

REVIEWS

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BOOK REVIEW: *ZIEMIE OBIECANE. ROLNICTWO DOLNEGO
ŚLĄSKA W LATACH 1945–1956
W UJĘCIU EKONOMICZNYM I HISTORYCZNYM*
[PROMISED LANDS: AGRICULTURE OF LOWER SILESIA
IN THE YEARS 1945–1956
FROM THE ECONOMIC AND HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW]

Abstract: The review of the book titled *Ziemie obiecane. Rolnictwo Dolnego Śląska w latach 1945–1956 w ujęciu ekonomicznym i historycznym* [*Promised Lands: Agriculture of Lower Silesia in the years 1945–1956 from the economic and historical point of view*] was written by Sylwia Straszak-Chandoha and published in 2021 by the Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu [Publishing House of the Wrocław University of Economics and Business]. The book describes the problem of settlement, which is rarely discussed in the literature on the subject, and, in particular, the organization of agricultural production in Lower Silesia in the first few years after the end of World War II.

Keywords: settlement, Lower Silesia, repatriation, migration, agriculture, re-emigration

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The book titled: *Promised Lands: Agriculture of Lower Silesia in the years 1945–1956 from the economic and historical point of view* was written by Sylwia Straszak-Chandoha (2021), employed at the Department of Philosophy and Economic History at the Wrocław University of Economics. Having specialized in 20th century economic history for many years, she is the author of many publications on issues pertaining to agricultural history, particularly of State Farms in Lower Silesia. However, the presented book presents issues that precede the establishment of these farms. The book

entitled: *Promised Lands: Agriculture of Lower Silesia...* is therefore an excellent complement to the author's previous scientific achievements and fills a gap in this area of research.

The "promised land" of the title is Lower Silesia, which, after World War II, in accordance with the provisions of the Potsdam Conference, found itself within the borders of Poland. The author's book deals with the agricultural economy in these areas through the years 1945–1956, with particular emphasis on the aspect of collectivization of the countryside. In keeping with the title, the book places the main emphasis on the economic and social factors of this process in conjunction with the political changes that took place in Poland during this period. The period of 1918–1939 was taken as the reference point for the analyses carried out, and this topic determined the necessity of a multi-level approach. In addition to the historical knowledge resulting from work with archival materials, the author had to demonstrate economic, legal, sociological and agricultural knowledge. Noteworthy is the fact that the book was carefully edited and beautifully published.

The monograph consists of three chapters. The first deals with agriculture and agrarian structure in Lower Silesia during the interwar period. The analysis presented on the importance of Lower Silesia's agricultural production within the German economy in the years 1919–1939 is, particularly, interesting. The author compares some aspects of this production with the results achieved in other European countries. It is worth noting that the author created this chapter based on a wide range of German-language archival and statistical sources. An interesting aspect covered in this chapter concerned how large-scale farms were parceled out during the interwar period and its impact on the agricultural productivity achieved in the area. The first chapter provides an indispensable reference point in dynamic research for the next two chapters, which constitute the main core of the work.

In the second chapter, the Author presented the concepts of settlement and the situation of agriculture in Lower Silesia after World War II. This is a continuation of research previously conducted by the Author (cf. Straszak-Chandoha, 2017). In the face of extensive war damage to the area, the reconstruction of agricultural potential became a priority. In the Eastern Bloc countries, to which Poland belonged, the process of implementing a broad package of changes aimed at improving agricultural productivity through the abolition of large-scale land ownership began at that time (cf. Janicki, 2011; Machałek, 2021). In this chapter, the author de-

scribes, extremely interestingly, the alternative agricultural concepts that were considered for the Western and Northern Territories. In the end, however, the solution of creating large-scale socialized farms was adopted. The author, in her text, highlighted the figure of economist Wincenty Stys, who played an active role in the conceptualization and implementation work in this area, especially in the creation of parcel-settlement cooperatives.

An extremely important issue, which was extensively described in this chapter, is the issue of settlement. This is a continuation of previously undertaken research by the Author (Straszak-Chandoha, 2018; 2019). The war in Ukraine has given us the opportunity to observe population migration and its economic consequences. Post-war migration in Poland was, of course, of a different nature. It is worth reading this chapter to get an idea of what parallel settlement, which was successfully implemented in Lower Silesia, consisted of and how it was carried out in practice. In addition to statistical data, the author included in this chapter not only a description of the population's adaptation processes and the problems they faced but also the opportunities from which they could have benefited. The author's recollections of the settlers from this period add color to the narrative. Brief, but extremely important for the history of Lower Silesia, is the section on the settlement of the Jewish population in the area and the re-emigration of the Polish population from Yugoslavia, France, Saxony, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Greece or Macedonia. The final pages of this chapter will provide insight into the size and impact of the matrimonial explosion in Lower Silesia in the late 1940s.

The third chapter describes the process of collectivisation of agriculture in Lower Silesia in 1949–1956. It discusses the socialisation of agriculture in Lower Silesia against the background of data for the whole country. One can learn here about the political genesis of this process. In the chapter, we learn about the political tools aimed at intensifying collectivization. Among them, the author described the level of mandatory deliveries to individual farms or tax breaks for socialized agriculture. This is a chapter for those who want to learn how State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) were established in Poland. The critical manner in which the research was conducted is evidenced by the fact that the author compares data on the socialisation of agriculture in Lower Silesia with data for Poland of that period and other socialist countries. Also noteworthy is that section of Chapter Three, which describes the phenomenon of the mass dissolution of cooperatives in 1956.

The issue of food self-sufficiency is, for that matter, important for the society of any country today. However, in the postwar period, it was of crucial importance. In her argument, the author asks whether the state's concentrated efforts on industrialisation and the collectivisation measures taken, in any way, affected the pace of agricultural development at that time. To answer these questions, the production efficiency of individual and socialised agriculture was compared in the years 1945–1956. It is worth emphasising that the author analysed the manufacturing base of Lower Silesia in 1949–1956 based not only on official statistics but also on materials stored in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance – declassified just a few years ago. Arguably, Sylwia Straszak-Chandoha's analysis is one of the first studies of this material. It is worth noting that the results of the quantitative research were combined with an analysis of the political situation and the decisions made regarding the organization of agricultural production in Poland.

In conclusion, the author comprehensively answers two fundamental research questions: 1) whether the structure of agriculture in Lower Silesia, the existing technical equipment, the agrotechnical culture, which had been shaped in the interwar period in a different system model, were adapted in the new political and social conditions; 2) what scope and what effects did collectivisation bring in Lower Silesia in 1945–1956. Certainly, the perception of the text would have been easier if these questions had appeared earlier in the introduction. On the other hand, the editorial procedure of omitting a clear presentation of hypotheses and research questions in the introduction means that the author leaves space for the reader to study the sources presented and draw conclusions on their own. The methodological approach adopted makes this book different from the academic publications on the peasantry currently popular in Poland (cf. Wyżga, 2022; Kuciel-Frydryszak, 2023). It is not a book written around a ready-made thesis, which is a manifestation of the great respect that Sylwia Straszak-Chandoha has for her readers.

The book is an excellent lexicon of sources for research on agriculture in this area. The list of archival materials used to write this text is admirable. This is the strongest point of this book. In addition to Polish-language archives, the list also includes German sources relating to the interwar period. The author also uses data published by the Central Statistical Office and tables prepared by other authors. Another great value of this book is that the author carefully cites sources, does not mix

data from different sources, but focuses on their criticism and comparison. Thanks to this, the reader can use these sources on his own when writing works on agriculture in Lower Silesia. Especially since the author does not try to create her own indicators and does not use quantitative methods. The book can therefore be a starting point for further research in the area of post-war agriculture in Lower Silesia.

The economic history of border lands is always complicated and, therefore, extremely interesting. The history of Alsace, Tyrol, Carinthia and Styria, Silesia, Warmia and Masuria and many other regions shows how strongly political decisions influence the socio-economic situation. They are difficult to study due to the lack of data during the period of administrative changes, the availability of source documents in different languages or the adoption of different metric systems, which make it difficult to compare data. Prof. Sylwia Straszak-Chandocha took up this task and successfully completed it. Certainly the results of the research presented in the book entitled: *Promised Lands: Agriculture of Lower Silesia in 1945–1956...* can be a great starting point for further analysis in dynamic and international perspective.

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