

“WROCLAW MEETING WITH ECONOMIC HISTORY”, OR AN ATTEMPT TO REVIVE RESEARCH ON THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

“WROCLAWSKIE SPOTKANIA Z HISTORIĄ GOSPODARCZĄ”, CZYLI O PRÓBIE OŻYWIENIA BADAŃ NAD GOSPODARKĄ I SPOŁECZEŃSTWEM

Significant changes in the development of research conducted in Poland on the economy and society had already been observed since the 1970s. Since many historians in Wrocław had withdrawn from active academic life, including those who continued the work done before the war by Prof. Franciszek Bujak (1875–1953) at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv and his team. At the same time it was noticeable that many research topics were no longer being continued, for example the work conducted on the development of industry on Polish lands in the 19th and 20th centuries. These problems were observed not only among historians in Wrocław, but also throughout the country, in academic institutions carrying out historical research.

For many postwar years at the Institute of History of the University of Wrocław the organization of research in the field of economic and social history was led by Prof. Stefan Inglot (1902–1994), the founder (in 1946) of the Department of Economic and Social History, and then for many years the head of the Department of Economic History, Demography and Statistics. His death, and a little later also the death of his student Prof. Leszek Wiatrowski (1930–1997), meant the end of research on the Silesian village of the feudal period. Similarly, after the death of Prof. Marian Haisig (1908–1996), who specialized in the feudal period, no one undertook

work on the history of Silesian crafts in that epoch. The death of Dr Marian Wolański in 1991 had a similar effect, interrupting the research on the history of prices in Wrocław in the feudal times. Some of the results of Dr Marian Wolański's research were published thanks to the efforts of Prof. Wiatrowski, but at present there are no indications that this work will be resumed. There is concern that the research on Silesian industry conducted by Professors Waław Długoborski (1926–2021), Zbigniew Kwaśny (born 1930), and Stanisław Michalkiewicz (1930–2008) will also meet a similar fate. No students or successors were left by Prof. Aleksander Nyrek (b. 1930), who retired. He conducted research on the intersection of history and natural sciences, including research on fishery and forestry industry important in Silesia from the 16th to 19th century. Prof. Kazimierz Orzechowski (1923–2009), an outstanding expert on land ownership and the economic system of Silesia, and Prof. Karol Jonca (1930–2008), an expert on Upper Silesian industry, also passed away.

After Inglot's retirement he was replaced for many years by Prof. Z. Kwaśny, his student. Another of his student, Prof. Waław Długoborski, headed the Department of Economic History, then at the Wrocław University of Economics. His retirement took place before habilitation examinations were to take place in the newly established Department, so the authorities of the Academy turned to Prof. Kwaśny with a proposal to take over the management of the Department. For several years Prof. Kwaśny simultaneously headed the Department of Economic History, Demography and Statistics of the University of Wrocław and the Department of Economic History of the Academy of Economics. Undoubtedly, Prof. Kwaśny's management of those units was facilitated by the fact that both of them were staffed by graduates of the University of Wrocław's Institute of History and that Prof. Kwaśny and Prof. Długoborski were Prof. Inglot's students. The period in which Prof. Kwaśny combined both leading functions can be regarded as a harbinger of future significantly developed research by economic historians of both institutions. However, health perturbations began in this team and a collapse in the field of economic and social research, with a political background, became apparent, which was also observed in the whole country.

Our awareness of the difficulties faced by the Wrocław community of economic and social historians led the next generation of researchers to the attempt to start cooperation. In the 1990s I was appointed head of the Department of Economic History, Demography and Statistics at the Historical Institute of the

University of Wrocław, while Prof. Jędrzej Chumiński was coordinating the work of the Department of Economic History at the Academy of Economics. During a joint meeting of both teams we considered undertaking joint research. At that time we outlined plans for cooperation and made the first decisions. This led to an application for a ministerial grant, as a new research profile for the two institutions was needed. The subject of the research project contained in the question: *Modernization or apparent modernization? The socio-economic evaluation of the Polish People's Republic 1944–1989 (with particular emphasis on Lower Silesia)*. The issue was socially and scientifically important, so we received funding for our research, which was completed in 2010. Their tangible result is a publication¹.

Earlier, in connection with the 60th anniversary of Polish economic and social research in Wrocław, a conference was also planned, and was held in November 2006. The invitation to the conference was accepted and taken seriously by leading scientific centres in Poland. It was then decided then that such conferences would be organized annually, and that their topics would include key economic and social issues observed throughout Polish history. We decided to call this and other scientific meetings under the common name of “Wrocław Meetings with Economic History”. The participants of the conference welcomed our initiative with great enthusiasm. All of them saw in it a great opportunity to consolidate our community and, in the future, to undertake joint research projects on key economic and social problems not only of the Polish lands. These meetings were thus to become an important platform for cooperation and exchange of scientific views, with numerous representatives from leading scientific centres in Poland attending.

Since that first Meeting with Economic History in 2006, there have been 14 conferences documented by volumes of studies published after each Meeting. In 2009, the Meetings’ organizers were hosts of one of the sections of the 18th General Congress of Polish Historians, which took place in Olsztyn. In 2010, an initiative was taken to establish the Polish Society of Economic History, with Prof. Wojciech Morawski from the Warsaw School of Economics (Szkoła Główna Handlowa – SGH) as its first president. From 2019, after I retired, the organizational duties were taken over by Tomasz Głowiński, Professor of the University of Wrocław. Representatives of the Wrocław Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance also joined the scientific committee of the conference.

¹ *Modernizacja czy pozorna modernizacja? Społeczno-ekonomiczny bilans PRL 1944–1989 (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Dolnego Śląska)*, ed. Jędrzej Chumiński, Wrocław 2010, p. 488.

While the first two conferences clearly placed the interests of the organizers and panellists in the 19th-20th centuries, the subsequent ones did not have such chronological limitations. While the first two conferences clearly placed the interests of the organizers and speakers in the 19th-20th centuries, the following ones did not have such chronological limitations. In this way, we tried to encourage historians interested in other periods to participate in our meetings. And we gladly welcomed representatives of other sciences, and even strove to make our conferences interdisciplinary. We hosted geographers, hydrologists, cartographers and historians of cartography. More and more often historians reached for experiences and findings of other sciences in presenting their interdisciplinary works. We have noticed the presence of historians in our group, whom nobody would classify as historians of economic and social history. Nowadays, those who usually focus on political history, more and more often reach for the issues that are the main area of our interest. Each meeting brings a lasting trace of the discussions held, as each year has resulted in the publication of new comprehensive volumes of studies indicating the economic and social dimensions of the issues covered by the conference.

What did our initiative bring about? Today we no longer have any doubts that from the very beginning these meetings were treated as a very needed platform for the community to exchange views on key research problems concerning economic and social history. This impression has not changed. Although the current new requirements for the evaluation of the scientific activity of the staff have lowered the rank of participation in conferences compared to the previous requirements. However, in our community there is a conviction that these professional contacts are very much required.