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Yaman Kouli, *Dolny Śląsk 1936–1956. Szybki rozwój i nieudana odbudowa. Wpływ wiedzy na produkcję przemysłową* [Lower Silesia 1936-1956. Rapid development and failed reconstruction. The impact of knowledge on industrial production], transl. Tomasz Dominiak, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2018, 315 pp.

The economic history of Lower Silesia in the 20th century has been the subject of many studies by Polish and German historians, although the year 1945 has become a fixed date in historiography, separating the long period of German rule in Silesia from the incorporation of the eastern German territories into the Polish state following the border changes after World War II. For this reason alone, the attempt by Chemnitz University of Technology historian Yaman Kouli to discuss the economic history of the region from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s should be greeted with interest. Similar curiosity is aroused by the announcement of an analysis of “the impact of knowledge on industrial production”. However, the categorical thesis in the title about the “rapid development” of Lower Silesia during the Third Reich and the “failed reconstruction” of its industrial potential after the end of the war raises doubts.

The work is divided into five chapters, the “Introduction” (*Wprowadzenie*) and the “Appendix” (*Dodatek*) with the explanation of the bilingual naming of towns and cities together with the list of industrial plants) basically according to the chronological and thematic key. Although the title outlines three issues, the axis of the narrative has become “the relationship between scientific knowledge and industrial production” (Chapter II), which found its conclusion in Chapter VI

in the description of the “results of the study”. The Author assumed in advance that the economic development of the lands incorporated into Poland in 1945 remained below their proper potential. He polemicized with the previous findings, which emphasized above all the war damage and the subsequent dismantling of industrial facilities, the lack of capital and labor, the lack of interest on the part of the Polish authorities in investing in the area, and the sense of provisionality prevailing among the settlers. Kouli considered it necessary to add to the catalog of problems analyzed the loss of “knowledge relevant to the production process” as a consequence of the displacement of the German population (p. 16). He thus addressed a factor that cannot be measured, in the context of the collapse of production levels in 1945 and the inconsistent displacement policy (first seeking to get rid of the German population quickly, then trying to stem its outflow).

In Chapter II, “The relationship between scientific knowledge and industrial production”, (*Związek pomiędzy wiedzą naukową i produkcją przemysłową*) the Author recalled three categories of knowledge – educational, empirical, and so-called knowledge networks – that affect the course of the production process. He considered “methodical capture of macroeconomic manifestations of knowledge” to be significant challenge. He concluded that the interdependence between material capital and knowledge networks could be examined using the example of parts of the former eastern provinces of Germany. For the displacement of the German population undoubtedly meant the dismantling of existing knowledge networks (p. 33).

Chapter III traces the development of industry in Lower Silesia in the years 1936–1945, pointing to the important role of this province in the German economic system. The Author’s goal was to determine the level of production potential in Lower Silesia and to try to answer the question of whether the region was an example of economic underdevelopment (such a thesis dominates in historiography). He also stressed right away that Lower Silesia is the most interesting of the former German eastern provinces because it is not explicitly agricultural or industrial. There was both a long tradition of textile industry and a strong agricultural sector. Here the Author explained the choice of the starting caesura of the work as a result of the preservation of sources, specifically the existence of the censuses of the Reich Statistical Office from 1936 (p. 49). He also firmly rejected opinions about the relatively large destruction of infrastructure during the war (with the exception of Wrocław). On the contrary, he emphasized that the industrial potential increased during the war years because armaments plants were moved to Lower Silesia from other parts of

Germany exposed to Allied bombing. In the Author's detailed description, Lower Silesia with its mines in Wałbrzych, machine industry, textile industry, cement plants, ceramic industry, and sugar factories appears to be an economically well-developed region, although it is far below the national average in terms of net output per capita. This observation led the Author to the preliminary conclusion that "economically, the eastern provinces of the Reich belonged to the periphery" (p. 65). However, a little further on he contradicted this thesis, writing that the diversified structure of industry and the education of its employees testified to the contrary (p. 73). Still further on, however, he has no doubt that "before 1939, Lower Silesia in terms of economic development lagged behind the German provinces located west of the Oder and Neisse rivers" (p. 84). He then softens this categorical assessment, writing that there was indeed a lag in some industries, but that these were not "hopelessly out-dated" ones (p. 87). This is supposed to be evidenced by the increase in production in the years 1936–1939, although not as fast as on a national scale. An important thread of the analysis is the problem of war damage in Lower Silesia. Already in this chapter, the Author points out that the scale of destruction and dismantling had previously been "overemphasized" (p. 118).

In Chapter IV, the Author focused on the period after 1945 to examine the extent to which continuity in the region's industrial production was interrupted. Here he returns to the issue of destruction and citing previous literature, draws the conclusion that the destruction has been "overestimated". However, it should be noted that the material losses in the cities are very impressive, the destruction of 40% of the bridges and almost all the tunnels. The scale of postwar Soviet dismantling is a matter of dispute. The Author argues against the thesis that their scope was "enormous", but actually does not take a clear position on this issue. Nevertheless, he believes that they had the greatest impact on the decline in gross factory property compared to the effects of military operations and dismantling carried out by the Wehrmacht (p. 139). The consequences of material losses proved impossible to recover, for tabular comparisons of employment structure and production volumes over twenty-four years show significant declines (the exceptions being the production of sugar and electricity). Table 18, comparing the development of output of selected industrial products in 1936 and 1960, is particularly suggestive. It shows that declines were as high as 62% (paper production).

Chapter V addresses the consequences of the displacement of the Germans, but the Author dealt with the problem of postwar reconstruction in general, stating

that in fact “it is difficult to determine the reasons for the abandonment of reconstruction and shifts in production” (p. 201). From the Polish official documentation, where he found a number of requests from various workplaces under the Ministry of Industry (85% of the requests were from Lower Silesia) for a total of more than 50,000 German skilled workers, Kouli concluded that an important reason for the production problems was the lack of specialized labor. Analyzing the policy of the Polish authorities, the Author showed the existence of a dilemma of the administration, which, on the one hand, strived for the fastest possible Polonization of the new areas, and on the other, wanted to effectively launch industrial plants (p. 205). As it turns out, plans to retain professionals because of the benefits in kick-starting the economy played no role in the practice of resettlement. In this context, Kouli writes about the “asymmetry of interests of ministries and factories’ managements” (p. 238). The Polish authorities believed that it was sufficient that German specialists would train Polish workers as their successors in the same jobs. As Kouli states, this strategy failed. The drive to assimilate a group of tens of thousands of Germans is supposed to prove that German workers could not be replaced. The Author concludes that: “There was a high dependence between complementary workers and means of production, and it was not possible to transfer to Polish workers the knowledge necessary for good management” (p. 260).

In Chapter VI, being a summary, the Author took a very cautious approach to the task of formulating a final conclusion, emphasizing the title “the impact of knowledge on industrial production”. He stated that he had succeeded in proving a link between the failure of reconstruction in Lower Silesia and the loss of knowledge subjects, adding that “knowledge substitution” had failed. However, he left unanswered the question of whether abandoning the displacement of the German population would have prevented the economic problems (p. 278).

All in all, Yaman Kouli’s study is an interesting comparison of the situation in the region in the last years of the Third Reich with the first years of Polish administration in these lands. The Author makes use of quite a number of sources, both German and Polish, and moves among them cautiously, which is sometimes visible in the not very precise formulation of his opinion. Focusing on one problem, but with the (necessary) presentation of a very broad political, social, and economic background, resulted therefore in a kind of pretextual monograph, which actually is an attempt at an original look at the socio-economic history of Lower Silesia at the time of the historical breakthrough.