

Sewing Machines, Innovation and Consumers in Russia, 1852–1914

Pavel Pokidko,

Independent Researcher,
Graduate Faculty of History of the European
University in Saint-Petersburg,
e-mail: pavel.pokidko.85@mail.ru

Abstract:

I consider the process of promoting and using the sewing machines in late Imperial Russia (1852–1914). I focus on social development processes leading to the deep integration of sewing into the everyday life. Success in spreading the innovations in sewing machines based upon the transfer of production and merchandising ideas to Russia creating multiple new opportunities to solve the consumers' everyday life problems. My objective is to study the changes intimated by applying the sewing machines and leading towards the emerging industrial society. Consumers' reaction to the suggested innovations played a key role in developing the innovation and influenced its further modifications. Advertising the innovations changed the mass consumers' opinions. Possibilities to sew various items, such as sails, harnesses, clothes made the sewing machine an important invention undergoing constant changes faster than any other gadget in the epoch considered.

Key words: Sewing machine, innovation, buyers, Singer, newspapers, advertising support, Russia.

■

УДК 725.4
ББК 66.1

Петр Кулиговский,
Институт истории, Университет имени Адама Мицкевича,
докторант,
e-mail: piotr.kuligowski.1990@gmail.com

Между адом и раем.

Концепт индустриальной цивилизации в политическом дискурсе польских домарксистских левых (1830–1860-е гг.)

Основная цель этой статьи – объяснить значение концепта (точнее, комплекса концептов) индустриальной цивилизации в дискурсе ранних левых движений в Польше, т. е. в период 1830–1860-х годов. В число исследуемых концептов входят, в частности, пролетариат, развитие, машины и труд. Применительно к политическому дискурсу тех, на чьих трудах основана статья (это, например, Эдмунд Хоецкий, Хенрик Каменский и Людвиг Кроликовский) можно указать, что в этот период выделяются три основных подхода к индустриальной цивилизации: негативный, умеренный и позитивный. Многомерность рассуждений Хоецкого, Каменского и Кроликовского на эту тему была усилена особой экономической ситуацией в польских землях и тяжелыми условиями, с которыми мыслителям пришлось столкнуться в изгнании. Более того, их идеи были в некоторой степени вдохновлены радикальными французскими мыслителями того времени.

Ключевые слова: история концептов, индустриальный, польские левые, пролетариат, рай.

Between Hell and the Kingdom of God. The Concept of Industrial Civilization in the Political Discourse of the Polish Pre-Marxist Left (1830s-1860s)

Piotr Kuligowski,

Institute of History,

Adam Mickiewicz University,

PhD Candidate,

e-mail: piotr.kuligowski.1990@gmail.com

Abstract:

The main aim of the following paper is to interpret the meaning of the concept (or, more precisely – the cluster of concepts) of industrial civilization within the discourse of the Polish early left, that is to say, in the period of the 1830s-1860s. Therefore, I examine understanding of such concepts as, for instance, proletariat, development, machine and labour. Referring to the political discourse of my protagonists (eg. Edmund Chojecki, Henryk Kamieński, or Ludwik Królikowski), I indicate that in this period one can distinguish three main approaches to the industrial civilization: negative, moderate, and positive one. The multidimensionality of their reflections on this sphere was being deepened by the specific character of the economy on Polish lands and by the situation of difficult living conditions in exile that they had to face. What is more, their thoughts were to some extent inspired by the French radical thought in this period.

Key words: the history of concepts, industry, Polish left-wing, proletariat, the Kingdom of God.

The main aim of the following paper is to interpret the meaning of the concept (or, more precisely – the cluster of concepts) of industrial civilization within the discourse of the Polish early left, that is to say, in the period of the 1830s-1860s. In the research question defined in this way, certain semantic problems emerged. First and foremost, many political concepts in the epoch, because of their rapid change in that period of transition, are ‘Janus-faced’ for a contemporary researcher due to their ambiguities. Within the cluster of concepts, which are coupled with the widely understood industrial civilization, the concept of industry seems to be of particularly importance. Therefore, the Polish word ‘*przemysł*,’ as well as the French ‘*l’industrie*,’ could be understood, depending on the context, both as ‘handcraft’ and as ‘modern industry.’ A good example in this case could be an article of the Polish early socialist Adam Gurowski, in which the author stated that in Slavdom *przemysł* has shined and ruled for many centuries. Thereby, for Gurowski *przemysł* meant the very organization of productive work¹. Similar ambiguity appears when one regards the concept of proletariat, because in this time this concept was interpreted more often in the pre-modern way, so as the name of the poorest stratum in ancient Roman society. In Polish political thought, probably only at the turn of the 1850s and 1860s, the concept of proletariat began to be combined with the modern indus-

¹ ‘Przyszłość’, 1/1834, p. 24.

trial working class¹. Another obstacle is stuck in the fact that an important part of representatives of the first generation of the Polish left had been writing their articles both in Polish and in French. As a result, in certain cases there exist differences between those two linguistic contexts. For instance, in texts written by my protagonists in French, the frequency of using the concept of proletariat seems to be higher than in those ones published in Polish.

Representatives of the early Polish left elaborated their attitudes towards the industrial civilization in special circumstances. After 1831, when the Polish November Uprising was finally defeated, many of them settled in Western countries, where they encountered issues unknown to them previously, such as proletariat, industry, workers strikes, and pauperism². It is of particular importance here that despite of the noble origins of many of them, they were forced to make a living faced with a new reality. Consequently, some former Polish soldiers were deskilled, sometimes working in laundry or on the railways. Therefore, their observations and reflections were created not only as theoretical speculations, but also on the basis of tough and hard experiences.

Finally, in these introductory remarks one more thing ought to be added: one could say that in this period the industrial civilization was only at the early stage of development, and thus their attitude to these problems referred especially to earlier forms of production, such as craftsmanship. Notwithstanding, I am inclined to claim that in this time of transition specific problems are visible to the actors in other, maybe more unexpected aspects and ways than in the time of established political or economic structures. Moreover, according to a variety of indicators, it was exactly the time when, for instance, cities were developing faster than ever before.

My protagonists formulated varied statements referring to the industrial civilization. All in all, one can distinguish three main approaches here: negative, moderate, and positive ones. Therefore, part of the Polish left-wing thinkers (for example Edmund Chojecki, Jan-Kanty Podolecki) were convinced that industrial civilization as such was a 'true hell,' and for this reason they claimed that Poles ought to do their best to protect their native, agricultural landscape against the detrimental, industrial influences from West. Chojecki in his reflections based himself on analysis of concrete events, so on the observation of the living condition of proletariat in Belgium and in France, and especially on the

¹ I have written about that: P. Kuligowski, *Ouvriers, prolettrjat, czy stan czwarty? Konceptualizacje klasy robotniczej w kregach polskiej lewicy (1832–1892)*, 'Praktyka Teoretyczna', 1 (23)/2017, p. 160–194.

² However, the problem of pauperism had already begun to be discussed in some works in the 1820s. See: J. Jedlicki, *Polskie nurty ideowe lat 1790–1863 wobec cywilizacji Zachodu*, in: 'Swojskość i cudzoziemszczyzna w dziejach kultury polskiej', ed. Z. Stefanowska, Warszawa 1973, p. 202.

activity of these groups during the violent incidents of the 1848's revolutions¹. In another way, without these more empirical references, this question was analysed by a groups of Polish democrats, notably by Podolecki. His articles, presumably often written with a few co-authors, were in fact sophisticated analyses of the Polish way of development. Groups of authors, lead by Podolecki and consisting of the most distinguished ideologists of Polish Democratic Society, wrote a few comprehensive articles about this problem. They published these texts in a specific time: it was shortly after the Galician Slaughter, that is to say, after the biggest peasant uprising in European history after the French Revolution. So, regarding their intuitions, one may see this theoretical activity as a polemic with right-wing authors, who accused the democrats of alleged inciting peasantry to a bloody revolt. Therefore, Podolecki and his collaborators argued that Poland had a different trajectory of development than Western countries, because the Polish progress should be based on villages, whereas the Western one – on cities and industry. A group of three authors (as well as Podolecki, also Wojciech Darasz and Stanisław Worcell) presented the same theses also in French, in the international journal 'Le proscrit.' According to them, such phenomena as proletariat or bourgeois are not known in Polish history. What is more, they considered the 'social face of the Polish question' only in the categories of progressive transformation of the Polish people, or, more precisely, the peasantry². For democrats, the progress was coupled not only with the level of economic development, but also with the existence of constitutional order or political and individual liberties. In one of the articles, published in the main journal of Polish democrats, an anonymous author claimed that Haiti after the revolution was more developed than Europe, because Haitians established civil rights which were better than European ones³.

The second group, which I call here 'moderate,' was interested in the processes of economic development and its historical changes rather than in judging the industrial civilisation as such. One of the most distinguished characters at that moment could have been Jan Czyński. He represented the proletariat, more plebeian fraction of Fourierists and therefore he had extensive contact with French workers (his close collaborator was a Parisian shoemaker)⁴. Czyński was convinced that many Polish migrants, especially moderate democrats, had not been interested in the situation of the Polish townspeople (whom he called in his French works 'bourgeois'). He had no doubts that townspeople were the social stratum which could greatly contribute to the successful Polish uprising.

¹ E. Chojecki, *Rewolucjoniści i stronnictwa wsteczne*, Paryż 1849, p. 113–114.

² W. Darasz, S. Worcell, J.-K. Podolecki, *Tendance sociale de l'idée démocratique polonaise*, 'Le proscrit: journal de la République universelle,' vol. 1, 1850, p. 41–44.

³ 'Demokrata Polski,' August 2, 1845, p. 14–15.

⁴ M.D. Sibalís, *Une mutuelle fouriériste au XIXe siècle: Laurent Héronville et la Société Laborieuse des Cordonniers-Bottiers de Paris*, 'Cahiers Charles Fourier', 1/1990, p. 70–71.

However, he was interested not only in the Polish question. Czyński wrote many articles about the situation of the French working class, and according to him the best way to improve its condition was to remodel the organization of industry in the way, proposed by Charles Fourier, so through creating associations (*phalansteries*). Despite the fact that in his articles he touched upon many topics, doubtlessly the problem of workers comes away on top. Another who contributed to a sober analysis of the modern economy rather than to its emotional judgement was Henryk Kamieński. In the 1840s he published a voluminous work about 'the philosophy of material economy,' in which he both examined the trajectories of economic development and sketched his own original vision of a new society. He considered that machines in the West really generate the terrible 'proletariat,' however, he did not agree with Sismondi who argued for slowing down the technological progress to reduce poverty¹.

And finally, the third part, to which I include those few thinkers who were close to the ideas of early communism, claimed that machines had been not a curse, but a blessing for humanity, because the industry in a new society in the future would contribute to create the Kingdom of God on Earth. It was to be the system in which the work would be easy and assisted by machines. One important question looms here: probably the majority of thinkers, considered beforehand as 'moderates,' could be also included to this group. Nonetheless, at this point appears the problem of a subject which interested them more. Such thinkers as Zenon Świątosławski or Ludwik Królikowski, in contrast to eg. Kamieński, were interested rather in the possible result of social change than in analysing the existing economic conditions. The general idea, that in the Kingdom of God on Earth (so in a communist society) the work will become pleasant thanks to machines, was expressed many times by Ludwik Krylikowski in his articles (in Polish and in French) and in this question he was strongly inspired by a French communist Étienne Cabet².

To sum up, I would like to stress that at the early stage of development of the industrial civilization many different ways of its progress seemed possible. The multidimensionality of the Polish reflection on this sphere was being deepened by the specific character of the economy on Polish lands and by the situation of difficult living conditions in exile that they had to face.

■

¹ H. Kamieński, *Obraz porównawczy pauperyzmu*, in 'Filozofia ekonomii materialnej ludzkiego społeczeństwa z dodaniem mniejszych pism filozoficznych', ed. B. Baczeko, Warszawa 1959, p. 360–375.

² L'individualisme et le communisme / par les citoyens Lefuel, Lamennais, Duval, Lamartine et Cabet, Paris 1848, p. 31; É. Cabet, *Idee generale du Communisme*, in 'Système de fraternité', no. 6/1851, p. 196–199.