

DEMOCRACY – COMMUNITY – SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF POLISH COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

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Abstract: This article discusses the most recent publishing projects devoted to the history and intellectual accomplishments of the Polish cooperative movement before 1939. It illustrates the political dimension of the concept of cooperation, the need to deepen the research on the symbolic universe of the movement and the effect which defining the peripheral status of the Polish economy had on the development of the economic analyses of the Polish cooperators. The political philosophy of Polish cooperativism, created primarily by Edward Abramowski, in many respects exceeds the limitations characteristic for the classical modern ideologies of the political left-wing, thanks to which it inscribes in the process of “inventing tradition” by the modern emancipation movements in Poland.

Keywords: cooperativism, Edward Abramowski, democracy, Polish cooperative movement, radicalism.

Maria Dąbrowska, one of the most prominent Polish writers of the first half of the 20th century, nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in literature, assessed the first seven years of the Polish state's independence after WWI as follows: "The ideas of Abramowski – consciously or unconsciously – permeate everything great, wise or good that happens in Poland" (Dąbrowska 2014, 45). While this assessment is marked by journalistic exaggeration, admittedly, the influence of Edward Abramowski, a non-partisan intellectual (for most of his adult life), who performed no public function (aside from almost three last years of his life when he was a psychology professor at the University of Warsaw) in Polish social life, was much greater than one might surmise from a brief analysis of his biography (Dobrzycka 1991; Lange 1928; Augustyniak 2006). The ideas of Abramowski inspired and became a program credo for a large section of the mass cooperative movement, which influenced hundreds of thousands of citizens of the Second Republic of Poland. Unfortunately, both the memory regarding Abramowski himself as well as the grand scale and accomplishments of the pre-war Polish cooperation have been but forgotten. Due to the fact that, in a formal sense, the cooperative movement was a vital element of the economy of "state socialism" before 1989, contemporary Poles do not have positive associations with it. They view it as a relic of the old system and often identify it with inner cliques, low economic effectiveness and the rough decor of the "Spolem" cooperative stores, which have been pushed out of the market by competition in the form of foreign chain stores. It is a sad assessment of the movement whose goal was the total re-structuring of social relations and a peaceful abolishment of capitalism. During a cooperative convention in 1923, Romuald Mielczarski – aside from Abramowski, a key patron of the Polish cooperative movement and one of the creators of the aforementioned "Spolem" – said the following when explaining the goals of cooperation and the strategies to fight capitalism:

Cooperation states that [...] the existence of capitalism is entirely in the hands of consumers and this unjust system can be gradually ousted by the cooperative system, if only consumers, uniting in consumer associations, take trade and production into their own hands. [...] Capitalism indeed possesses terrifyingly large means in comparison with the consumer. [...] We must remind ourselves, however, that all that wealth at capital's disposal is nothing other than collected profit. Let consumers, organizing in their own associations, step by step deprive capital of profit and let that profit be changed into common capital, and the relation of forces will change overnight in favor of the consumers. Capitalism will lose ground and cooperation will gain it (Blesznowski 2017, 131–132).

A spectacular historical failure of the cooperative movement, so ambitious in its original goals, should not, however, eclipse its historical significance and its impact on the social, economic and ideological changes of the inter-war period, when it could function freely and boom. This is also the position of the authors and editors of the volumes published last year, devoted to the history of Polish cooperativism: Bartłomiej Blesznowski (*Cooperativism and Democracy: Selected Works of Polish Thinkers*), Filip Karol Leszczyński (*Spółdzielczość jako organizacja gospodarcza w II RP. Wybór pism*) [Cooperativism as an Economic Organization in the Second Republic of Poland. Selected Works] and Aleksandra Bilewicz (*Spółem 1906-1939. Idea, ludzie, organizacja*, vol. 1–2) [Spółem 1906–1939. The Idea, People, Organization]. These works have a prime documentary function as few sources have been published so far on the history of pre-war cooperativism. Combined, they can be an exhaustive body of knowledge about the history of Polish cooperativism and at the same time – as we will see – an inspiration for further research.

Cooperation, or the moral revolution

The special position, which the aforementioned Edward Abramowski held in the history of the Polish cooperative movement, did not stem from his organizational achievements. Despite the ambitious forecasts of theoreticians, in 1918, when Abramowski was dying, the consumer cooperative in the territory of the Congress Kingdom was still relatively poorly developed, and its future, due to the course of military operations and political turmoil, uncertain (Żerkowski 1961, 17–19). Let us note that the activists anticipating the “Cooperative Republic” were mostly fascinated by numbers, statistical compilations documenting increases of turnover, assets and the number of association members. Abramowski directly contributed to their growth only to a small degree. While he was one of the founders of the intelligentsia Towarzystwo Kooperatystów [*Association of Cooperators*] (Chyra-Rolicz 1989) and published in the early cooperative press, he basically did not participate in the current organizational activity. Nevertheless, he made a special contribution to the Polish cooperative movement – not only did he translate the basic principles of cooperation derived from the Rochdale tradition to the Polish reality but, most of all, he attempted to give cooperativism the status of *sui generis* political philosophy. It is thanks to this that the Polish consumer cooperatives movement did not end up in the next decades as simple “store-keeping”. By maintaining its clear ideological identity, it was able to keep its independent position in the conditions of the polarized political scene of the Second Republic of Poland (see: Polonsky 1972; Wynot 1974).

Abramowski embarked on his political activity in the 1880s as a socialist and a Marxist. In November 1892, he participated in the founding congress of the Polish Socialist Party. However, during his stay in Switzerland, he had an ideological crisis and ultimately abandoned Marxism, becoming one of the most eloquent critics of socialism of the Second International period in Europe at that time. One of his students, Konstanty Krzeczkowski, later commented on this transformation:

He left as an Orthodox Marxist and party activist, and was returning with a new theory of stateless socialism, which was his own and apolitical, he was returning as an utopian supporter of an immediate incorporation of the ideas of communism and statelessness, as an anarchist, although he may not have wanted to realize that (Krzeczkowski 1924, XXVI).

Abramowski accused the European socialist movement, which was flourishing at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, of an economic determinism, succumbing to the bourgeois morality as well as fetishizing the institution of the state and treating it *de facto* as the subject of the socialist transformation (Abramowski 1904; see also Piskala 2014, 67–73). Moreover, he pointed out that the socialist parties, having gained increasingly more parliamentary influence and ability to affect government policy, essentially were not moving the realization of socialism forward, as their leaders claimed; on the contrary, they were reinforcing the ties between the working class and the existing order. At the same time, he also criticized various forms of Blanquism – a belief that a revolutionary seizure of power, which would allow the ultimate removal of obstacles holding back a society of universal freedom and social justice, was the cure for compliance eating at the European socialism. Abramowski felt that the consumer cooperative movement could overcome the crisis of emancipation politics outlined in such a way. It combined a practical fight against capitalism (by reducing trade profit) with real direct democracy practiced in voluntary associations, and a gradual “moral revolution” – the transformation of an individual’s consciousness without which any social change of an emancipatory nature would be unthinkable.

Cooperation is the highest form of socialization. Abramowski studied its traces in individual humans and sought forms of activity which through the individual, through respect for individual needs and the exploitation of the creative energy of the entity, would give birth to a higher, more democratic form of communal life–“more democratic” meaning the kind where the particular elements and the collective are as close to one another as possible. This did not mean, however, a return toward collectivism in the pattern familiar to him from, among other places, the writings of many of his contemporary socialist thinkers; it was rather a matter of an original “social individualism,” which in fulfilling Fourier’s dream pins the individual will to collective sense and action (Blesznowski 2017, 27–28).

Blesznowski, in his preface to the volume *Cooperativism and Democracy*, while reconstructing the intellectual sources of the Polish cooperativism reveals its clearly heterodox nature. Polish cooperativism was influenced, among others, by utopian socialism which experimented with new forms of communal organization, Proudhonian and Kropotkin's mutualism as well as syndicalism with which it supposedly shared the "immanence genesis of political change" contrasted with the concept of an objective historical process that organized the strategic thinking of socialists at the time (Blesznowski 2017, 29). It is noteworthy that Marxist socialism was also an important reference point for Polish cooperativism in the following decades: on the one hand, they both criticized the main elements of capitalism and socialists were viewed as potentially close political allies; on the other, Abramowski and Mielczarski's students rejected the concept of class cooperativism proclaimed by socialists, according to which the cooperative associations were to become yet another tool in the class warfare waged by the working class under the leadership of the socialist party. According to Abramowski's views, cooperatives played a much more significant role – they were to become a type of laboratory for the new social order, areas where the post-capitalist form of cohabitation could be practiced without considering the "objective" premises of the new order, fetishized by the socialist of the Second International. Abramowski, expressing this notion of the immanent essence of the social transformation, wrote:

For the moral revolution, this core of every social transformation, to actually happen, communism must take over people to such a degree that their life, their customs, their private and everyday matters, would speak that they are communists, a new type of people, of new revolutionary morality; once among them, one could immediately feel that it is a new human world which has nothing to do with the bourgeois world, a social life developing on completely new rules, governed by new impulses and moral factors (Abramowski 1965, 190).

This far advanced radicalism of goals resulted in the fact that the cooperative idea could be found – according to Blesznowski – in various sections of the rich tradition of the 20th century modernist "grand narratives", fueled with the utopian desire for a total transformation of the society and establishment of a stable, harmonious order, securing freedom and well-being for the individual. Cooperativism was, however, a "pragmatic utopia", attempting to overcome the tension between the idea and the notion of the future order, and everyday practicality and pragmatic motives, between the grand ultimate goal and even the slightest positive social changes. It also allowed for maintaining the basic integrity of the Polish cooperative movement despite profound ideological and political differences which divided its leaders or its environment (Blesznowski 2017, 43-44). Hence, it was embraced both by the "pragmatics", mainly focused on multiplying the resources of

the cooperative and improving the economic circumstances of its members, and the “idealists”, primarily invested in the question of the “moral revolution”, which was to be realized by practicing cooperation (see also Kędziorek 1969).

From cooperatives to a mass social movement

In independent Poland, this idea of “pan-cooperativism”, which drew primarily from the social philosophy of Abramowski, was mostly propagated and executed by the Związek Spółdzielni Spożyców RP [*Association of Consumers' Cooperative in the Republic of Poland*], commonly referred to as “Spolem” – from the name of its primary journal (in 1935, the word “Spolem” was officially incorporated into the name of the organization). In the inter-war period, “Spolem” was the largest sales organization in Poland and at its peak in the late '30s, it included nearly two thousand cooperatives, almost three thousand stores and about four hundred thousand members (Bilewicz 2017, 91; Żerkowski 1961, 80). Not only did “Spolem” have a chain of stores offering the cooperative’s members cheap and good-quality products (counterfeiting foodstuffs was a huge problem in retail trade at the time) but according to Abramowski and his successors’ vision of ousting private capital from economic life, it also made successful attempts at creating cooperative factories (manufacturing sweets, fruit products, cosmetics, etc.), and even founded its own bank (Chyra-Rolicz 1985, 100–102). However, the significance of “Spolem” went far beyond what could be gleaned from economic statistics.

“Spolem”, saturated with the idea of “pan-cooperativism”, radically critical of capitalism and pursuing its internal transformation, was not only an economic organization but first of all, a mass social movement. Aleksandra Bilewicz accentuates it strongly in the introduction to the anthology on the history of Polish consumer cooperatives before 1939 (Bilewicz 2017, vol. 1). In certain aspects, this is a pioneer work offering a fresh look at the history of the Polish cooperativism. While the previous research, conducted primarily before 1989 and prior to the system transformation, concentrated mainly on the history of the organizational structures of cooperatives and on the quantitative analysis of their development, this anthology compiled by Bilewicz is an interesting attempt at an introduction to the research on the cultural and social history of the cooperative movement. Bilewicz aims to show “Spolem” not only as a complex of collegial management bodies but, most of all, as a movement based on certain types of social ties, offering its participants a wide range of experiences while employing interesting symbolic forms in its everyday activity (see: Gurney 1996).

It is worth remembering that it was predominantly intelligentsia reformers, often university-educated, who were the pioneers and the first organizers of cooperatives in the Polish land. Until 1939, the representatives of this group played *de facto* managerial functions in cooperative headquarters. Nevertheless, “Społem” quickly took on a mass character and became unequivocally plebeian – the majority of cooperators were recruited from peasants, workers, craftsmen or lower rank officials (Chyra-Rolicz 1992, 47). Hence, the movement went far beyond the intelligentsia “ghetto” while elitism and paternalism, typical for the Polish intelligentsia tradition, started to vanish (see Chalasiński 1946). Cooperatives were essentially becoming a tool of partial economic emancipation but also social liberation by subverting traditional hierarchies of prestige, especially in rural and small town environments, while creating channels of social advancement for a certain group of activists of a plebeian origin.

As a mass movement recruiting new participants and sympathizers primarily among the representatives of common people, “Społem” employed rich and suggestive symbolic instruments in its everyday activity and agitation for cooperative ideas. Thus, various kinds of celebrations were organized aimed at reinforcing identification with the movement and its goals. Also, numerous propaganda materials were circulated, such as fliers, posters, brochures, postcards, etc., whose accessible and clever forms disseminated the values and postulates of the consumers’ cooperatives. A number of them was re-printed in the anthology compiled by Bilewicz in the form of illustrations or source excerpts (e.g. fragments of poetry or drama devoted to the cooperative ideals, didactic stories or “decalogs” of cooperation principles). When commenting on these types of texts and rituals, Bilewicz suggests that the structures of “Społem” fostered a peculiar system of cooperative education shaping a spirit conducive to cooperation, active participation in deciding about the fate of the community, an open discussion and empowerment. It is noteworthy that the cooperative propaganda also frequently invoked the metaphors and cultural codes of religious genesis, relatively close and easily understood by the majority of the participants and potential sympathizers of the movement whose cultural socialization typically had taken place within the community of Roman-Catholic church. For agitation purposes, there were creative attempts at adapting, for example, traditional carols, religious formulas and elements of Christian iconography (e.g. at Christmas, the birth of the “consumers’ cooperation” was modeled after the birth of Jesus in a symbolic manger). As a result, the idea of cooperativism underwent a kind of sacralization while injecting a propaganda message, as might be expected, with additional persuasion. It is worth adding that such adaptations of religious symbols were not an exception – for instance, the Polish socialist movement employed similar devices. However, it should be pointed out that once the position of “Społem” stabilized and the first “heroic” period of propagating the ideas of the consumers’

cooperatives had ended, the emotional temperature of agitation texts and materials produced by the movement somewhat cooled down.

With time, the tone of the cooperative press became less emotional (earlier it could be at times rather exaggerated) and more factual and practical. The language of impulse, change, ardent belief in “shaking the world at its core” and a nearly religious exaltation, which is characteristic for the initial phase of the development of a social movement, subsided, at least partly, to the rhetoric highlighting the role of an effective organization or planned action. While at this stage of its development, the Association made sure that the rationalization of actions did not replace idealism and drive, nevertheless, education started to be based primarily on transferring specialized knowledge and providing specific skills (Bilewicz 2017, 144).

The second volume of Bilewicz’s anthology also presents sample instruction materials, advice and practical pointers for the local activists or potential cooperatives’ creators. What is particularly striking about them, and simultaneously, what was fundamentally characteristic for the Polish cooperativism overall, was a strong awareness that there were weaknesses in the conducted activity and a readiness for continuous improvement. A certain kind of (self)critical discourse was one of the key threads in the Polish cooperators’ press. They often devoted as much attention to discussing positive perspectives afforded by communal cooperative activity as listing and characterizing any possible pathologies and threats resulting from the association’s activity (e.g. Jan Wolski, the propagator of labor cooperatives, see: Wolski 2015). This is one of the key conclusions after reading six hundred pages of documents on the history of “Spolem”, compiled and edited by Bilewicz: although the Polish cooperators knew the value of their accomplishments and were hopeful about the growth of their movement, they were far from sedating self-satisfaction or naive optimism. It seems that its openness to a democratic, unbridled discussion protected Polish cooperativism against these diseases eating at a number of radical movements fueled by the faith in the future transformation of the society. Democracy was not simply proclaimed in the program manifestos but usually it was actually practiced, from the lowest rank to the top of the organizational hierarchy.

Cooperativism as a program of economic modernization

Undoubtedly, “Społem” was not only one of the strongest and most numerous cooperative centrals in the Second Republic of Poland but certainly the most effective in terms of propaganda as well. What distinguished it was also the fact that it inscribed cooperation into a wide project of transforming social relations. However, “Społem” was only one segment of a diverse landscape of the Polish cooperativism in the inter-war period. The diversity applied both to ideology, which has been mentioned, but also the “industry”. In inter-war Poland, aside from the consumers’ cooperatives often animated by radically-oriented activists, other cooperatives also flourished. Agricultural cooperatives conducted sales, processed agricultural products and facilitated purchases of tools, seeds, fertilizers, etc. There were savings and credit cooperatives popularized by, among others, Franciszek Stefczyk (see: Stefczyk 2017), or housing and labor cooperatives. Such multi-dimensional picture of the inter-war cooperativism emerges from the volume *Spółdzielczość jako organizacja gospodarcza w II RP*, edited by Filip Karol Leszczyński. The work gives voice to the cooperative activists summarizing the economic condition of the movement and searching for ways to accelerate its expansion. Leszczyński complements these reflections with a wider, systemic context of the activity of the inter-war cooperativism. While in legal terms, its developmental capabilities were secured (Chyra-Rolicz 1992, 34), the economic reality of the inter-war Poland was not conducive to the cooperators’ activity.

Drafting their vision of the “Cooperative Republic”, Abramowski and his successors seemed to assume that the cooperatives, based on the mass consumption of staples by the associated clients, would somehow be separated from the capitalist market and as such, secured from its inherent risk or unpredictability. However, such a notion could only last in the reality of a good and relatively stable economic situation of the years preceding WWI. The inter-war period brought a realization that cooperatives were strongly dependent on economic fluctuations and any complications faced by the domestic economy also directly affected them. The revived Poland was struggling with chronic inflation (which lasted until 1924) and the consequences of military losses. After a short period of prosperity, in 1929, it plunged into another six years of deep crisis as a direct result of the collapse of the world economy, which was much longer and devastating – in light of key macroeconomic indices – than it was in the case of a vast majority of European countries.¹

¹ For instance, the industrial production index between 1928 and 1932 decreased by 41%, unemployment in cities reached around 1 million, the budget deficit for the entire period of the crisis (1929–1935) totaled 1.35 billion zloty (over 50% of the annual budget spending in that period) while the consumption of the most numerous social group — peasants — decreased by half compared to the last year prior to the crisis. (Aldcroft 2006, 112-113; Landau and Tomaszewski 1999, 187–247).

Under the pressure of such circumstances, the criticism of capitalism developed by the Polish cooperative movement became deepened and nuanced. It was necessary to go beyond the rational criticism of the excessive chain of middlemen, promises to break down capitalism by intercepting trade profit by consumers' cooperatives and general arguments about the benefits of combining small sums for the greater good. The texts of inter-war theoreticians and practitioners of cooperativism compiled by Leszczyński presented two alternative models of organizing economic life: one, based on the logic to maximize profit; and the other, on the fundamental drive to maximize social benefits. The analyses conducted by cooperators also outlined an argumentation which in a way foreshadowed subsequent theories of dependence several decades later. As noted by Polish cooperators, the market principle of maximizing profit not only meant giving consent to social injustice but in the conditions of the delayed economy of inter-war Poland, it essentially led to the preservation of its peripheral or semi-peripheral status. Capitalists, interested in multiplying their own profits, fundamentally are not prone to taking risks or capital-intensive investments in the sectors far beyond the roles "prescribed" to the (semi-)peripheral Polish economy in the international division of labor. According to cooperative theoreticians, the opposite process was to be expected – the market logic of maximizing profit is mostly conducive to directing investments to raw materials and low-processed manufacturing based on natural resources and cheap labor. In other words, despite basing Polish capitalism on the principles resembling those in the Western Europe, it was too weak and behind to offer hope for expanding the internal market, a rapid improvement of the population's standard of living or alleviating social inequalities. The cooperative writers included by Leszczyński noted that this goal could only be achieved thanks to a rational management of any available resources and the assumption that the aim of an economy should be the best possible satisfaction of the society's needs. Cooperatives were supposed to follow these principles and so should – at least potentially – the state. Hence, it is not surprising that the program drafted by Marian Rapacki in 1935 in response to the great crisis which clearly had exposed the discrepancy between the capital goals and the social interests, it was the state and the cooperative economy that were defined as the drivers of the country's modernization – a modernization whose primary goal was supposed to be the expansion of the internal market, improving the population's standard of living as well as bridging stark social inequalities. Without this – argued Rapacki – it was impossible to break the vicious cycle of backwardness but also to consolidate the newly regained independence:

I strongly believe that both for the whole world and particularly for Poland, the system transformation is simply a matter of existence, not only because the welfare of a great number of individuals must be improved but also so that our country can exist. It shall be a weak and vapid state and it shall crumble if it tolerates the poverty of millions of its citizens. This poverty and destitution cannot be eradicated unless the present relations are rebuilt. (Leszczyński 2017, 232).

Cooperativism – an invented tradition?

The three anthologies discussed, particularly their prefaces penned by Blesznowski, Bilewicz and Leszczyński offer a fresh look at the history of the Polish cooperative movement. Their authors audaciously go beyond the framework set to the reflection on the Polish pre-war cooperativism by the previous historiography typically concentrated on factual data, recreation of organizational structures or reports on the contents of the cooperative press. The authors of these works attempt to inscribe the history of the Polish cooperativism into a new conceptual system borrowed, for instance, from various takes on the modernization processes and expansion of market relations, from reflections on heterodox economic and political thought or the social and cultural history. It seems that the latter perspective is particularly worth pursuing. The historiographical landscape of various radical and plebeian political movements operating in Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries remains incomplete since the focus has primarily been on the history of organizations, their leaders' actions and official ideologies. We know much less about the motivations of anonymous activists, the affective dimensions of their engagement, the ties between them or everyday symbolic practices which often had as much effect on the face of the movement as resolutions of managements or debates of publicists. Naturally, writing this type of multidimensional history of Polish cooperativism will not be easy, mostly due to the fact that few source materials have been preserved (as a consequence of the military destruction), however, Bilewicz's outline on "Społem" illustrates that this is a worthwhile effort. The materials which she has compiled, supported with an archival and librarian query, and perhaps even microhistorical outlines carefully analyzing the functioning of individual cooperative communities could be an entirely sufficient foundation of such an attempt characterizing the consumers' cooperative movement.

Finally, it should be noted that an increase in interest in the history of Polish cooperativism in recent years not only has a scientific significance but also seems to have a certain political dimension. Although the authors of the discussed works reliably present the ideological diversity of Polish cooperativism, and aside from such radicals as Abramowski, Jan Hempel or Maria Orsetti, they also include the texts of the authors

leaning to the right-wing, such as Catholic priest Aleksander Wóycicki or Edward Taylor, it is still clear that they are most interested in the anti-market, communal, participatory and egalitarian threads present in the tradition of Polish cooperativism. From the perspective of the authors of these three anthologies, the history of cooperativism is not only a distant past submitted to dry research but also a source of examples still inspiring to think about politics, economics and alternative solutions of social organization. This might be the lens to consider an expression of “inventing tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) by contemporary progressive and emancipation-oriented circles (including the movement of the so-called “new cooperativism” [see: Bilewicz and Potkańska 2013]) in Poland, suffering from a lack of clear and direct antecedents due to the broken historical continuity in the four past decades of the “state socialism”. However, if this type of “inventing tradition” was to go beyond the process of adopting certain symbolic forms, deepening of historical self-knowledge and seeking ways to reinforce a positive auto-identification while becoming a reference point in the face of contemporary political dilemmas, it seems that the history of Polish cooperativism could be a particularly rewarding matter. Although, as Blesznowski points out, cooperativism should be categorized with the group of modern political ideas drawing from 19th century optimism and dreams of perfecting the organization of society, the program texts of cooperators and the practices devised almost one hundred years earlier still seem to match rather well the challenges faced by the contemporary emancipation movements forced to manage without a universal, class entity of expected systemic change, plurality of political identities, previously unknown subtlety of capitalism’s adapting mechanisms and progressive erosion of traditional forms of organization and political activity. It appears that in such circumstances, certain elements deciding about the face of the Polish cooperative movement decades earlier – such as pragmatism, perceiving inherent value in the process of cooperation, focus on an individual, horizontality, orientation towards creating spaces excluded from the influence of the market logic, locating sources of possible social change in social practices and not in the activity of determinisms or in a revolutionary crisis, and finally, an ideological openness and program pluralism – can render its historical and theoretical legacy surprisingly up-to-date. Hence, the works produced by Blesznowski, Bilewicz and Leszczyński will serve not only to historians, concerned with the past, but also to activists, practically oriented and hopefully looking into the future.

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Kamil Piskala – historyk, w 2017 roku obronił doktorat ze współczesnej historii Polski na Uniwersytecie Łódzkim. Jego zainteresowania badawcze koncentrują się na historii ruchów pracowniczych i socjalistycznej ideologii dwudziestego wieku, historii ludowej oraz ideach politycznych.

TYTUŁ: Demokracja – wspólnota – sprawiedliwość społeczna. Teoria i praktyka polskiego ruchu spółdzielczego pomiędzy dwoma wojnami światowymi.

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł dotyczy najnowszych projektów wydawniczych poświęconych historii i ideom polskiego ruchu spółdzielczego sprzed 1939 roku. Autor skupia się na politycznym aspekcie pojęcia spółdzielczości, potrzebie pogłębienia badań nad symbolicznym uniwersum ruchu oraz nad skutkiem, jaki na rozwój ekonomicznych analiz polskich spółdzielców miało zdefiniowanie peryferyjnego statusu polskiej gospodarki. Polityczna filozofia polskiego kooperatywności, opracowana głównie przez Edwarda Abramowskiego, pod wieloma względami wymyka się ograniczeniom charakterystycznym dla klasycznie nowoczesnych ideologii politycznej lewicy, dzięki czemu na trwale wpisała się w proces „wynajdywania tradycji” przez nowoczesne ruchy emancypacyjne w Polsce.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: kooperatywność, Edward Abramowski, demokracja, polski ruch spółdzielczy, radykalizm.