

Maciej Tymiński, *PZPR i przedsiębiorstwo. Nadzór partyjny nad zakładami przemysłowymi 1956–1970 (The PUWP and Enterprise. Party Supervision of Industrial Plants 1956–1970)*, Warszawa 2001, Wydawnictwo TRIO, 268 pp.

The work under review is a successive monograph in the series *W krainie PRL (In the Land of the Polish People's Republic)* published by Wydawnictwo TRIO. Its young author (b. 1966) is a graduate of two departments of Warsaw University: that of Applied Social Sciences and Economic Sciences, which has enabled him to see the issue under discussion from a different viewpoint than one acquires as a result of historical studies. It should be added that he put his education to good account.

The main subject of his work is an analysis of the relations between the Communist Party and enterprises in Poland under Gomułka. While defining the notion of socialist enterprise the author says it should be "understood as an organization governed not by an economic, but political rationality, in other words, in its activity the economic interest was subordinated to an ideological Utopia, propagated by the party in power" (p. 8).

The author is right in saying that the party supervision of production plants in People's Poland has not aroused much interest of historians so far. The existing literature on this subject has been dominated by works devoted to economic and sociological aspects of their operation. Historians' contribution to this analysis has not, however, been significant. Realizing that it is impossible to study all the sources that document this subject, M. Tymiński has analysed materials concerning only four industrial plants: The Rolling Stock Repair Works at Pruszków, The May 1 Industrial Plant producing machine tools at Pruszków, The Cable Factory at Ożarów and The Crane Factory at Mińsk Mazowiecki. All of them — the author says — "were objects of the same interest of the Warsaw Voivodship Committee (WKW), belonged to the so-called key industries and were of middle size (about 1–2 thousand workers each)" (pp. 11–12). The basis for the author's findings were archival materials of party committees (WKW, as well as district committees at Pruszków and Mińsk Mazowiecki, and committees at two enterprises under discussion), preserved in the Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw, as well as the records of the trusts these plants belonged to. On the other hand, the documentation collected in the enterprises has been left out of account, as not relevant to the author's subject.

Can such premisses of research enable a suitable analysis of the issue the author chose as the title of his work? As regards the choice of four enterprises as the basis for general conclusions, even if his method may arouse some doubt, it has been applied to historical research with good effect. Let us cite not only — as M. Tymiński does — Witold Kula's *Szkice o manufakturach w Polsce XVIII wieku (Essays on 18th c. Polish Manufactories)*, but above all works on the Soviet Union, beginning with the classical one by Merle Fainsod *Smolensk under the Soviet Rule* (London 1958), up to the recent work on Magnitogorsk by Stephen Kotkin¹. What links them is an attempt to formulate general conclusions concerning the function of the authorities and society in the Soviet Union, on the basis of research encompassing chosen regions or towns. Academic successes scored by these monographs were due to the fact that they enabled a more insightful view of many social phenomena, the perception of their "inner side" that escapes one who is viewing things "from above", and in a wider perspective.

The scope of the archival research leaves much to be desired. It is true that materials concerning the party supervision of industrial plants must be sought mainly in party records, but certainly not only there. It would seem worthwhile at least seeing the records produced by the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (admittedly, currently difficult of access) or by the trade unions.

The first chapter (*Politics and Economy*) is based on the existing literature on this subject. On this basis the author presents his deliberations on the political system of Poland following 1945, the evolution of the peremptory economic system and the way enterprises operated under it. Of most interest would seem those parts of his text where M. Tymiński, while citing treatises on economics and management that are not well-known to historians, shows the contradictory instructions given to enterprises by the economic apparatus, the "planners' tenders", their play for influence. This led to a situation where "factories, formally deprived of independence, could realize to a smaller or greater extent their own purposes, despite the intentions of their superior authorities" (p. 36). The activity of these plants was marked by informal or semi-formal actions of their managers,

¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as Civilisation*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1995.

which enlarged the freedom of their decision-making and were termed as part of an adaptive superstructure. These processes led to the "spontaneous decentralization of power".

In chapter II (*Party Apparatus and Enterprise*), the author develops an argument according to which the supervision of an enterprise by its party committee was composed of four elements: the right to give instructions in the form of general directives, the right of control, the capability of executing these rights, and the institution of *nomenklatura*. Chapter III is devoted to the latter phenomenon. Subsequent ones deal with the function of factory committees, the relations between party committees and managements of enterprises, as well as the emergence of workers' councils and their incapacitation in the form of the initiative of creating the Conferences of Workers' Selfmanagement, controlled "from above".

What is the main value of Tyimiński's work? In my opinion, it consists in showing that, despite the peremptory system that was in power, the process of managing an enterprise was complex and full of conflicts, and the relations between institutions that were meant to run it were not harmonious. Due to an insightful study of particular plants certain assertions of a theoretical-model character, formulated earlier in scholarly literature, have been verified. Although the author agrees with the opinion of Włodzimierz Pańków, who holds that the party apparatus played an essential role in filling the posts in the economy, yet he disagrees with his statement that "executive party committees shaped and controlled the whole of the policy concerning the personnel in national economy, from a minister up to the level of master and foreman". As he proves, practice in this respect largely diverged from the principles of *nomenklatura* procedures, especially in the case of lower level posts. After 1956 appointments to them escaped the control of party organizations in the plants. The managements of the enterprises under discussion simply did not consult these appointments with the PUWP structures active in their plants, and this did not arouse any repercussions. Moreover, M. Tyimiński's findings show that the obligations towards the *nomenklatura* were treated by the managements of enterprises as a bureaucratic ritual. Not without reason did the secretary of the PUWP Committee of the Pruszków Town and District say in 1969 that 90% of directors and masters in the Cable Factory there, were not confirmed by the party Factory Committee (p. 90).

Worthy of attention are also the author's remarks on the practice of the plant managements' adjustment to the realities of the market, adopted in consultation with the heads of local party cells, and consisting in acting in the name of the plants' interests, despite the directives given by the superior authorities. Tyimiński describes how as a result of contradictions between various formulas of rationality, distorted or outright false information was sent to the "district" or "voivodeship" authorities, how party committees of the enterprises and their managers acted in collusion to lower the data concerning their reserves, so as to extend their field of manoeuvre while meeting the demands imposed "from above" concerning the fulfilment of production plans (p. 131). "Activists from the party organization", he maintains, "were not inclined to execute strict supervision of the managements of enterprises, e. g. when the latter broke the existing regulations in order to achieve the planned output" (p. 157). It also happened that the managements tried to take advantage of the contradictions in the interests of the party apparatus and economic administration, and turned to the PUWP bodies for help in settling their affairs with the trust or the ministry.

Finally, the author describes in an interesting way the mutual relations between the managements of enterprises and party organizations at various levels. On the basis of his own research he confirms the theses formulated by Jacek Tarkowski on the role of patronage in the relations between the managers of industrial plants and their party committees. He proves irrefutably the significance of the informal links of those managers with powerful "protectors" placed higher in the hierarchy of party-state structures. Such managers were

much more free in their contacts with their "own" party organization. This found its reflection in the statement of the manager of the May 1 Industrial Plant made in 1963: "I have such an asylum that if anybody dares to put a spoke in my wheel, I will take you in hand so that all of you [party committee of the plant] will not know where you are" (p. 146). In the structures of power in the enterprises their managers got the upper hand of the secretaries of party organizations, especially as the former were better educated.

The author describes an interesting phenomenon: a progressing merger of the economic and party apparatus and the emergence of the so-called technocrats. This merger was due to the fact that both the managers of enterprises and party activists, when dismissed from their posts could — unless they were accused of serious abuses or political errors — count on "compensation in the form of another managerial post" (p. 91). A mechanism called in common parlance "a merry-go-round of posts" was here at work. Besides, in this period managerial posts were dominated by party members. A process developed of shifting a part of competences of the party hierarchy to the economic administration (also party members), partly in connection with the above-mentioned procedures of by-passing the *nomenklatura's* rights. Hence, Tyminiński seems right in questioning the assertions of Maria Hirszowicz, who said that the access of professionals to the posts of responsibility was limited, and they were replaced by people who were politically trustworthy and always at the party's disposal.

The monograph closes with deliberations concerning workers' councils. Here we find interesting remarks about the differences in the attitudes and behaviour of people holding managerial posts in industry in the period when Władysław Gomułka's collaborators were establishing their power and workers still expected something from the newly-created institutions. It turned out that the workers' expectations concerned an improvement in their financial conditions.

As one can see the subject-matter of the book — despite its modest size — is very rich, its findings are interesting and they encourage further research into these problems. The most important reflection aroused by the book is a question about the representative value of the author's assertions. To what extent is his analysis a reflection of concrete cases under discussion, and to what extent does it present a wider fragment of reality? It is difficult to give a precise answer to this question, especially since historians are not interested in this subject.

However, the author's observations can at least be corroborated by some works concerning the realities of the workers' life in Poland before 1956. These works show that many procedures adopted by the managements of factories "in defence" against the regulations imposed "from above" were also characteristic during the implementation of the 6-year plan. It was then that the "alliances" were established between managers, secretaries of party organizations, and presidents of factory councils, who deliberately lowered production norms in order to ensure "their" workers a better pay, so that they wouldn't leave their jobs and make the realization of production plans difficult. Such behaviour was also stimulated by the need to secure some "leeway" in the realization of successive production obligations imposed "from above"². This research, based among other things on the records of trade union structures that were not used by the author, also confirms his findings concerning the character of the workers' expectations connected with the movement of workers' councils³. So it can be easily seen that at least some of the author's assertions are more universal in character and relate to a period longer than that encompassed by his analysis.

The work under review is in principle free of factual errors. One can certainly present in a more precise way the information that the main reason for the

² I wrote about it in my work *Polacy a stalinizm 1948-1956 (Poles and Stalinism 1948-1956)*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 98-101.

³ D. Jarosz, *Robotnicy '56-'57: czy rozczarowanie komunizmem? (Workers '56-'57: disappointment in communism?)*, in: *Komunizm. Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. T. Szarota, Warszawa 2001, pp. 325-337.

workers' strike in H. Cegielski Factory (then *ZISPO*) on June 28 was an attempt to introduce higher technical norms "with the same level of pay". In accordance with historians' previous findings this was an important motive of the workers' stand, but they also wanted to be repaid the tax deducted from their earnings for many years, as well as to change the system of calculating their pay for piece-work, their bonuses, etc.⁴ The author's conviction that in December 1948 the numbers of *PPS* (Polish Socialist Party) members were "decisively greater" than those of *PPR* (Polish Workers' Party) members (p. 17) is false. It is worth recalling that as a result of a purge enforced by the authorities of the *PPR* in the party of Polish socialists, about 100,000 members were expelled from it⁵, which allowed the Polish communists (despite a verification carried out in their own ranks) to gain a numerical advantage over the *PPS*.

M. Tymiński has successfully joined the current of research into the fundamental questions of the social function of the institutions in the Polish People's Republic, a current that is with difficulty forcing its way into Polish historiography. And regardless of whether we pigeon-hole his work with the monographs dealing with broadly-conceived social history, or social history of politics, or other, its value certainly consists in the fact that, at least partly, it fills an essential gap in the research into the system of power "in operation" in the Polish People's Republic.

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⁴ See *Poznański Czerwiec 1956 (June 1956 in Poznań)*, Poznań 1990, pp. 60–67.

⁵ See among others Janusz Wrona, *System partyjny w Polsce 1944–1950 (The Party System in Poland 1944–1950)*, Lublin 1995, p. 293.