

REPORTS

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REPORT FROM THE 2ND NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE ON 'WORK CULTURE', DECEMBER 1, 2022

Abstract: On December 1, 2022, the 2nd National Scientific Conference on 'Work Culture' was held at the Faculty of History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, entitled "Little Workers: Child Labor in Social-Cultural and Economic Perspectives Throughout History". The organizers of the meeting were the Department of Economic History, the Department of Eastern European History, and the Workshop of Cultural History of the Faculty of History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Due to the participation of speakers from abroad, the conference had an international character this time around.

Keywords: child labor, cultural history, academic conference

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The main goal of the debates held that day was to present the state of research on the issue of child labor in the past and to discuss the topic in the various historical-cultural aspects and contexts. The organizers wanted to draw attention to the interpretive possibilities related to acquiring new historical sources on the subject of child labor or to an inspiring interpretation of those already known.

The conference began with a welcome address by the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of History, Prof. UAM Dr. hab. Maciej Michalski. In the name of the organizers, Prof. UAM Dr. hab. Anita Napierała delivered an introductory speech. Due to the chronological scope of the presented topics, the speakers' presentations were divided into three sessions. The conference began with a panel discussion between Professor Johannes-Dieter Steinert from the University of Wolverhampton and Prof. Dr. hab. Beata Halicka from the Faculty of History at the Adam Mickiewicz

University in Poznań, whose main theme was "Forced Labor of Polish and Soviet Children under Nazi Occupation". During the discussion, the speakers discussed the circumstances of the introduction of compulsory child labor from Eastern Europe for the Third Reich and its significance in the system of exploitation of conquered territories. At the same time, they emphasized the exceptional nature of the practices used by the Nazi apparatus, which, not only served economic goals but also reinforced German dominance over dependent communities. The exchange of opinions between the panelists initiated further discussion in which the participants drew attention to the unique character of the child labor experience and the emotional problems posed by research on the issues discussed.

After a short break, the presentations by the speakers began, which were dedicated to the work of children under German occupation in Poland. The first lecture titled "(...) collecting stones in the field for a plate of soup" was given by Dr. **Beata Kozaczyńska** from the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce. The presentation focused on showing the phenomenon of excessive use of displaced children by caregivers who used their labor force, especially, in rural areas in the Garwolin, Siedlce, and Mińsk-Mazowiecki districts, despite the actions of local RGO agencies. As the lecturer pointed out, many children from Zamość region not only lacked proper care but were also exploited as an additional labor force. The next two lectures, by **Artur Ossowski** from the IPN branch in Łódź, "'Under Special Supervision:' The Work of Underage Prisoners in the German Camp for Polish Children on Przemysłowa Street in Łódź (1942-1945)" and Dr. **Olga Morozova** from the Black Sea National University in Mykolayiv "Young Workers from the Przemysłowa Camp in Łódź" The Work of Children in the Polen-Jugendverwahrlager der Sicherheitspolizei in Litzmannstadt" concentration camp was devoted to the functioning of a work camp for minors on Przemysłowa Street in Łódź. Artur Ossowski emphasized that the German occupation authorities treated children in the camp as criminal offenders, without considering the motives of their behavior or investigating the causes of the pauperization of Polish society. The speaker also drew attention to the unclear rules of operation of the camp and the interpretational differences arising from the source materials concerning the number of children residing in it. Olga Morozova, based on the letters of children in the camp, which are stored in the Museum of Polish Children in Łódź, as well as in reference to the materials of the Łódź IPN, attempted to reconstruct the living con-

ditions in the camp “on Przemysłowa.” Although a significant portion of these materials was censored, they reveal a shocking picture of the use of child labor by the Nazis.

Mgr. **Michał Krzyżaniak** from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań presented a different perspective on the issue of using Polish minors for forced labor by German occupiers in a lecture entitled “From serving ‘the Germans’ to forced labor at Focke-Wulf. A minor forced-laborer from a village near Kalisz during World War II in auto documents and oral history”. The aim of his lecture was to present the individual wartime experiences and fate of Leokadia Ratajczyk (née Jaroszevska, b. 1928, d. 2010), a minor forced-laborer, based on her oral testimonies and recorded memories of her forced labor at Focke-Wulf aircraft factory in Krzesiny during World War II. An interesting aspect of the lecture was the attention paid by the speaker to the functioning of such sources – auto documents, memories, and oral testimonies within the family circle – and the resulting interpretational problems for historians.

The second session began with a lecture by Dr. **Zuzanna Grębecka** from the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw, titled “Little Hunters in the Queue and the Shop: Children as Suppliers of Consumer Goods in the Culture of Shortages in Communist Poland”. In her presentation, Zuzanna Grębecka discussed the problem of children’s involvement in obtaining material goods for their families in the last decade of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL). In addition to presenting the general socio-economic conditions, especially the problems with obtaining basic products for Polish families during this period, the speaker analyzed the example of Legnica, where Soviet Army troops were stationed. Based on source materials – testimonies collected during two ethnographic projects on the memories of Legnica residents about the presence of the Northern Group of Soviet Army Forces in the city, as well as on childhood memories from the 1980s – she presented specific forms, ways, and motives of this phenomenon, precisely because of the presence of the aforementioned military unit in the city.

Prof. **Grzegorz Skrukwa** from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań continued the discussion on the history of the PRL with his lecture entitled “Between a Relic of the Past and a Socialist Obligation: Child and Adolescent Labor in the Light of Youth Literature of the PRL Period.” The lecture discussed the most important forms and scope of presenting child and adolescent labor in the literature for young people of that time. The speaker emphasized the importance of changes that occurred over time, as

writers' attention shifted more and more from working-class and peasant youth to intellectual youth, and thus the subject of child labor – relatively important in the Stalinist era – gradually disappeared from view.

The next papers concerned the issue of child labor in the context of the transformations that took place at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in what is now Ukraine. The first speech, titled "Working Conditions of Minors in Industrial Enterprises in Ukrainian Lands (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)," was presented by Prof. Dr. **Iryna Shandra** from the State Academy of Culture in Kharkiv. She outlined the rapid economic changes in Ukrainian lands (particularly in Donbas) that led to high rates of industrial production, numerous advances, and technical and technological innovations. However, these changes came at a high social cost, including child labor. Drawing on the memories of workers and representatives of educated classes, the speaker painted a horrific picture of the working conditions of minors who lacked adequate care for their age. The next presentation, entitled "Forced Labor of Children in Orphanages in the Ukrainian Governorates (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)," was given by Dr. Hab. **Olena Kravchenko** from the Kharkiv National University of Economics named after Semen Kuznets. The speaker discussed examples of child labor in agricultural colonies and asylums for juvenile delinquents, noting that even though these institutions were funded by the state, municipalities, and private individuals, minors were still forced to work in exchange for clothing and food. In contrast, the so-called "Olgin Houses of Industry" (named after Nicholas II's daughter Olga) stood out positively, as they provided assistance to minors in finding work. Dr. **Viktoriiia Voloshenko** from the University of Gdańsk gave a presentation entitled "Changes in Reading Practices and Living Conditions of Ukrainian Peasant Children in the Dnieper Ukraine at the Turn of the 20th Century." She discussed the reading practices and lifestyle of peasant children during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, showing how economic factors and social changes (increased mobility, new forms of economic organization, new areas of work outside traditional peasant work) influenced the formation of modern identity. According to the speaker, the analysis of socially accepted and promoted reading materials for peasant children ("what they read") allows for the reconstruction of intellectual projects of modern changes in daily life and the social role of Ukrainian peasants. The transfer of the experience gained through reading to their own lives was an important factor in the changes related to forms and methods of work, as well as identity.

Dr. **Joanna Kołat** from the University of Economics in Krakow started the third session with a presentation on "Children and Work in 15th-century Florence". In her speech, the speaker emphasized the importance and role of children's work in the overall economic development of Florence during the Quattrocento period and how it was perceived by contemporaries. Children from wealthy and well-known Florentine families were not only working within the city walls but they were also sent abroad for internships, for example, in banking and commercial institutions. Interestingly, a significant group among minors were girls employed in workshops or as servants.

Dr. **Kamil Śmiechowski** discussed the living and working conditions of children in major industrial centers in the Kingdom of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century in his talk, "Little Workers in the Big City: The Issue of Child Labor and the Urban Modernization Discourse in the Kingdom of Poland". He argued that the debates among journalists and experts at the time were part of social criticism that exaggerated various social problems typical of the capitalist stage and often took the form of a "moral panic". In his presentation, he attempted to answer questions such as whether the discourse of the time considered the comprehensive context of the problem and whether the position of children was being exploited, purely, instrumentally by those interested primarily in establishing self-government and only secondarily in addressing social problems. He also questioned whether the municipal government, if the Kingdom of Poland had been granted it, would have been able to effectively solve these problems.

Mgr. **Agata Łysakowska-Trzoss** from the Department of History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań gave a presentation entitled "'She Would Be Fit for Service, but Has No Decent Clothes:' Working Children as Beneficiaries of Celestyna Działyńska's Charitable Activities". The aim of her talk was to characterize the group of working children who directly or indirectly (e.g., through their parents) sought help from charitable organizations run by Celestyna Działyńska - the Polish Women's Charity Society in Poznań, which operated from 1845 onwards, and later, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. As the speaker emphasized, Działyńska most often helped girls who went into service - as part of her support, she provided them with basic items such as clothing, shoes, or bedding. For boys, the societies organized vocational training, recommending them to artisanal establishments where they acquired skills under the guidance of, for example, shoemakers or carpenters.

Mgr. **Maciej Duklewski** from the University of Warsaw discussed the visual representation of child labor in his talk “Working and Living Conditions of Children in Documentary Photography of the First Half of the 20th Century: A Comparison of the Works of Lewis Hine and Aleksander Minorski.” He argued that by analyzing the work of Hine and Minorski, we can see how reform movements understood the documentary value of photography in the first decades of the 20th century. Therefore, the works of both photographers were used in discussions about the prohibition of child labor, modernization of education, and improvement of living conditions for children from working-class families.

Each of the sessions concluded with discussions where the speakers responded to questions from participants and developed threads requiring further elaboration. To maintain the effects of the conference, the organizers have decided to publish selected papers in the journal “*Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*.”

Romuald Rydz is an Assistant Professor with a PhD in History. Since 1993, he has been working as a researcher at the Workshop of Cultural History in the Faculty of History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include the history of political thought, European expansion in the Early Modern Period, Atlantic History, and Transformations of Social Life at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries. He was also a co-organizer and secretary of the 2nd National Scientific Conference on ‘Work Culture’ entitled “Little Workers: Child Labor in Social-Cultural and Economic Perspectives Throughout History” which was held in Poznań on December 1, 2022.