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Aneta Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens do Wałbrzyska. Powrót Polaków z Francji oraz ich adaptacja w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1945–1950* [From Lens to Wałbrzych. Return of Poles from France and their adaptation in the People's Republic of Poland in the years 1945–1950], Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018, 400 pp.

The issue of post-war forced and voluntary population movements in the area of the Polish territory was raised many years ago in original studies by Krystyna Kersten, Tomasz Szarota and Franciszek Kusiak¹. The subject of the analysis undertaken by Aneta Nisiobęcka is the fate of Poles who arrived from France after World War II, and their confrontation with the realities of People's Republic of Poland. This topic has not been studied before, although it has been mentioned in the relevant literature. The year 2016 marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the first Polish-French re-emigration agreement and the arrival of the first transport of Poles from Lens to Wałbrzych, the towns highlighted in the book's title.

The opportunity for an in-depth study of the subject did not come until after 1990, when access to French archival sources was opened up. The Author made use of it in a very conscientious manner, reaching in particular for materials of the local state administration and security apparatus. The research covered a considerable amount of files from archives located in 5 departments: Nord and Pas-de-Calais, Basses-Pyrénées (Atlantiques), Pyrénées Orientales and Arièges, i.e. those

¹ Krystyna Kersten, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej (Studium historyczne)*, Wrocław 1974; Tomasz Szarota, *Osadnictwo miejskie na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1948*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1969; Franciszek Kusiak, *Reemigracja polska po drugiej wojnie światowej. Udział w zasiedlaniu ziem zachodnich i północnych*, Wrocław 1995.

industrial regions of France where Polish emigrants were most numerous and where they declared their willingness to return to Poland. It is worth noting with approval that the Author has also examined many file groups in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris and in Warsaw, mainly in the Central Archive of Modern Records. Whereas when investigating the meanders of Polish domestic policy towards re-emigrants in the years 1945–1950, she also explored the resources of the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw and its branches in Kielce, Katowice, Kraków and Wrocław, as well as the Central Military Archives in Warsaw–Rembertów and the State Archives in Katowice.

The result of this extensive research is an exhaustive monograph (originally a doctoral dissertation), in which the issues of repatriation and re-emigration of Poles from France are combined with the process of their settlement in Lower Silesia, a mining region acquired after the war when the new Polish-German border was demarcated. The title of the book refers to Wałbrzych, the centre of the coal basin, because it was there that the largest number of emigrant families settled and the region is still sometimes called “Little France”. Nisiobęcka formulated her research objectives in several preliminary questions concerning the plans and expectations of the Communist authorities in Poland in relation to repatriation and re-emigration from France, the country which, despite the existence of the “Iron Curtain”, allowed from 1946 on the departure of miners, industrial and farm workers. The Author was interested in the position of the French Polish community regarding the prospect of repatriation and re-emigration and their level of awareness of the economic and political objectives of the Communist repatriation/re-emigration policy and of the internal realities of Stalinist Poland.

The narrative motivated by the above-mentioned research questions was presented in Part I of the book, titled “Polish emigration in France between 1918 and 1945” (pp. 27–94), in three separate chapters. In Chapter 1 she presented “The social and political causes of Polish emigration after World War I and their adaptation in France” immediately after the restoration of independence in 1918. The number of Poles emigrating from Poland, the location and course of their immigration was regulated by the Polish-French emigration convention of 3rd September 1919. Also so-called “Westphalians” were included in the group of Polish emigrants, i.e. miners and workers from the Prussian Partition employed in the mining and metallurgical industry in Westphalia and the Rhineland, who came to France after 1918. The change in French policy towards foreigners who turned out to be “undesirable” in the 1930s,

in the conditions of the World Depression, was presented by Nisiobęcka in Chapter 2, titled “Indésirables en France”. According to her findings, Polish immigrants made up a community of 324,840 people. The tragedy of Polish fate as a result of the hostile policy of the Vichy government and the internment of Poles in detention centres for foreigners is shown in Chapter 3, titled “The war and its impact on the situation of Poles in France during World War II”. She also considers their joint conspiratorial activities with the French in occupied France.

The most extensive Part II of the book, “The Return of Poles after the World War II” (pp. 97–247), is divided into four chapters. The Author began her narrative with “An analysis of the legal basis for repatriation and re-emigration” in Chapter 1, moving on to present “The reasons for the end of the re-emigration action in 1947” in Chapter 2. The next Chapter 3 presents “The organisation and course of the re-emigration action in France and the occupied zones in Germany”, while Chapter 4 assesses “The consequences of repatriation and re-emigration”. The book shows that, although the Polish authorities, dominated by Communists were keen to repatriate wartime emigrants (“dipis”), in economic terms it was more important for them a return of the “old” economic emigration, including miners, farm and industrial workers, mainly from north-eastern France. In total, this was a group of some 425,000 Poles at the time, including wartime emigration estimated at 100,000. Of these, only 47,000 became French citizens in 1936–1946. The Author’s findings show that the Communist authorities were counting on the arrival of about 250,000 people, i.e. all the war emigration and about 150,000 of the “old” emigration. The efforts for their return began when the Polish-German border on the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers was established in Potsdam. For the Communist authorities, the Polish settling and development of the so-called Recovered Territories was a key political task.

The issue of re-emigration and repatriation was the subject of negotiations by the Polish-French Joint Committee, during which it became clear that the expectations of both sides were divergent. The Polish side wanted to gain the miners and farm workers, and the French only wanted to keep the former, since Poles accounted for as much as 40% of the employees in their mines. The authorities in Warsaw were hoping for migrants from the Pas-de-Calais department, where Polish miners and their families accounted for some 90,000 inhabitants, with a further 55,000 living in Lens. Meanwhile, despite the maintenance of official talks, the French were negative about the miners’ re-emigration. Thus, as the Cold

War atmosphere grew, their position in the Commission became more rigid and more campaigns were launched by them to encourage miners to remain in France. The same effect was produced by the so-called “whispered propaganda” of supporters of the London government against the Communist authorities in Warsaw. Eventually, however, in 1946, on the basis of two interstate agreements signed with the Provisional Government of the French Republic (GPRF), including an agreement on repatriation, around 70,000–78,000 re-emigrants arrived in Poland in 1947. In Poland at that time, the total number of repatriates and re-emigrants reached 3,798,715 people. In the course of researching autobiographical accounts of re-emigrants, the Author found that return was declared more often by agricultural workers than by miners or textile and chemical industry workers. Yet information about the collectivisation of Polish agriculture had an inhibiting effect on the farm workers, so more they were war emigrants who declared their willingness to return.

The change in sentiment is reflected in the numbers of re-emigrants. As a result of the first Polish-French agreement of 20th February 1946 (concerning miners only), 5,029 of them and 12,854 of their family members returned to the country. It is worth mentioning that these were mainly people with Communist views, including participants in the Spanish Civil War, not assimilated into French society. They were convinced that in Poland they would receive social benefits and a higher professional status than in France. Some were also encouraged by the fact that, under the terms of the agreement, they could return with all their belongings at the expense of the Polish state. As a result of another agreement of September 1946, out of planned 2,000 farm workers’ families, only 450 arrived (a total of 1,712 people). Their return was under much worse conditions, as they had to contribute half of the travel costs and were deprived of the right to transport their belongings and livestock. The last of the re-emigrant groups, in 1947, was the most numerous, with 13,336 people – miners, farm and industrial workers. It was, however, less numerous than expected, due to the fact that the talks on re-emigration were held in the atmosphere of internal political conflicts in France and social and economic disputes among Polish circles, as well as contradictory reports from the pro-Warsaw and pro-London press.

The third and last part of Nisiobęcka’s book, “Processes of adaptation of the re-emigrants to the post-war conditions in Poland” (pp. 251–329), concerns the integration of the ‘French’ into the Stalinist reality of the time. It also includes three chapters showing that the newcomers negatively perceived the confrontation

with the Communist reality (Chapter I), experiencing a dilemma: to stay or to travel back? Some, more affluent, were more likely to choose to return, but the majority accepted conditions of difficult adaptation, struggling with gruelling working conditions, miserable housing and low pay. Their daily life turned out to be much more difficult than in France, but the efforts to return were done more by the younger generation (men and women), who felt alienated by their lack of language skills, and who were “both fellows and strangers” to their co-countrymen (Chapter 2).

Moreover, they did not feel safe in the Polish western lands, in the then atmosphere of total destruction and temporariness. Some of the re-emigrants, in order to eliminate this climate of alienation, joined “the Communist security organs”. Isolated from the Polish society, they became involved in the process of “consolidating” the “people’s power” and the Stalinist system, participating in the operational activities of the Ministry of Public Security and the Military Internal Service, i.e. organs which, earlier, immediately after their arrival to Poland, were persistently looking for spies and political enemies among them, subjecting them to surveillance. The most ideological Communists, including participants in the Spanish Civil War, sought employment in specifically closed and, at the same time, privileged environments, i.e. in the Militia and the Security Ministry, in the prison service and in the structures of intelligence service.

Therefore, their return to Poland turned out to be one of the significant migration movements after 1945 and allowed them to participate in the post-war political life. On the extent and effects of their activities the Author writes in Chapter 3, “The character of the role of re-emigrants in the Communist State Security organs”. She gives numerous examples that some of the re-emigrants with Communist convictions took up high positions in the Militia structures and in Internal Security offices or ministries, and were also employed in the prison service. Politically, they joined the process of “consolidation of the people’s power” and “tightening” the Stalinist system, which the society treated with caution and even hostility. The role of this group of privileged “Frenchmen” changed after Stalin’s death in 1953. With the political “Thaw” and the weakening of the Stalinist system, their status began to deteriorate rapidly. The process of further changes concerning them was summed up by the Author with the words “the inhuman system began to devour its own children who returned to build the socialist homeland”.