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The Problems of Labour Migration in the Polish Economic Thought 1870–1939

Introduction

In the period when the emigration of rural population from the Polish country started to assume an extent of a mass movement, i.e. generally speaking after 1870, the Polish land was under the rule of three occupying powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary. Opinions expressed at that time by the Polish economists concerning the reasons of the emigration of thousands of Polish peasants to the countries of North and South America and to several European countries, similarly as the opinions of these economists concerning the effect of that exodus on the economic life in Poland, were addressed not so much to the state authorities, as rather primarily to the Polish public opinion.

The independence regained by Poland in November 1918 was undoubtedly an essential moment in the history of the Polish people, but it did not contribute to the liquidation of the factors “pushing out” the great number of rural people beyond the borders of Poland. On the other hand, the conditions prevailing in the countries to which masses of Polish people emigrated before the I World War, were radically changed. Within the borders of Polish state, there accumulated a great number of the so called “unnecessary people” who were willing to change any time their life situation by emigration. The accumulation of several million of “unnecessary people” was for the state a serious economic and social problem. Hence, in the works of Polish economists published in the interwar period, there started to appear some projects proposing to include organized emigration as one of the methods of solving the surplus population existing in Poland.

Next to the presentation of the opinions of Polish economists concerning the reasons of the economic emigration, I wish also to discuss their views on the effects of this movement for the economic life in Poland. I wish also to present several suggestions of utilizing emigration for the solution of Polish economic and social problems.

Determination of the reasons of emigration

In general terms, one can say that all Polish economists speaking about Polish economic emigration in the years 1870–1939 agreed in principle that the primary reason of this phenomenon was the poverty in which rural people were living. However, the people were also poor before 1870, i.e. before the exodus from Poland reached any serious extent. Therefore, there appeared the question: “What was the reason of the intensification of the emigration movement after 1870?”—The Polish economists were looking for the answer to this question both in the economic and in the non-economic factors constituting the economic life of Polish society. And so, for example, Stanisław Szczepanowski, the author of a critical work concerning the economic situation in Galicia,¹ i.e. this part of Polish land which was in the hands of the Habsburg monarchy, indicated the “awakened initiative of the people” as the direct cause of the intensified emigration movement. According to this author, the migration of rural population beyond the borders of Galicia, undertaken in search for more favourable life conditions testified a “great vitality” of the peasant population in contrast to the passivity and resourcelessness of the representatives of other social and professional groups of the inhabitants of Galicia, and in particular in contrast with the passive attitude of the class of officials.²

In the last decade of the passed century there was an outflow of three emigration “waves” from the Polish land to Brazil (called also the “Brazilian fever”). The intensity and the great number of the emigrants surprised the observers of the Polish emigration movement of those times. At the same time, their attention was called by the role which in the genesis of the economic emigration from Poland was played by payed agents recruiting volunteers to settle in Brazil. Including the emigration agitation into the list of direct causes of emigration, the particular investigators assigned to it different ranks of importance. Maksymilian Jackowski, a known

¹ S. Szczepanowski, *Nędza Galicji w cyfrach i program energicznego rozwoju gospodarstwa krajowego*, Lwów 1888.

² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

economic activist from Wielkopolska, i.e. from the region being under the Prussian rule, believed that next to the agents, an essential reason of mass emigration of the rural people was the predilection of peasants to vagabondage and idleness. On the other hand, Jackowski discarded the view that the emigration of peasants was caused by the lack of work in their native country.³

A different view concerning the influence of emigration agitation on the emigration movement was represented by Zofia Daszyńska, among others the author of studies on the agrarian structure in Galicia. She agreed in general with the view that the extent of “Brazilian fever” was influenced by the emigration agitation, but she added that the agitation found in Galicia favourable conditions because of the dissatisfaction of rural people with the material conditions of their existence. Only this fact, according to Daszyńska, permitted to understand why the peasants with no own farmland and the owners of small farms were so eager to believe in the mirage displayed to them by the emigration agents.⁴

Among the Polish investigators of the economic emigration movement, the greatest and unquestioned role in the evoking of the peculiar emigration atmosphere was ascribed by Leopold Caro to the payed agents. The author of the most comprehensive work about the emigration from the Polish land, which was published before the outbreak of the I World War, suggested that if it were possible to exclude the activity of agents, the extent of economic emigration from Poland would have been very insignificant.⁵

It is obvious that the estimation of the influence of emigration agitation on the origin and development of the emigration movement depended on the social and political views of the author who made that estimation. It was characteristic that the economists associated with the circles of great landowners stressed the role of emigration agitation, and at the same time they diminished the importance of economic factors. In turn, the economists sympathizing with the socialist movement, although they also mentioned the activity of payed agents, they primarily stressed the demographic and economic factors.

Regarding poverty in which the majority of rural population existed as the direct cause of economic emigration, the majority of Polish economists tried to define the main sources of that poverty. In this way,

³ Cf. B.P. Murdzek, *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought 1870–1914*, New York, N.Y. 1977, p. 30.

⁴ Z. Daszyńska, *Własność rolna w Galicji*, “Ateneum,” vol. III, 1899, p. 106.

⁵ L. Caro, *Emigracja i polityka emigracyjna ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem stosunków polskich*, Poznań 1914, p. 15.

the considerations concerning the reasons of the emigration phenomena gave rise to the studies on the agrarian structure of the Polish village, the indebtedness of peasants/ farms, the material situation of rural families, as well as the dynamical increase of the number of the inhabitants of the Polish country. Comparatively early the Polish economists called attention to the fact that next to the factors “pushing out” the people from their native land, an essential influence on the origin and development of the emigration movement was exercised by the factors “attracting” the emigrants to other, sometimes very distant countries.

Still in 1889, during the debates of the Congress of Polish Lawyers and Economists, Stanisław Kłobukowski, the author of the leading paper concerning emigration from Poland stated: “In fact, so far only indirect and global conclusions can be drawn that countries to which the masses of people wander have more of these sources (of support—P.K.) than the countries from which they emigrate. Otherwise, the migration would take place in the opposite direction.”⁶ The successive Polish investigators had already no doubts that the immigration areas “attracted” the emigrants by offering them significantly more abundant sources of support than they had in their native country. Nevertheless, the attention of the majority of Polish investigators concentrated on the factors which “pushed out” the migrants.

Ten years later, in 1899, Julian Marchlewski—known primarily as the activist of the international communist movement—analysing the factors influencing the migration dynamics from one area to another, arrived to the conclusion that the migration dynamics is under the influence of the “economic stagnation or boom both in the country from which people emigrate and in the country to which they immigrate.”⁷ The dependence of migration dynamics on the state of economic culture on both areas where the migration movement developed was not so obvious for other contemporary Polish investigators of economic emigration from Poland.⁸

Here, it is worth noting that the dependence of the dynamics of the migratory movement on the condition of the economic situation on areas between which the movement takes place has been defined by Brinley Thomas⁹ in mid-1950-ies. I do not intend to suggest that Marchlewski

⁶ S. Kłobukowski, *Roczna emigracja polska i środki przeciw niej zaradcze*, “Ateneum,” vol. IV, 1889, p. 285.

⁷ J. Marchlewski, *Stosunki społeczno-polityczne na ziemiach polskich zaboru pruskiego*, Lwów 1901, p. 21.

⁸ E.g. L. Caro, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁹ B. Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth. A Study of Great Britain and the Atlantic Economy*, Cambridge 1954, specially see Chapter XIV.

outstripped the British economist in the formulation of this dependence by half a century, but one can assume that systematic studies on the emigration movement from the Polish country could have lead the Polish economist to similar findings as those made by Brinley Thomas.

I have already mentioned that the studies of Polish economists on the reasons of mass emigration from Poland have lead in practice to the determination of the sources of poverty of the rural population of those times. The opinion of Leopold Caro that the source of that poverty was the illiteracy of the rural people, as well as their inclination to litigations and alcoholism¹⁰ did not find any approval among the majority of Polish economists. They agreed that both the ignorance or the general low cultural level of the rural people, as well as the inclination to litigation and alcoholism contributed to the degradation of the material situation of rural people, but they indicated that these features belonged to pathological phenomena originating on the ground of poverty. Therefore, they were the result and not the reason. On the other hand, the Polish economists saw the sources of the poverty of rural inhabitants in the high birth-rate, the faulty agrarian structure and the underdevelopment of industry.

It is obvious that the particular investigators ascribed to the mentioned sources different degrees of influencing the process of the pauperization of the rural people. In general, they indicated that a decided majority of rural people in Poland either had no own land at all, or the possessed land was not big enough to meet the material needs of the numerous families. In result, the existence of the majority of peasant families depended on the possibility of obtaining an additional job outside of the native village. The poor industrialization of the Polish country did not offer many such possibilities and the maintained high birth-rate of the rural population additionally complicated the situation on the local market.

In the discussion on the attempts of the Polish economists to determine the sources of the poverty of the rural people being the reason of the economic emigration from Poland, one cannot omit to mention the name of Ludwik Krzywicki. This scholar, sociologist, ethnologist and economist in one person, and in addition a propagator of historical materialism in Polish science, spent a lot of his energy criticizing the principle of the functioning of capitalist economy. In the analysis of the reasons of the pauperization of the rural population, Krzywicki was looking for arguments speaking in favour of the thesis about the soulless and destructive action of the laws controlling the functioning of capitalist economy. Krzywicki saw the genesis of the pauperization of rural people in the transformations taking place in

¹⁰L. Caro, *Nasi wychodźcy zamorscy*, "Przegląd Powszechny," 1908, no. 8, p. 158.

the social and economic structures existing in Poland in result of passing over in agriculture from the feudal to the capitalist economy.¹¹

Earlier, the peasant, who was under the protection of the feudal lord, practised natural economy, i.e. he produced himself all things necessary in his own household. In fact, money was not necessary to him. This situation was changed after the enfranchisement when the peasant became independent and was faced with two “powers” with which he had no contact before. The first power was the state that required from him regular payment of taxes. For this purpose the peasant had to come into contact with another “power:” the market governed by laws of supply and demand which were unknown to him. Failure in selling his own products faced the peasant with the spectre of bankruptcy. The increase of the level of debts of the peasant farms and the decreasing number of these farms were perceived by Krzywicki¹² as a confirmation of his thesis that in capitalistic conditions, due to difficulties in becoming adjusted to the requirements of the market, part of the owners of medium and small farms fell into poverty. In extreme cases they were even forced to sell the farms. At the same time, in a close neighbourhood of Poland—on the area of the German Reich experiencing in the last two decades of the 19th century a period of stormy economic development, there grew the demand for manpower. The easy possibility of obtaining work and wages averaging twice as high as those obtained in Poland¹³ supplied a sufficient impulse for thousands of peasants from Galicia and the Congress Kingdom of Poland to migrate to Germany.

The observation of the directions of economic migrations in Europe permitted Krzywicki to determine three migration “waves.” One of them was started in Galicia and went through Poznań land, Saxony, Berlin to England and from there to America and Australia, the second one was started in Hungary and went through Austria, Czech country to Germany, the third one started from Piedmont and went through Switzerland to France and from there to the oversea French colonies.¹⁴ In fact, the migration movement took place from agricultural regions “of lower wages and lower culture” to regions with “higher wages and higher culture.”¹⁵ By “higher culture” Krzywicki understood the industrialization level.

¹¹ See L. Krzywicki, *Czynniki upadku włościaństwa*, “Głos,” September 1887, no. 38 and October 1887, nos. 39 and 40.

¹² L. Krzywicki, *Z kresów poznańskich. Stałe i ogólne rugi żywiotu polskiego*, “Kraj,” 1885, nos. 39 and 40.

¹³ L. Krzywicki, *Sachsengängerei*, “Prawda”, 1891, no. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Concluding the presentation of the views of Ludwik Krzywicki on the reasons of economic emigration, it must be noted that in contrast to other contemporary Polish investigators, he ascribed a very small role in the genesis of emigration to demographic factors. According to him, the high birth-rate on Polish areas influenced of course the deterioration of the living conditions of the population, however, the main sources of poverty, as indicated above, according to Krzywicki, were to be found elsewhere. This point of view is worth stressing because a few decades after the publication of Krzywicki's articles—in the interwar period—there developed a discussion in Poland concerning the so called surplus number of people, i.e. the number of people who could leave the Polish state any time without causing any disturbances in the functioning of economy. This number, depending on the accepted calculation method, and the year of calculation, was estimated at 3.0–8.4 million persons.¹⁶ The intensification of the discussion concerning the number of “surplus population” suggested that the Polish “emigration problem” was originated by the high dynamics of the birth-rate of the population.

Trying to sum up the above presented considerations of the Polish economists concerning the causes of mass emigration from Poland, it must be stressed that in principle the listing made by them is complete. Although they primarily concentrated on the “pushing out” factors, they also noticed the influence of the “attracting” factors. On the other hand, among this “pushing out” factors they distinguished both the demographic, economic and the social influences. Finally, it must be stressed that the Polish investigators of the Polish economic emigration soon enough realized that the movement was only a fragment of the all-European phenomenon.

Evaluation of the emigration and its results

The determination of the reasons of some phenomenon is usually the first step leading to its understanding. On the other hand, the analysis and evaluation of the results evoked by it constitute the first step leading both to the evaluation of the phenomenon itself as well as to the elaboration of a conception how to handle it. Therefore, before I proceed to the presentation of several conceptions of handling the phenomenon of emigration elaborated by the Polish economists, I would like to discuss briefly how they evaluated

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. Z. Ludkiewicz, *Podręcznik polityki agrarnej*, Vol. I, Warszawa 1929, p. 88; different estimation see: J. Poniatowski, *Przeludnienie wsi i rolnictwa*, Warszawa 1936, p. 245.

the phenomenon of economic emigration from Poland and its effects on the life of Polish society.

In general, one can say that the majority of Polish economists expressing their opinions concerning emigration in the discussed period evaluated negatively the extent of this movement. On the other hand, the phenomenon itself was treated by them either as a natural consequence of the uneven economic development of the different regions of the world,¹⁷ or as an effect of a specific psychosis which took possession of the Polish society, particularly of the poorest classes.¹⁸

The first unusually negatively estimated result of mass emigration pointed to by economists associated with the landowner class was that in result of the outflow of a significant number of peasants from Poland, the agriculture was deprived of manpower which could have a negative effect on the functioning of that economic sector.¹⁹ However, the economists connected with socialist circles noted that the exponents of the above mentioned fear were primarily concerned with cheap manpower, since in reality, in spite of the significant emigration, the threat of the lack of people working in agriculture did not exist.²⁰

Different were the reasons of the negative evaluation of emigration by economists who in their socio-political views were rather inclined to the Polish National Democratic Party. Their opinion was that although in the Polish situation the emigration of a certain number of people was a favourable phenomenon, since it decreased the social tension, in result it decreased the Polish national potential” and this was a negative phenomenon. The Polish emigrants settling in North and South America comparatively quickly adapted to the life conditions in the new place, and thereby they lost their interest in the matters referring to their native land.²¹ In fact, the economists associated with the National Democratic Party evaluated negatively not the mere fact of the outflow of the great number of people from Poland, but rather the fact that the emigrants were so easily giving in to the assimilation processes in the new land.

However, the economists connected with the circles of landowners and those being under the influence of National Democracy, were much more critical towards the results of the migration of the rural people hiring themselves to seasonal agricultural works on the area of Germany. These

¹⁷ H. Gliwic, *Materiał ludzki w gospodarce światowej*, Warszawa 1935.

¹⁸ L. Caro, *Emigracja i polityka emigracyjna*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ A. Benis, *Emigracja*, “Czasopismo Prawnicze i Ekonomiczne,” 1905/06.

²⁰ L. Krzywicki, *W sejmie pruskim*, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, 1891, no. 5.

²¹ A. Benis, *op. cit.*

people returned to their homes bringing with them not only money but also a number of new habits. This type of migration contributed to the transplantation to the Polish land of civilizational achievements but also of some not necessarily favourable phenomena. One of the Polish economists made such a statement:

The people come back arrogant, rebellious, sometimes deprived of their native faith, they become the propagators of different free-thinking and the leaders of rural plots in order to force higher wages from the landowners. The maidenly ideas about the obedience towards the future husband and their traditional shyness disappear [...] the maid strives for equal rights.²²

However, next to the fact that the migrants “bring home with them different improved tools, appliances and utensils and introduce them in their country” it was noted that some of the migrants returned with the notion of higher German culture, with habits of German hired people, and some disdain for the local relations and customs.²³ Therefore, the Polish economists indicated that from the national point of view, the effects of the migration to seasonal works in Germany were also negative, although this type of migration did not cause any demographic loss in the “Polish national potential.”

The strongest and the most frequently stressed positive effect of economic emigration was the inflow from abroad of some amounts of money sent by the emigrants to their families in Poland and brought in by the seasonal migrants. Part of this money was designed for consumption purposes which obviously improved the existence of some part of the rural population. However, significant sums were spent for buying land, since the size of the possessed farmland influenced the existence of a peasant family and improved its position in the local society. The wish to increase the own farm was the motive of the majority of decisions to migrate abroad. However, the high demand for land—called the “land hunger”—caused that the prices for land became very high.²⁴ In effect, the calculations of Polish peasants emigrating abroad with the hope of returning home after several years with saved money permitting to live a better life in the native land started to be less real.

In result, perceiving a number of negative phenomena brought about by the Polish mass emigration, a decided majority of economists regarded emigration as the necessary evil. Only few voices demanded from the authorities to undertake administrative actions restricting the outflow

²² Quoted after L. Krzywicki, *Sachsengängerei*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Z. Ludkiewicz, *Kwestia rolna w Galicji*, Lwów 1910, also Z. Daszyńska, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-102.

of migrants. Much more numerous were the voices demanding to give to the emigration movement some organizational forms and to care for the emigrants in order to level the negative effects of mass emigration.

Projects to give organizational forms to emigration

The first projects to create an organization which would take care of the emigrants during their migration to the foreign land and which would direct the emigrants to selected areas with the possibly best conditions for settlement were initiated in the circle of Polish economists at the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century.²⁵ In result of the undertaken efforts, the Polish Trading and Geographical Society was established in Lvov. However, this society was not able to develop any wide activity due to the absence of adequate financial means, as well as because of the disagreement within the management of the Society concerning the priority of its two objectives: care for the emigrants or the organization and control of the migration movement.

To some degree the first problem was solved by itself. The Society concentrating its efforts on the investigation of the adequacy of different oversea areas for agricultural settlement ran into financial difficulties. In result, in spite of being successful in obtaining from the Brazilian authorities a permission to bring to Brazil several thousand farmers, and in spite of having received an area where these farmers could settle after previous adaptation of the land, the planned settlement action was not realized. In the meantime different church organizations developed within the Society of St. Raphael²⁶ started organizing some help for the emigrants.

At the turn of the 19th c., several other initiatives of organizing the Polish emigration appeared in Galicia. The objective of the Polish Colonization Society and the Colonization and Trade Society was the concentration of the Polish agricultural emigrants on the area of the Brazilian state Parana. The mentioned Societies, similarly as the earlier mentioned Polish Trading and Geographical Society were not able to collect the necessary funds for the organization of the settlement.

²⁵ Cf. S. Kłobukowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 475-495.

²⁶ Cf. A. Pilch, *Emigracja z ziem zaboru austriackiego (od połowy XIX w. do 1918 r.)*, in: *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII-XX w.)*, ed. A. Pilch. Warszawa 1984, pp. 313-315.

At the base of the above mentioned and several other attempts undertaken later—also in the interwar period—to settle on selected areas a greater number of Polish farmers, there was the conviction that this type of emigration was the most favourable one both for the emigrants and for the Polish society. For the emigrants it seemed favourable because they could obtain in the foreign country what was difficult to obtain at home, i.e. land. Furthermore, the Polish emigrants would be not exposed to constant contacts with an ethnically foreign environment. The possibility to create Polish organizations and the chance that they would function due to their number permitted to believe that groups of agricultural settlers would preserve the Polish language and the Polish customs at least for several generations. This in turn permitted to believe that the centres of people of Polish origin would be ready to sustain contacts and economic cooperation with the native country contributing to the extension of the sale market for Polish goods.

In the extreme form, the projects of the organization of a compact agricultural settlement presumed the domination of the Brazilian state Parana by the Polish emigrants.²⁷ As we know, the complete domination by Polish emigrants was never achieved in Parana, on the other hand the results of the nationalistic rules of Getulio Vargas have certainly confused the authors of the projects of the organizations of Polish emigration, who believed that a compact settlement of Polish peasants would effectively prevent the children of Polish emigrants from abandoning their native language.

Next to the projects of organizing a compact agricultural settlement on selected areas and sending there the Polish settlers, the Polish economists proposed a number of other methods of controlling the emigration movement from the Polish country. The already mentioned economist, Leopold Caro, proposed to create a system of legal regulations concerning the procedure of agitation, recruiting, making contracts for work, and emigrating abroad.²⁸ It is obvious that the lack of precise regulations concerning the above problems facilitated the action of different type of swindlers misusing the credulity of the peasants. However, if the legal regulations proposed by Caro, were to be effective, they would require an army of controllers watching the conformity of all procedures with the corresponding paragraphs. It is dubious whether it would have reduced the factors “pushing out” the migrants from Poland, although one can imagine that a bureaucratic control would have hindered

²⁷ Cf. M. T. Koreywo-Rybczyńska, *Roman Dmowski o osadnictwie w Paranie*, “Przegląd Polonijny” 1984, no. 1, pp. 59-67.

²⁸ L. Caro, *Emigracja i polityka emigracyjna*, pp. 330-334.

and delayed the migration abroad. In fact, the proposed solution would not contribute to the liquidation of the phenomenon of mass emigration.

Quite a different approach to economic emigration than the above one, was represented by these economists and social activists who proposed to limit the extent of the emigration movement from Poland by the undertaking of some economic actions in Poland. For example, if the building of a network of canals were undertaken in Galicia, then this venture would bring many-sided advantages.²⁹ First of all, tens and maybe even thousands of potential emigrants would find employment in this kind of work, Besides, the network of canals would certainly limit the negative results of frequent floods and the number of natural calamities would be reduced.

Similar positive effects could have been achieved by the construction of roads or by rebuilding of the existing railroad network. However, a common shortcoming of the above mentioned and many other proposals was the fact that no sources were indicated for the financing of the undoubtedly useful undertakings.

Conclusion

Summing up the presented discussion, I must stress that the Polish economists observing the phenomenon of economic emigration in the period 1870–1939 assumed in general that it was a social problem developing on economic ground. The observation of the emigration movement from the Polish country permitted them to present an extensive list of the reasons of this movement. Evaluating the listed causes from the point of view of the present knowledge about economic migrations, it must be said that the list contained all most essential responsible factors.

Although the results of abandoning the Polish land by many thousands of people per year were negatively evaluated by the Polish economists, they did not see any possibilities of stopping quickly this movement. Therefore their proposals concentrated on the utilization of the emigrants for the improvement of the condition of Polish economy. This discussion became particularly important in the interwar period when the absorptive power of the international labour market decreased and in consequence several millions of surplus population accumulated within the borders of Poland.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 328; *cf.* also A. Pilch, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

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1870–1939**

by Piotr Kraszewski

Abstract

The migrations of Polish population were one of the most important issues in the socio-economic life in Poland before 1939. This is why already in the late 19th century the outflow of a great number of people abroad became the subject of observation by journalists, researchers of spatial mobility, and politicians. The presented text shows, using several examples, the views on the fundamental reasons that led to the rise of the mass migratory movement from Poland, as well as on its effects on both the country that hosted the refugees and Poland itself. The question of the care of the people leaving the Polish territories was also brought to attention.

Keywords: Polish migration 1870–1939, Polish economic thought.