] Charter 77, they were not *dissidents* themselves: they formed, instead, the core component of an organised political opposition, and a germ of a political alternative."¹ The exquisite book on Romanian dissidents of the 1980s, written by Cristina Petrescu, a historian and political scientist of the Bucharest University, also compares their activities with those of the oppositionists in other East Central European (ECE) countries – and shares the doubt whether the phrase 'dissident formation' is applicable with the case in question. But the doubt expressed by Petrescu is of a completely different kind: while Poland could serve as an example of extremely powerful opposition to the regime, weak resistance, offered not by organisations or groups of people but, mostly, by individuals, was characteristic of Romania. As Petrescu notes, in reference to the classic nineteenth-century concept of Titu Maiorescu, "... Romanian dissent was often a form without substance, which succumbed due to its own misconception." (p. 31)

The weakness of Romanian opposition against the dictatorial rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu appeared thought-provoking even to some contemporary

¹ Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca* (Warsaw, 2013), 234.

Western observers. Attempts made to explain it were of three sorts: First, the post-Weberian argument that civil movements in countries of the Orthodox tradition were basically weak. Second, an extremely strong nationalist legitimisation of the local regime, founded (among other things) upon the country's ostentatious independence of Moscow, was emphasised. Thirdly, the efficiency of Romanian repression apparatus was appreciated. Whilst the author would not polemicise against any of these explanations, her focus is not on the reasons behind the manifestations of the regime's strength and persistence but on characterising those scarce aspects of opposition which nonetheless did appear in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s.

The chronology of the analysis under discussion is framed by the Helsinki Accords of 1975 and the bloody Romanian Revolution of 1989. The first chapter describes the international and local determinants of the dissident activities. Petrescu highlights a paradox related to the Helsinki Conference: while the provision on human rights protection appeared to be a convenient instrument for the opposition groups in other Eastern Bloc countries, it long did not play a significant part in Romania. As understood by Ceauşescu himself, the Helsinki provisions did not extend to the sovereignty of Romanian citizens with respect to their own state but were limited to the state's sovereignty in the international arena. The policy pursued by the United States reinforced his conviction: in 1975, Romania was granted the Most Favoured Nation status, enjoying appreciation from the Administrations of Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Doubts about whether a repressive regime of this kind actually deserves such a privilege emerged in the U.S. only in the 1980s. Decisive for the loss of international prestige proved those elements of Ceauşescu's policies which conflicted with ethnic and religious minorities. When the 'systematisation' action (destructions of old buildings, concentrations of residential areas) expanded from towns into rural territories, protests broke out not only in Western Europe but also in Hungary, where the move was interpreted as a blow against the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. In the latter half of the decade, the Romanian dictator lost the remains of international appreciation. The new political line assumed by the Soviet Union deprived Romania of its strategic importance. Seen in the context of Mikhail Gorbachev, a liberal and open leader, Nicolae Ceauşescu no more appeared as a nonconformist: he was merely a satrap now. Finally, Ceauşescu, with his obsessive attachment to the idea of complete autonomy, resolved to start a radical march toward autarky, paying off his country's international debts prematurely and quitting any close economic contacts either with the East or the West. Once a partner of the powers, he finally turned into a gloomy autocrat in a poor, not-too-important country.

The position of dissidents in a country that was gradually withdrawing from the international community was not enviable. Petrescu argues that the authorities were driven by simple logic in their response to social resistance:

Ceaușescu was eager to maintain his international status; therefore, a chance to avoid brutal repressions and to extend, be it a little, the oppositional activities could only be owed to contacts with Western mass media. Under pressure from them, secretary-general of the communist party was disposed not so much for concessions but for giving dissidents an opportunity to leave the country. Those who rejected the offer were subject to pressures and extortions or, at times, were merely beaten. Therefore, any manifestation of resistance to the dictator remained isolated. Those who initiated such acts usually ended up leaving the country before they could ever get in touch with a larger group of such who shared their thinking. And, they were replaced by others who started all over again, put under pressure by the Securitate – the secret police agency that was mastering its methods.

The subsequent chapters of *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote* describe the four basic forms of Romanian dissident movement. The first was the only attempt made to refer to the Helsinki provisions, which is fully comparable to the oppositional activities in other ECE countries – namely, the open letter to the Romanian secretary-general written by the writer Paul Goma, influenced by the news on the Czechoslovak Charter 77 initiative. In spite of the initial scruples of the American authorities, which still viewed Ceaușescu as an ally, Goma's protest was noticed abroad and publicised by Radio Free Europe (RFE). At home, support for the letter in defence of human rights violated by Romanian authorities was expressed by several hundred people. Goma himself and some of the other signatories were subjected to various forms of repression – intimidated, beaten, and detained. Romanian émigrés in the West protested in defence of the writer. The authorities finally decided to release him and allow him to leave for France, where he settled down for good. Albeit while abroad, he would not pose any threat to the regime's stability, Romanian secret services continued their operation aimed at Goma for several years afterwards, going as far as commissioning his killing (the would-be assassin let his principals down and 'chose the liberty option', taking advantage of the foreign trip opportunity).

This first dissent movement to appear in Romania did not become a seed of a broader phenomenon and thus did not debilitate the communist regime. The reverse was virtually the case, Petrescu argues: the experiences gained in the course of fighting the Goma movement contributed to an improvement of Securitate's activity. The secret police elaborated an efficient strategy that enabled suppression of all the subsequent attempts at resistance. Also the organisation of the services was streamlined. More importantly still, Goma's protest fell victim, to an extent, of its own success (quite modest as it was, in any case). The author seeks to identify the incentives of the letter's signatories, finding that a hope to emigrate was the actual driver behind the actions taken by most of them. This calculation appeared apt in most cases, and the consecutive permits to leave attracted other potential emigrants,

many of whom had been endeavouring to leave the country for years. Their personal victories meant that the communist authorities were getting rid of the opposition and proved that Romania was not overly repressive as far as human rights are concerned: after all, emigration was admitted, rather than keeping political opponents in prison. This combination of repressive measures 'tailored' to the individual's profile with admitted or, at times, forced emigration appeared to be an extremely efficient tactic in combating the scarce manifestations of social resistance in the 1980s.

The subsequent expression of oppositional stance against Ceaușescu was even more limited than the movement initiated by Paul Goma. This time, the initiative unfolded in Transylvania and was virtually confined to exponents of local Hungarian minority. This group had their rights severely restricted in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Károly Király, a high-ranking functionary of the Romanian Communist Party, first protested to the authorities against these developments in 1971; his action gained traction in the West but eventually had no practical significance, apart from marginalisation of Király himself in the authority's structure. The Hungarian minority revived its activity in the early 1980s, with a group of intellectuals set up a samizdat periodical *Ellenpontok*, through which they demanded respect for their rights. A limited scope of this form of opposition partly ensued from its nationalistic character: the Hungarians addressed the authorities in their own interest, without entering into collaboration with Romanian dissidents. In fact, they enjoyed support from some democratic opposition circles in Hungary, which were tolerated by the local authorities. As a result, the protest movement became a convenient tool of unofficial foreign policies pursued by the neighbours manifesting reciprocal aversion: the Hungarian communists allowed the populist opposition to openly speak in defence of compatriots abroad while the Bucharest-based regime encouraged Romanian people to oppose foreign interferences in the affairs of their country. The barrier between the two nations was successfully crossed only in the late 1980s, when Doina Cornea, the Romanian dissident from Cluj, transmitted to the West a protest against the 'systematisation' launched in countryside areas, signed by several dozen Romanian and Hungarian oppositionists. Petrescu emphasises the tough conditions under which Cornea acted; the communist authorities accused her of favouring Hungarian revisionism.

There was probably no manifestation of resistance against Ceaușescu that would have better demonstrated the chasm between the situation in Romania and in other ECE countries than the so-called 'Letter of the Six', sent to the secretary-general in 1989. The moment the political system was undergoing a deep crisis (not to recover from it any more), a group of Romanian communists pushed to a sidetrack demanded that the principles of law be observed, economic reform carried out, and the policy pursued by the Party's executive team rectified – so as to reinstate the country's international

prestige. These postulates turned out poorly not only when compared against the positions assumed at the time by dissident circles in Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, but even the policy of Mikhail Gorbachev, secretary-general of the Soviet Union's Communist Party. RFE and BBC commented upon the Party activists' protest with mixed feelings. The Letter's content agitated few; it seemed more important that an oppositional faction finally appeared within the Romanian Communist Party. The kickback from the regime, detentions of people associated with the signatories and a campaign against 'spies' and 'traitors' was not based on the protest's content but on the very fact that six old communists proved courageous enough to criticise the dictator.

The last, and largest, chapter of Cristina Petrescu's book deals with seven intellectuals who, in their dissident activities, repeated Paul Goma's gesture in one way or the other but could not count on organisational support from a national minority (unlike the Hungarian dissidents in Transylvania) or assistance from trusted Party comrades (unlike the Letter of the Six signatories). Apart from Doina Cornea, the names include Mihai Botez, Dorin Tudoran, Radu Filipescu, Gabriel Andreescu, Dan Petrescu, and Mircea Dinescu. In these seven cases, the comparison with Don Quixote, signalled in the title, seems the best justified. Acts of protest against the regime were, as a rule, doomed to failure; news penetrating into the West and afterwards retransmitted through the radio to Romania, could be deemed a success. First of all, as the author convincingly argues, internationalisation of a protest was the only way to protect the dissident from long years in prison. She attaches smaller significance to the substantive content of any of the political and economic programmes compiled by the dissident intellectuals. Most of them did not design or envision an overthrowing of the political system, striving instead to reform it, make it more flexible, and improve its most burdensome absurdities and injustices. Such limited impact did not matter much to the authorities – as it now does not matter much for historians: it is the very act of protest that counted.

From Robin Hood to Don Quixote has every characteristics of reliable study in the recent Central and Eastern Europe history. The sources Petrescu makes use of extend to interviews with dissidents held by the author in 1998–2003 as well as archival materials. The latter represent three mutually complementary perspectives: the ones of the communist party, its secret services, and RFE employees. The study considerably expands the topic Dennis Deletant embarked on in the 1990s.² The typology of Romanian dissident movements proposed by Petrescu, based on differences in the nature and circumstances of the protests occurring in the 1970s and in the 1980s, proves logical and convincing. A transparent construction and elegant narration make the book

² Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London, 1995).

all the more readable. Such books are usually referred to as research gap-fillers; this particular one does the job in the most respectable manner. It is worth emphasising that a comparative perspective assumed by the author positions the book in a young dynamic current of comparative history of dissident movements.³

Apart from these strong points, the study under review has one more advantage, rather rare with books of this sort: the author is emphatic in her approach to the subject-matter. This attitude partly stems from the assumed perspective: the central characters are ‘the Don Quixotes’, rather than the repression apparatus persecuting them. Perforce, the focus is not a political organisation, as no such body was ever formed by Romanian oppositionists. But empathy stays with the author also when she analyses the vicissitudes of individual dissidents, spied on and persecuted, urged to collaborate with the Securitate – some of them joining the game indeed, always to lose. It is with a distance, but refraining from arrogance, that Petrescu comments on conflicts among Romanian émigrés and, likewise, on the political disputes after 1989, when the figures she describes positioned themselves at various sides of political conflict.

Romanian dissidents did not manage to peacefully depose the communist system, nor did they take the lead of the bloody revolution that overthrew the Ceaușescu rule. Neither did they form the elite of a new post-communist state. Comparison against Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia is not much of advantage for them. Was their activity something more than an act of personal courage and nonconformity? Was there any practical effect of their efforts? With all the sobriety of judgment and critical approach demonstrated throughout her book, Petrescu gives a positive answer. She perceives the Romanian dissidents’ attitude not only in terms of an idealistic act of defence of moral values but also a germ of active citizenship, whose deficit she considers to be one of the major problems of contemporary Romania: “In short, these critical intellectuals did not contribute to the collapse of communism in 1989, but they did contribute to the democratic consolidation afterwards.” (p. 396) It is such ‘soft’ merits that have caused that those ‘Don Quixotes’ from the non-heroic time of Ceaușescu achieved much more than ‘the Robin Hoods’ – the anticommunist partisans hiding in the mountains between the end of WWII and the early 1960s, who prevail in Romanian historiography of the 1990s. This perception could be the sufficient reason for making the Petrescu book interesting to historians of the other former Eastern Bloc countries.

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³ Of the recent publications, see e.g., Robert Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Osnabrück, 2013).