



Jędrzej Chumiński (*Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław*)

THE MATERIAL SITUATION OF POLISH WORKERS BETWEEN 1945 AND 1956

The article deals with the problem of the material situation of workers between 1945 and 1956. It was particularly difficult in the first months after the end of the war, when “cheap labour” was the immanent feature of so-called “real socialism”. The problem became even more severe due to the policy of “underconsumption” proclaimed in 1946 by one of the directors of the Central Planning Office and introduced as the basis of financing the investment plan. Keeping a disproportionately high level of accumulation at the expense of consumption was a prominent feature of the system.

Keywords: *consumption, “underconsumption”, working class, post-war period, Polish People’s Republic.*

doi:10.2478/sho-2014-0002

INTRODUCTION

In 1954 after 10 years of communist rule in Poland, poverty was the prevailing phenomenon among Polish people¹. The observations of an American journalist Frederick Kuh from *The Chicago Sun Times*, who received permission to travel around Poland freely, illustrate it well. In his reportage “Red Poland without censorship”, he noted that one of his strongest impressions about Poland at that time was that “people [...] suffered from the lack of consumer goods. Most of the available products

¹ The analyses presented in his article are the part of the author’s broader research regarding Polish workers in 1945-1956.

were of poor quality. A lot of products that the majority of people nowadays find absolutely indispensable were unavailable”².

Taking that into account, one should not be surprised by the “sociological low” formulated by Michał Kalecki according to which “even a few years later at the beginning of the sixties almost everyone in Poland thought that their quality of life became worse in comparison to the interwar period”³. This notion was not unfounded, particularly in regards to some social classes (including industrial workers), taking into account that proverbial “cheap labour” was the immanent feature of the so-called “real socialism”. It is worth noting that wages constituted only around 10% of the costs of the national industry at the time of the Polish People’s Republic. In 1954 it was 11.2% and in the eighties – 10.7% (data collected in 1988). It is significant that in the interwar period wages accounted for more than 20% of the value of produced goods (data collected in 1937)⁴.

THE MATERIAL SITUATION OF POLISH WORKERS IN THE FIRST MONTHS AFTER THE WAR

The material situation of workers was particularly difficult in the first months after the end of the war. In October 1945 their real income (the sum of received money and the value of ration stamps and received goods) comprised only 27%, in comparison to 1938, that is in the metallurgical industry 23%, mining 23%, metal industry 31% and textile industry 26%⁵. Two years later in October 1947 there was still a considerable disproportion in worker wages in comparison to the interwar period (table 1). It is estimated that the average income of an industrial worker at the time (in 1938) was about 82 zlotys [zł], that was about 67% of the aver-

² Archiwum Akt Nowych (further: AAN), Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (further: KC PZPR) sygn. 237/V1b/15, *Pismo Departamentu Prasy i Informacji MSZ do tow. Mazura (14 kwietnia 1954 r.)*, p. 129.

³ M. Kalecki, *Porównanie dochodu robotników i pracowników umysłowych z okresem przedwojennym*, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1964, nr 1, p. 39-40.

⁴ *Tablice statystyczne 1953-1954*, Warszawa 1956, p. 126-127; *Koszty produkcji i rentowność w przemyśle uspołecznionym w 1988 r.*, Warszawa 1989, p. 12-13; *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939*, Warszawa 1939, p. 134.

⁵ AAN, Komisja Centralna Związków Zawodowych (further: KCZZ), Wydział Ekonomiczny sygn. 460, *Wskaźniki płac realnych (październik 1945 r.)*.

Table 1. The value of real wages in September 1947 in relation to pre-war wages of workers employed in different sectors of the national economy

Sectors of the national economy	Average wages in 1938 in zlotys	Average wages in September 1947 in zlotys	Wages in September 1947 converted into zloty from 1938	The value of wages in September 1947 in relation to wages from 1938 expressed as a percentage
Territorial state and self-governed administration	219	11200	73	33
Central state administration	457	16750	109	23
Teachers	245	11350	74	30
Rail transport	218	10685	69	31
Industry including:				
White-collar workers	310	18121	118	38
White-collar workers	122	12578	82	67
Including the following branches of industry:				
Mineral	88	10961	71	80
Metal	147	10930	71	48
Electrotechnical	124	11006	71	57
Chemical	143	11373	74	51
Textile	122	10206	66	54
Paper	116	10126	66	56
Leather	139	13265	86	61
Timber	68	10222	66	97
Food	114	12832	83	72
Coal mining	202	14131	92	45
Metallurgy	233	11610	75	32

Source: AAN, KCZZ, *Próba oceny dochodu z pracy najemnej i jego udziału w dochodzie narodowym – opracowanie J. Janiak* (luty 1948 r.), p. 16 (photocopy in author's private archive). AAN, KCZZ Wydział Ekonomiczny sygn. 459, *Wypłaty w przemyśle za październik 1947 r.*; *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939*, Warszawa 1939, p. 270-275.

The conversion into real wages in September 1947 was done with the cost of living index: 1938 = 1, September 1947 = 154. The data regarding different branches of industry illustrates the level of wages in September 1947.

age income before the war⁶. This income was lower than the one received by public workers before the war and only slightly higher than the income of unqualified women (66 zł a month)⁷. The average income fell the most in those branches of industry in which high qualifications were required and in which traditionally wages were high, e.g. in the *metallurgical industry* the wages of workers after the war constituted only 32% of the wages before the war, in mining 45%, in *metal industry* 48%, in the *chemical industry* 51% and in the *textile industry* 54%. It is significant that there was not a single branch of industry in which wages reached the pre-war levels; however, they were the highest in the *mineral industry* – 80% of pre-war wages, *timber industry* 97% and *food industry* 72%⁸.

Paradoxically, even though the wages of industrial workers fell, the decrease in wages of other groups employed in the national economy was even bigger. It is worth noting that the wages of workers employed in the state and local administration in 1947 constituted only 33% of pre-war wages; those employed in the central state administration, 23%; teachers, 30%; and railway workers, 31%. White collar workers employed in industry also received only 38% of pre-war wages.

Low wages are, however, only one of the factors influencing the condition of workers. The most important problem after the war was the insufficient provision of food. Especially in 1945 the situation was dramatic and almost as bad as during the occupation years when, according to the German Upper Silesian Economic Institute, “Der Pole hungert” (it did not apply only to the workers possessing *volksliste*). The caloric value of the provisions received by the Polish people constituted only from over a dozen to around thirty percent of the physiological norm (estimated to be 2400 calories a day). It is noteworthy that poverty in Poland was more severe than in most other European countries. As the daily calorie intake

⁶ We assumed that the average wages of industrial workers are about 120 zł. This figure was also given in some post-war literature. According to research conducted in 1938, the average weekly wage in large scale and medium scale industry were 29.9 zł. It should be noted, however, that in 1954 the National Committee of Economic Planning assumed that net income in the processing industry in 1937 was 136 zł. According to other estimates, average wages were around 140 zł. AAN, Państwowa Komisja Planowania Gospodarczego (further: PKPG) sygn. 312, *Porównanie dochodów na głowę ludności pracowniczej w 1954 i 1937 r.*, p. 3; *Mały rocznik 1939...*, p. 272; H. Jędruszczak, *Płace robotników w Polsce 1924-1939*, Warszawa 1963, p. 243.

⁷ *Mały rocznik 1939...*, p. 276; *Statystyka Pracy*, XVII, 1 / 1938, p. 37.

⁸ AAN, KCZZ, *Próba oceny dochodu z pracy najemnej i jego udziału w dochodzie narodowym – opracowanie J. Janiak* (luty 1948 r.), p. 16 (photocopy in author's private archive). AAN, KCZZ Wydział Ekonomiczny sygn. 459, *Wyплаты w przemyśle za październik 1947 r.*

before the war (between 1935 and 1938) in Poland equalled 2702 calories, it dropped to a mere 1030 calories in 1943-1944 (it was lower only in Italy 1000 calories). Malnutrition of workers was widespread, around 60% of them being more than 8 kg underweight, and 20% - more than 15 kg underweight. As a result certain illnesses became more common, e.g. tuberculosis, typhus, rheumatism, psychological disorders and chronic gastrointestinal diseases⁹.

Hunger was commonplace in Poland also in the first months after the war in spite of the fact that between March and December 1945 the average working family spent 65.2% of their income on food¹⁰. The situation became particularly dramatic in 1946. In February and March 1946 450,000 tons of grain was lacking to cater for the needs of the population (and additional 100,000 tons for sowing), and "the situation regarding the supply of fats was even worse". This situation was mostly caused by the relatively slow restoration of food production after the war. A good illustration of this phenomenon is the report of Kamil Kowalski which indicates that in 1946/1947 the grain production in Poland constituted only 41% of the pre-war production, potato production 53%, meat production 28% and fat production 26%. In comparison to other European countries the production growth rate for all these products was the slowest (except for potato production, in which Poland was last but one)¹¹.

As a consequence in 1946 food consumption among Polish people was very low, and according to Kazimierz Rusinek, equalled only "half of pre-war norms". For example, in the case of wheat it was 34%, potatoes 42%, sugar 57%, fat 88%, pork 69%, cotton fabric 63% and wool fabric 38%¹². As a result, the nutritional value of consumed products was low. In 1946 protein consumption comprised only 55% of pre-war consumption, fat consumption 58%, carbohydrates consumption 33%, and daily caloric intake

⁹ *Documenta occupationis teutonicae I*, Robotniczy Przegląd Gospodarczy, nr 1 / 1947, p. 28; K. Kowalski, *Plan Marshalla: uwarunkowania i skutki gospodarczo-polityczne*, Łódź 2013, p. 88 (typescript); C. Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, Poznań 1979, p. 563-565; J. Chumiński, *Ruch zawodowy w Polsce w warunkach kształtującego się systemu totalitarnego 1944-1956*, Wrocław 1999, p. 126.

¹⁰ J. Jędruszek, *Szkic porównawczy kosztów utrzymania*, Robotniczy Przegląd Gospodarczy, nr 12 / 1947, p. 22

¹¹ K. Kowalski, *Plan Marshalla ...*, p. 121-123.

¹² K. Rusinek, *Sytuacja gospodarcza a postulaty świata pracy*, Robotniczy Przegląd Gospodarczy, nr 7 / 1947, p. 7; K. Rusinek, *Trudności, które przezwyciężymy. Przemówienie Generalnego Sekretarza Komisji Centralnej Zw. Zaw. na posiedzeniu Wydziału Wykonawczego Zw. Zaw. Robotnik*, nr 27 (427) z dnia 28 stycznia 1946 r.

was only 56% of the intake in 1938. A year later these figures rose but they were still about 1/5 lower than before the war¹³. Noteworthy is the data presenting the level of consumption in Poland in comparison to other European countries. The daily calorie intake in 1946/1947, that is 2100 calories, was among the lowest in Europe; it was lower only in Germany (1800 calories), Italy (2000 calories) and Austria (2000 calories)¹⁴.

Evaluating the first two years after the war, Kazimierz Secomski expressed the opinion, hardly surprising in this context, that "in case of the protection of human beings and the need to restore the element of human work, in 1945 and 1946 the circumstances made it necessary to give priority to the restoration of the material element. A malnourished and unprotected man had to be sacrificed for the faster restoration of the basic economic elements". He also said, "currently we are experiencing the period of post-war underconsumption, which is greeted with a lot of resistance and is [...] unpopular. [...] This lack of patience leads to a great tension regarding a fierce fight to eliminate the phenomenon of underconsumption"¹⁵. The author of these words most likely referred to the growing wave of strikes in Poland.

The low level of consumption among Polish workers is illustrated by the research conducted in November 1947 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which comprised workers employed in the main branches of industry in several cities. Its big advantage was the possibility to calculate the level of consumption of all members of the household taking into account their income¹⁶. According to the pre-war methodology it was assumed that a man, a breadwinner, constituted a so-called consumption unit (c.u.), his wife 0.85 c.u., his child aged 14-17 years 0.8 c.u. and aged 13 and below 0.5 c.u. Income per person in a family was also taken into account and 8 groups were specified with expenditures from below 3,000 to over 12,000 zł. On the basis of the gathered data it can be concluded that the material situation of the large proportion of worker families was dramatic. At the end of 1946 the Wage Joint Committee estimated the minimum subsistence level per person as 6000 zł per month and 44.5% of worker families

¹³ J. Kofman, *Plan odbudowy gospodarczej*, Robotniczy Przegląd Gospodarczy, nr 6 / 1946, p. 13.

¹⁴ K. Kowalski, *Plan Marshalla...*, p. 123.

¹⁵ AAN, Centralny Urząd Planowania (further: CUP) sygn. 1787, *Plan Narodowy a ubezpieczenia społeczne* - referat K. Secomskiego, p. 19-21.

¹⁶ Archiwum Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego (further: GUS) sygn. 513/7, *Badania budżetów rodzinnych MPiOS (listopad 1947 r.)*.

did not reach this level (130). If we omitted described conversion rates and just counted the number of individuals in analyzed families, then 73.7% of families and 79.5% of their members (1029 people) lived below the minimum subsistence level (in further analysis we will be taking into account mainly the data related to persons, not consumption units) (table 2).

It is worth taking into account, however, that disproportions in wages were very significant. The group of the richest workers spent monthly over 4 times more than the poorest group. What is more, individuals with the income below 3,000 zł spent over 68% of their budget on food, whereas the most affluent individuals 43.7%. Disregarding the quality of the consumed food products, the members of the first category consumed about 35 kg of food, whereas the members of the wealthiest group – 55 kg (on average 45 kg). The scope of poverty can be illustrated by the fact that almost 80% of the members of worker families consumed food products which value was below 3,000 zł, and every fourth person spent on food less than 2,000 zł (it is worth taking into account what the purchasing power of this amount was at that time – one kilogram of bread cost 35 zł, potatoes 9 zł, beef 200 zł, pork 270 zł, ham 360 zł, lard 150 zł, sugar 180 zł, butter 555 zł, one litre of milk 38 zł, one egg 15 zł, etc.).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the diet was mostly based on potatoes and bread which constituted 65% (29.3 kg) of consumed food. In the monthly balance they constituted 52% of consumed calories (52,156 calories a month, with overall consumption 100,336 calories per consumption unit). The consumption of products considered luxurious such as meat, ham, dairy products and sweets was minimal. The consumption of meat and poultry was especially low, which constituted only 2089 calories per consumption unit; that is only 2.1% of the overall consumption, dairy products 8.1%, sugar and sweets 6.7%. That means, for example, in Warsaw in November 1947 a worker consumed on average (per consumption unit) 0.57 kg of beef, 1.15 kg of pork, 0.36 kg of other kind of meat (including bone), and ham – 0.35 kg. In the case of dairy products, the consumption per consumption unit was 0.4 kg of butter, 0.22 kg of curd cheese, 0.02 kg of cheese and only 3 eggs. The consumption of sweets included 0.08 kg of candies, 0.05 kg of chocolate, 0.07 kg of biscuits and 0.02 kg of marmalade and jam. The consumption of tea was 0.01 kg, chicory coffee substitute – 0.17 kg, and coffee was not drunk at all (the consumption of these products was mostly the result of UNRRA supplies (table 3).

However, it should be stressed that this is averaged data and what is more, collected in the capital where the situation of workers was relative-

Table 2. Monthly spending of workers' families in different income groups (November 1947)

Expenditures	Income groups – expenditures per consumption unit (c.u.) in zloty							
	I		II		III		IV	
	Up to 2,999 zł per per- son	%	3,000 – 3,999 zł per per- son	%	4,000 – 4,999 zł per per- son	%	5,000 – 5,999 zł per per- son	%
Food	2630,64	68,1	3158,11	60,2	3504,66	54,5	3807,08	54,8
Alcohol and tobacco	106,36	2,8	155,69	3,0	185,54	2,9	236,55	3,4
Rent and flat renovation	53,66	1,4	89,55	1,7	163,58	2,5	105,66	1,5
Heating and light	393,41	10,2	514,25	9,8	602	9,4	689,99	9,9
Health and hygiene	113,44	2,9	146,03	2,8	178,31	2,8	197,03	2,8
Clothing and footwear	367,01	9,5	810,51	15,4	1254,11	19,5	1334,49	19,2
Culture and education	121,58	3,1	182,16	3,5	214,25	3,3	329,31	4,7
Others	78,35	2,0	193,73	3,7	325,91	5,1	250,91	3,6
Total in consumption units	3864,45	100,0	5250,03	100,0	6428,36	100,0	6951,02	100,0
Total per person	2646,12		3901,97		4998,54		5168,76	

Source: Archiwum GUS sygn. 513/7, Badanie budżetów rodzinnych MPiOS.

The research illustrates the situation of 289 workers' families in 26 places in Poland. These families comprised of 1295 individuals, expressed in consumption units (c.u.) - 967.58 (according to the methodology that was used at the time, an adult man constituted 1 c.u., a woman 0.85 c.u., a child aged 14-17 years 0.8 c.u. and aged 13 and below 0.5 c.u.). To the first category belonged 62 families, comprised of 321 individuals, c.u. 219.8; to the second category 68 families, 350 individuals, 260.13 c.u.; to the third category 44 families, 194 individuals, 150.85 c.u.; to the fourth category 39 families, 164 individuals, 121.95 c.u.; to the fifth category 38 families, 138 individuals, 107.05 c.u.; to the sixth category 12 families, 49 individuals, 43.9 c.u.; to the seventh category 19 families, 62 individuals, 49.75 c.u.; to the eighth category 7 families, 17 individuals, 14.15 c.u.

ly better. Among the poorest workers and the members of their families, the consumption level was dramatic. It is worth noting that in the category of individuals whose monthly income was below 2999 zł (I income group) in November 1947 consumed monthly (per person) 0.34 kg of beef, 0.69 kg of pork, 0.1 kg of fresh sausage, 0.35 kg of lard, 0.58 kg of sugar, 0.12 kg of butter, 0.08 kg of curd cheese, 2.89 litre of milk and 1.32 eggs. Even bread and potato consumption was not high, as the amount of consumed bread was 6.77 kg and potatoes 17.2 kg. The diet of workers whose income was below 3999 zł (II income group) was not much richer. The con-

Income groups - expenditures per consumption unit (c.u.) in zloty											
V		VI		VII		VIII		Mean		Per one person	
6,000 - 6,999 zł	%	7,000 - 7,999 zł	%	8,000 - 11,999 zł	%	Over 12,000 zł	%		%		
4154,77	53,3	4737,62	48,7	4729,81	43,5	6075,02	43,7	4099,71	50,6		3063
105,11	1,3	265,97	2,7	441,78	4,1	680,49	4,9	272,19	3,4		203,4
173,32	2,2	246,24	2,5	526,64	4,8	541,63	3,9	237,54	2,9		177,5
698,12	9,0	647,65	6,7	916,07	8,4	903,39	6,5	670,61	8,3		501,1
290,28	3,7	297,08	3,1	273,44	2,5	575,97	4,1	258,95	3,2		193,5
1559,01	20,0	2365,94	24,3	2488,55	22,9	3613,64	26,0	1724,16	21,3		1288
419,4	5,4	378,88	3,9	803,03	7,4	705,08	5,1	394,21	4,9		294,5
388,48	5,0	797,38	8,2	683,55	6,3	803,46	5,8	440,22	5,4		328,8
7788,49	100,0	9736,76	100,0	10862,87	100,0	13898,68	100,0	8097,58	100,0		6050
6041,72		8723,34		8716,57		11568,6		6470,70			

sumption of beef was 0.34 kg, pork 0.76 kg, sausage 0.11 kg, lard 0,5 kg, sugar 0.89 kg, butter 0.22 kg, curd cheese 0.09 kg, milk 4,57 litre, eggs 1.63 items. However, the consumption of bread and potatoes was significantly higher, bread 9.3 kg and potatoes 21.72 kg. In higher income groups the consumption of more valuable products was bigger. As before the war, a particular increase in consumption was related to such products as milk, butter, eggs, meat and sugar¹⁷.

The cost of living of people employed in various branches of industry is also worth analysing (table 4). The available data suggests that the biggest number of the least wealthy workers were employed in the metallurgical and chemical industries, branches that required high qualifications and were well-paid before the war. The rates of the members of the families who belonged to the lowest categories (I and II) were respectively: 56.9% and 67.7%. In the steel industry it was 47.1%, among railway work-

¹⁷ S. Mandecki, *Możliwości zmian w strukturze spożycia na tle znoszenia systemu kartkowego*, *Życie Gospodarcze*, nr 20/21 z dnia 1-15 listopada 1948 r., p. 797-800.

Table 3. Consumption of food items by worker families in different income groups

		Consumption of food items per person in worker families in different income groups							
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Food items in kilograms, litres and per item	up to 2,999 zl per person.	62	68	44	39	38	12	19	over 12,000 zl per person.
	families=321 individuals; mean number of family members = 5.17	families=350 individuals; mean number of family members = 5.14	families=194 individuals; mean number of family members = 4.4	families=164 individuals; mean number of family members = 4.2	families=138 individuals; mean number of family members = 3.63	families=49 individuals; mean number of family members = 4.08	families=62 individuals; mean number of family members = 2.42	8,000 - 11,999 zl per person.	Mean. 289 families = 1,295 individuals; Mean number of family members = 4.48
	6,000 - 7,999 zl per person.	7,000 - 7,999 zl per person.	8,000 - 11,999 zl per person.	13,46	8,28	9,303	9,83	145	137
	17,2	21,72	23,49	22,37	22,59	21,37	25,8	16,4	21,368
	100	126	137	130	131	124	150	95	124
	2,89	4,57	4,56	5,24	7,17	7,35	5,19	5,85	5,353
	100	158	158	181	248	254	180	202	185
	0,12	0,22	0,21	0,29	0,41	0,5	0,42	0,6	0,346
	100	183	175	242	342	417	350	500	289
	0,08	0,09	0,09	0,2	0,28	0,33	0,16	0,41	0,205
100	113	113	250	350	413	200	513	256	
0,006	0,002	0,007	0	0,01	0,008	0	0,04	0,009	
100	33	117	0	167	133	0	667	152	
1,32	1,62	2,28	3,03	3,76	6,36	5,2	9,58	4,144	
100	123	173	230	285	482	394	726	314	
0,34	0,34	0,49	0,58	0,53	0,81	0,48	1	0,571	
100	100	144	171	156	238	141	294	168	

Pork	0,69	0,76	0,94	0,82	1,03	1,19	1,35	1,04	0,978
Index	100	110	136	119	149	172	196	151	142
Poultry	0,02	0,02	0,05	0,11	0,1	0,08	0,18	0,08	0,080
Index	100	100	250	550	500	400	900	400	400
Sausage	0,1	0,11	0,18	0,18	0,24	0,25	0,32	0,36	0,218
Index	100	110	180	180	240	250	320	360	218
Lard	0,35	0,5	0,63	0,62	0,65	0,72	0,97	1,44	0,735
Index	100	143	180	177	186	206	277	411	210
Fish and her- rings	0,26	0,34	0,33	0,29	0,51	0,61	0,77	1,01	0,515
Index	100	131	127	112	196	235	296	388	198
Sugar	0,58	0,89	1,11	1,16	1,03	1,7	1,62	2,23	1,290
Index	100	153	191	200	178	293	279	384	222
Candies	0,07	0,08	0,1	0,08	0,07	0,17	0,05	0,01	0,079
Index	100	114	143	114	100	243	71	14	113
Chocolate	0,02	0,02	0,05	0,02	0,02	0,06	0,008	0,02	0,027
Index	100	100	250	100	100	300	40	100	136
Biscuits	0,01	0,01	0,01	0,03	0,05	0,04	0,04	0,13	0,040
Index	100	100	100	300	500	400	400	1300	400
Marmalade and jam	0,06	0,05	0,08	0,02	0,08	0,14	0,08	0	0,064
Index	100	83	133	33	133	233	133	0	106
Natural tea	0,01	0	0,002	0	0	0,008	0,001	0,008	0,004
Index	100	0	20	0	0	80	10	80	36
Natural coffee	0,001	0	0,0007	0	0	0,002	0,01	0,02	0,004
Index	100	0	70	0	0	200	1000	2000	421

Source: see Table 2

Table 4. Worker families in different income groups (September 1947)

Branches of industry	The number of individuals in different income groups							
	I		II		III		IV	
	Up to 2,999 zł per person	%	3,000 - 3,999 zł per person	%	4,000 - 4,999 zł per person	%	5,000 - 5,999 zł per person	%
Metallurgical	54,7	37,9	27,4	19,01	21,39	14,8	19,74	13,7
Metal	35,46	18,7	53,9	28,44	59,36	31,3	15,33	8,09
Textile	4,88	9,16	15,69	29,46	-	-	13,58	25,5
Chemical	31,9	39,3	23,1	28,44	6,09	7,5	9,14	11,3
Construction	-	-	10,53	19,45	-	-	3,68	6,8
Rail transport	13,14	16,2	22,34	27,52	12,7	15,6	13,46	16,6
Total	140,08	23,2	152,96	25,35	99,54	16,5	74,93	12,4
Number of families	28	20,4	33	24,1	22	16,1	18	13,1
Average number of family members	5,00		4,64		4,52		4,16	

Source: see Table 2

ers 43.7% and in the textile industry 38.6%. The lowest rate were those in the building industry 19.5%. It is worth noting that on the whole the minimum subsistence level (6,000 zł) was not reached by as many as 77.5% of the members of worker families; although in the metallurgical industry the rate was 85.4%, metal industry 85.4% and *chemical industry* 86.5%. *Relatively the best situation was in the textile industry 64.1%, railway industry 75.9% and building industry 26.2%*. This data explains to some extent the willingness of workers to go on strike in the first years after the war.

Post-war poverty is also illustrated by the fact that the level of consumption comparable to that before the war was reached by increased employment activity of family members. Before the war, as indicated by the analysis of working families' budgets in 1927, the family income was provided mostly by the breadwinner, which constituted 84.4% of the overall sum. Only 8.5% was provided by other members of the family (the additional income could come from annuities and pensions, social security benefits, other benefits, etc.). Therefore, in accordance with the tradition-

V		VI		VII		VIII		Total
6,000 – 6,999 zł per per- son	%	7,000 – 7,999 zł per per- son	%	8,000 – 11,999 zł per per- son	%	Over 12,000 zł per per- son	%	
7,92	5,49	4,12	2,86	8,88	6,16	-	-	144,15
12,69	6,70	8,26	4,36	4,5	2,37	-	-	189,5
10,36	19,45	5,9	11,1	2,85	5,35	-	-	53,26
2,98	3,67	8	9,85	-	-	-	-	81,21
8,68	16,03	17,2	31,8	11,2	20,7	2,85	5,26	54,14
13,2	16,26	6,34	7,81	-	-	-	-	81,18
55,83	9,25	49,82	8,26	27,43	4,55	2,85	0,47	603,44
16	11,7	12	8,8	7	5,1	1	0,7	137
3,49		4,15		3,92		2,85		4,40

al model of the family, the duty of providing for the family belonged to a man. Women worked relatively infrequently. The situation changed after the war. The average cost of living for the family of four in November 1947 was 20,000 zł (e.g. in Warsaw 23,900 zł, in Łódź 21,200 zł, Katowice 20,200 zł, Wrocław 20,100 zł, Gdańsk 20,600 zł) and the average salary in the industry which was about 12,000 zł covered only 60% of the family expenses. It forced other members of the family to become employed and it explains the post-war increase in the number of employed women and underage workers (it is worth noting that before the war there were 144 persons for every 100 workers, and it 1949 – only 119)¹⁸.

The second phenomenon that is worth taking into consideration is the significant increase in the number of workers who belonged to the lowest income group. Even though the gathered data is not fully comparable,

¹⁸ *Rocznik Statystyczny 1958*, Warszawa 1958, p. 338; K. Ryc, *Spożycie a wzrost gospodarczy Polski*, Warszawa 1968, p. 32.

it is significant that before the war (according to research from 1927) about 22% of analysed families belonged to the lowest income group; whereas after the war this number rose to 45%. It should be taken into account, however, that the level of consumption of the latter group was somewhat higher than that of the workers who belonged to the lowest income category before the war (to some extent it resulted from the rigid rationing supply). Another phenomenon that was observed after the war was the flattening of income, as the number of workers who belonged to the group of the highest income decreased (before the war 20% of workers received over 1200 zł per consumption unit, whereas in 1947 – only 9%). The consumption of the following products dropped in this group in comparison to the pre-war period: bread, rolls and cakes, milk, eggs, meat and fish, and sugar and sweets.

MATERIAL SITUATION OF WORKERS DURING THE THREE-YEAR AND SIX-YEAR PLAN

The politics of underconsumption introduced in the first years after the war aggravated dramatically the health condition of the Polish society. It was reflected in the average life expectancy. In 1950 it was over 56 years for men and almost 62 years for women¹⁹. These rates were among the lowest in Europe. Child mortality was also very high. In 1950 there were 111.2 deaths per each 1000 live births, which was also one of the worst rates among European countries²⁰.

This is the context in which the decision to change the priorities outlined in the Three-year Plan of Reconstructing the Economy (implemented in 1947-1949) should be seen. As K. Secomski put it, "it can bring major changes: the restoration of human capital. Human rights' protection is given priority over the rebuilding of the apparatus of the factors of production. The consequences of the above thesis are simple: the reconstruction of the country will become slower, a smaller part of the social income will be assigned to investments so that a fuller fulfilment of the needs of the working world is possible today and immediately"²¹.

¹⁹ *Trwanie życia w 2007 r.*, Warszawa 2008, p. 8-9.

²⁰ J. Z. Holzer, *Demografia*, Warszawa 2003, p. 210, 239; *Rocznik statystyczny 1956*, Warszawa 1956, p. 415-416.

²¹ AAN, CUP sygn. 1787, *Plan Narodowy a ubezpieczenia społeczne* – report by K. Secomski, p. 19.

The official declarations regarding the preference for consumption and light industry should be, however, treated with caution²². In reality, as in many areas, there was a gap between theory and practice. The low quality of life of workers at the end of the three-year plan can be illustrated by comparing the salary purchasing power at the end of the three-year plan with the situation in 1947, and especially in 1938. Even though in 1949, more groceries of almost every kind could be purchased on an average worker's salary in comparison to 1947, this amount was much smaller than the worker's salary purchasing power in 1938. The only exception was potatoes as slightly more could be purchased (if 1938 was 100, in 1949 – 124); however, for other products it was significantly less (bread 85, flour 67, beef 81, pork 47, lard 64, milk 81, butter 74, eggs 90, sugar 78, etc.) (table 5).

This disadvantageous situation of workers deteriorated even more after the end of the 3-year plan. The declarations about the need to invest in the "human capital" that were given during that period became the thing of the past during the Stalinization of social and political life that took place in the first half of the fifties. For the economy it meant adopting the Soviet economic model that was reflected in the 6-year plan. Its main characteristics are compatible with the sociological concept of forced industrialization. It is characterised by the high level of accumulation in national income, a preference for the factors of production over consumer goods, the centralized-directive system of economy management, the limitation of the independence of enterprises and the freedom to express their rights, strong involvement of the party apparatus in the organisation of the production process, and the expansion of the control system over all elements of the economy²³.

The problem with defining the quality of life of workers in this period results from the fact that, paradoxically, it was taboo in the "country of workers and peasants". The reasons behind it were expressed by one of the party dignitaries who questioned the need for them saying "we all know that the salary is not enough"²⁴. Jan Malanowski even stated in

²² I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1984, p. 480-481.

²³ W. Morawski, *Strategia narzuconej industrializacji a społeczeństwo*, *Studia Socjologiczne*, nr 4 / 1980, p. 117; J. Kaliński, *Polityka gospodarcza Polski w latach 1948-1956*, Warszawa 1987, p. 114.

²⁴ J. Malanowski, *Sprawa minimum egzystencji*, *Życie Gospodarcze*, nr 23 (274) z dnia 26 listopada 1956 r.

Table 5. Mean monthly wages of industrial workers expressed as the quantity of various food items and industrial articles in 1938, 1949, 1953 and 1955

Article type	Units	The quantity of products that could be bought with the average monthly wages of workers									
		1938	Index 1938 = 100	1947	Index 1938 = 100	1949	Index 1938 = 100	1953	Index 1938 = 100	1955	Index 1938 = 100
Rye bread	kg	387	100	247	64	330	85	341	88	385	99
Wheat flour	kg	244	100	94	39	164	67	170	70	192	79
Potatoes	kg	1200	100	876	73	1493	124	966	81	946	79
Beef	kg	80	100	47	59	65	81	39	49	44	55
Pork	kg	81	100	43	53	38	47	31	38	35	43
Lard	kg	74	100	40	54	47	64	29	39	33	45
Milk	litre	444	100	325	73	360	81	410	92	477	107
Butter	kg	33,8	100	25	74	25	74	18	53	21	62
Eggs	pieces	1049	100	876	84	948	90	759	72	819	78
Sugar	kg	120	100	63	53	94	78	69	58	96	80
Coal	tons	2,5	100	2,2	88	5,1	204	3,4	136	4,5	180
Paraffin	litre	315	100	345	110	328	104	256	81	288	91
Electricity	kwh	226	100	5696	2520	1643	727	2697	1193	3300	1460
Gas	m3	375	100	1139	304	1264	337	2050	547	2310	616

Source: *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939 r.*, Warszawa 1939 r., p. 254-255; *Rocznik statystyczny 1956*, Warszawa 1956, p. 110; *Zarządzenie Ministra Przemysłu i Handlu z dnia 7 lipca 1947 r. wydane w porozumieniu z Ministrem Apropozycji w sprawie ustalania cen maksymalnych na artykuły przemysłowe*, Monitor Polski z 7 sierpnia 1947 r. nr 106 poz. 70; W. Gomułka, *Sytuacja w partii i kraju - referat na X plenum KC PZPR*, Głos Pracy nr 252 (2100) z dnia 26-27 października 1957 r.

For 1938 we assumed the average wage of workers to be 120 zlotys (zl) and prices in Warsaw. For 1947 the average wages in the industry were 11,393 zl. The average workers' wage in 1949 and 1953 is proportionate and is accordingly: 493 zl (the wages in the national economy at the time were on average 466 zl) and 1025 zl (968 zl). In 1955 the average wage of industrial workers were 1155 zl.

1956 that "the necessary minimum was until recently probably the most untouchable subject of press and scientific analysis in the social and economic field". It was also a wider problem, and he said as much, "I am ashamed to admit that we knew much more about the working class, its structure, income, possessions and other features in the interwar period than now"²⁵.

Ignorance about the quality of life is not only the result of a lack of information about family consumption levels but also production volumes, as research on family budgets during the six-year plan was ignored). H. Minc assured the audience of the increase in the standard of living in almost every speech, but it was "mostly the increase of the Central Statistical Office, as it was based on production". It meant that from the global output of industry and farming, export and reserves were deducted, then import was added and this measure was divided by the population²⁶. In its most extreme form it led to the attempts to prove the increase in the standard of living "by the use of paper per capita and the decrease in the prices of steam locomotives"²⁷. This measure also ignored the quality of products, wastage, mismatch between demand and supply, "gathering" goods, both by individual consumers and enterprises.

In reality in the first half of the fifties poverty in Poland became more severe. The most difficult situation was in 1953. It seems that widespread surveillance and increasing political terror were aimed at intimidating Polish society and forcing it to accept the imposed sacrifices. Four years after the introduction of the six-year plan poverty was widespread. According to the official statistics when the purchasing power of an average salary in 1953 was compared to 1949 (when the quality of life was still very low) one could buy fewer than 14 of the 17 basic groceries. In the case of beef (if 1949 was 100) 59.9, pork 81.8, sausage 75.4, lard 62.3, butter 72.9, eggs 80, sugar 73.9, potatoes 64.7. The situation was a little better when manufactured goods were taken into account; however, also in this case if we take into account the most popular articles such as wool, sheet fabric, shirts, dress fabric or coal, we can notice the decrease in the purchasing power of an average salary (table 6).

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ T. Jaworski, *Trzeba prawdziwie spojrzeć w oczy*, *Życie Gospodarcze*, nr 12 (263) z dnia 20 czerwca 1956 r.

²⁷ J. Malanowski, *Kto jak żyje. Na marginesie budżetów rodzinnych*, *Życie Gospodarcze*, nr 39 (314) z dnia 29 września 1957 r.

Table 6. Mean monthly wages of the workers employed in the socialized economy expressed as the quantity of various food items and industrial articles in 1949, 1953 and 1955

Article type	Units	The quantity of products that could be bought with the average monthly wages of the workers employed in the socialised economy									
		1949 - average salary Price in zl	Quantity of pro- duct	Index 1949 = 100	466 zl	1953 - average salary Price in zl	Quantity of pro- duct	Index 1949 = 100	968 zl	1955 -average salary Price in zl	Quantity of pro- duct
Wheat bread	kg	2,4	194,2	100	5,9	164,1	84,5	5	213,6	110,0	
Rye bread	kg	1,49	312,8	100	3	322,7	103,2	3	356,0	113,8	
Wheat flour	kg	3	155,3	100	6	161,3	103,9	6	178,0	114,6	
Pear barley	kg	1,44	323,6	100	3,5	276,6	85,5	3,5	305,1	94,3	
Veal, 2nd quality	kg	7,2	64,7	100	24	40,3	62,3	24	44,5	68,8	
Lard	kg	10,5	44,4	100	35	27,7	62,3	34,3	31,1	70,2	
Butter	kg	19,3	24,1	100	55	17,6	72,9	55	19,4	80,4	
Ham	kg	16	29,1	100	55	17,6	60,4	55	19,4	66,7	
Semolina	kg	2,76	168,8	100	7	138,3	81,9	6,5	164,3	97,3	
Beef - leg	kg	7,5	62,1	100	26	37,2	59,9	26	41,1	66,1	
Pork - loin	kg	13	35,8	100	33	29,3	81,8	33	32,4	90,3	
Sausage	kg	9,8	47,6	100	27	35,9	75,4	26	41,1	86,4	
Milk	Litre	1,37	340,1	100	2,5	387,2	113,8	2,42	441,3	129,7	
Eggs	Pieces (pcs)	0,52	896,2	100	1,35	717,0	80,0	1,41	757,4	84,5	
Peas	Kg	2,01	231,8	100	7,7	125,7	54,2	9,25	115,5	49,8	

Sugar	Kg	5,25	88,8	100	14,75	65,6	73,9	12	89,0	100,3
Potatoes	Kg	0,33	1412,1	100	1,06	913,2	64,7	1,22	875,4	62,0
Clothing wool 100%	Meter (m)	185,7	2,5	100	617	1,6	62,5	617	1,7	69,0
Clothing wool 60%	m	119,7	3,9	100	380	2,5	65,4	366	2,9	74,9
Cretonne	m	6,33	73,6	100	16,4	59,0	80,2	13,7	78,0	105,9
Sheet fabric	m	6	77,7	100	13,3	72,8	93,7	12	89,0	114,6
Silk	m	28,8	16,2	100	58,8	16,5	101,7	47,43	22,5	139,2
Men's socks	pair	3,87	120,4	100	6,6	146,7	121,8	6,2	172,3	143,1
Shoes	pair	210	2,2	100	304,5	3,2	143,3	278,7	3,8	172,7
Men's shirt	pieces	28,4	16,4	100	61,2	15,8	96,4	46	23,2	141,5
Men's clothing made of 60% wool	pcs	454	1,0	100	918	1,1	102,7	737	1,4	141,2
Children shoes	Pair	95,3	4,9	100	142,5	6,8	138,9	119	9,0	183,5
Enamel pot	pcs	8,1	57,5	100	19,5	49,6	86,3	19,5	54,8	95,2
Plain glass	pcs	0,75	621,3	100	1,1	880,0	141,6	1,1	970,9	156,3
Washing soap	Kg	11,1	42,0	100	19,75	49,0	116,7	16	66,8	159,0
25 Watt Bulb	pcs	3,6	129,4	100	4,8	201,7	155,8	4,8	222,5	171,9
Men's bike	pcs	474	1,0	100	957,6	1,0	102,8	864	1,2	125,7
Coal	Ton	96	4,9	100	296	3,3	67,4	256	4,2	85,9
Paraffin	Litre	1,5	310,7	100	4	242,0	77,9	4	267,0	85,9

Source: W. Gomułka, *Sytuacja w partii i kraju – referat na X plenum KC PZPR*, Głos Pracy nr 252 (2100) z dnia 26-27 października 1957 r.; AAN, KC PZPR sygn. 237/XXXI/245, *Średni miesięczny zarobek brutto ogółu zatrudnionych w gospodarce narodowej w przeliczeniu na nielitore artykuły przemysłowe w latach 1955 i 1958*, p. 169.

The data presented above described the purchasing power in the national economy of the average salary. The decrease in the wages of workers was similar. Impoverishment is most visible when the worker salary purchasing power of the worker's salary are compared in 1938 and 1953. Taking into account the above mentioned 10 basic groceries, in all cases we can see a significant decrease in the salary purchasing power (if the level in 1938 is 100, then for beef it was 49, pork 38, lard 39, butter 53, sugar 58, wheat flour 70, etc). The situation in 1955 at the end of the six-year plan was almost as bad, for milk was the only product that was comparatively cheaper than in 1938, and it was possible to buy more of it (table 5).

The precise evaluation of worker wages at the end of the six-year plan brings with it many difficulties. According to the data gathered by the National Committee of Economic Planning, in 1954 the average wages in the processing industry were similar to the pre-war wages. This evaluation does not seem to be valid. According to our analyses for 1955, we note a decrease in worker wages in comparison to 1938 by about 7% (table 7). From the described 15 branches of industry only in 3 of them were the wages higher than before the war: that is, in *timber* (143), *mineral* (130) and *textile* (101) industries. However, in these branches of industry 340,000 workers were employed; that is less than 1/5 of the number of total workers. It is also worth noting that in spite of the relative increase in wages in these three branches of industry, the wages were still noticeably lower than the average for all employed workers in 1955. The biggest drop was in iron metallurgy (77) (if the wages in 1938 are 100), non-iron metallurgy (75), the textile industry (73), the chemical industry (85), and the printing industry (71). In coal mining the wages were 94, and in metal industry 96 of pre-war wages²⁸.

It is worth noting that these wages were reached by working overtime, which was very common. A good example is hard coal mining. The wages of 94 in 1938 were reached in 1955 by working 14% more hours than the standard working time. It is also important that before the war miners worked significantly fewer hours and enjoyed numerous privileges (e.g. employees working under the ground had a 45-hour working week, or 7.5 hours a day, whereas during the six-year plan they worked 8.5 hours a day). The amount of overtime was also low as in 1936 it constituted 2.5%

²⁸ *Rocznik statystyczny 1958*, Warszawa 1958, p. 93-95. K. Romaniuk, *Wstępne wyniki badań budżetów rodzin robotniczych w Polsce z lat 1937-1938-1939*, Przegląd Statystyczny, R. IX z. 4 / 1962, p. 339.

Table 7. Estimated wages of workers in 1938 and 1955 (in zloty from 1955)

Branches of industry	Monthly wages of industrial workers		
	in 1938 converted into zloty from 1955	the wages of industrial group workers in 1955	wages in 1955 in comparison to 1938 expressed as a percentage
Mining	1728	1674	97
Including coal mining	1824	1716	94
Iron metallurgy	1904	1461	77
Zinc and lead metallurgy	1984	1484	75
Mineral	832	1084	130
Metal and electrotechnical	1264	1215	96
Chemical	1296	1104	85
Textile	1168	858	73
Paper	1056	959	91
Leather	1248	1052	84
Timber	656	939	143
Food	1072	968	90
Clothing	880	892	101
Construction	1232	1133	92
Printing	1488	1050	71
Oil	1440	1121	78
Mean	1248	1155	93

Source: *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939*, Warszawa 1939 r. p. 274; *Rocznik statystyczny 1958*, Warszawa 1958, p. 93-95; AAN, PKPG sygn. 312, *Porównanie dochodów na głowę ludności pracowniczej w 1954 i 1937 r.*, p. 3-5.

The estimates of wages in different branches of industry in 1938 converted into zloty from 1955 were calculated by using the cost of living index provided by the Central Statistical Office for 1954 = 8 (with pre-war wages = 1).

of standard hours and in 1937 – 3.1%²⁹. In the whole social industry the amount of overtime in 1955 was over 6%³⁰.

It should be taken into account, however, that even though the economic situation of industrial workers was bad, their position was still

²⁹ M. Rotterówna, *Stosowanie pracy nadliczbowej w przemyśle*, Statystyka Pracy, R. XVII / 1938, p. 228-234.

³⁰ L. Skiba, *Dolnośląskie zagłębienie węglowe w organizmie gospodarczym PRL*, Warszawa-Wrocław 1979, p. 109-110; *Rocznik statystyczny 1956*, Warszawa 1956, p.108.

much better than that of other groups of employees. The wages of the employees in other sectors of the national economy were significantly lower. As the mean income in craft and industry in 1955 was 1183 zł, in the whole national economy it was 1083 zł, that is in farming and forestry 813 zł, transport and communication 1085 zł, trade 904 zł, administration 1020 zł, education, cultural and social institutions 973 zł, urban and housing economy 973 zł. Only in the building industry were the average wages higher – 1331 zł³¹.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the quality of life of industrial workers was lower at the end of the first decade of the Polish People's Republic than in the Second Polish Republic, it is important to establish the reasons behind it. Undoubtedly, especially in the first years after the war, it was the result of objective circumstances. The devastation of war, the chaos that naturally followed the war, and radical social and political changes were not favourable to the stabilization of economic situation, and, as a result, made it difficult to improve the material situation of the society. The main reason, however, especially in the long run, was the important flaws of the economic policy of communism. One of the biggest flaws was the reliance of the economic growth on the unqualified and underpaid workforce. It is enough to say that in 1950 the pre-war production volume (within the new borders) was reached after employing 600,000 workers more than before the war. The research on the reserves of work efficiency growth in large and medium scale industries (without mining) conducted by the Department of Economics Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences also shows excessive employment that was estimated to be 400,000 to 600,000 people³².

Among the many negative consequences of "unemployment in the workplace" such as low discipline, low efficiency, increased employee fluctuation, one of the most serious was maintaining the low level of wages. The whole increase in the payroll budget was consumed by the growing number of low qualified and inefficient workers. It was an immanent

³¹ *Rocznik statystyczny 1956...*, p. 279.

³² AAN, PKPG sygn. 330, *Szacunek rezerw wzrostu wydajności pracy w przemyśle wielkim i średnim (1953 r.)*, p. 17-27; A. Karpiński, *Zagadnienia socjalistycznej industrializacji Polski*, Warszawa 1958, p. 63.

feature of the economic system of the Polish People's Republic, and one can speak of a particular vicious circle, characterised by Józef Bobek, who said, "the doctrine of full employment, removing the pressure for high efficiency, becomes the factor reducing efficiency. And its low level results in reduced national income". Reduced income, in turn, equals lower wages³³. The problem became even more severe due to the policy of "underconsumption" in 1946, named by one of the directors of the Central Planning Office and introduced at the beginning of communist rule as the basis of financing the investment plan³⁴. It meant, and it was an immanent feature of the system, keeping a disproportionately high level of accumulation at the expense of consumption.

Jędrzej Chumiński – PhD, Professor of Wrocław University of Economics. Head of the Economic History Chair. Scientific interests: social and economic history of Polish People's Republic, social structure, labour relations.

³³ J. Bobek, *Próba porównania wskaźników efektywności gospodarki polskiej i wybranych krajów w latach 1970-1985*, Z prac Zakładu Badań Statystyczno-Ekonomicznych GUS, zeszyt 171 / 1988, p. 80.

³⁴ T. Stankiewicz, *Działalność inwestycyjna państwa w Polsce w latach 1945-1947*, Warszawa 1993, p. 188-189.