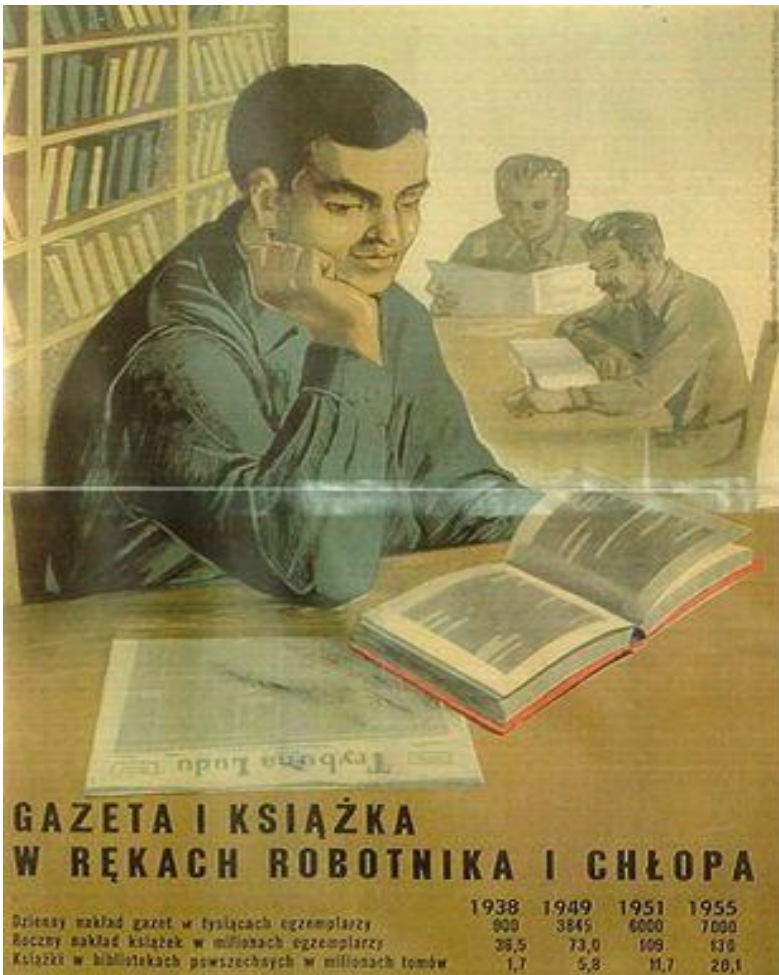


The European History Workshop Presents

Visions of Emancipation: Intellectual Mobility in Modern Poland

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 4-6PM

1014 TISCH HALL



Kathleen Wroblewski

PhD Candidate, Dept. of History,
University of Michigan

Wiktor Marzec

PhD Candidate, Dept. of Sociology
and Social Anthropology,
Central European University

Agata Zysiak

PhD, University of Łódź, Poland
Visiting Scholar, Dept. of Sociology,
University of Michigan

Commentator:

Brian Porter-Szűcs

Professor of History,
University of Michigan

Each dustman shall speak / both in Latin and Greek / And tinkers beat Bishops in knowledge.

- John Bull, Cockney University

From the late nineteenth century on, Polish intellectuals embarked on a number of projects involving the educational mobility of the popular classes. Usually these projects were heavily tainted by the intelligentsia's paternalism toward "the people." The "people," however, also engaged in independent forms of autodidacticism. In both cases, their projects were explicitly contested by guards of the existing order. But what did such democratization mean for intellectuals, peasants, and workers, respectively? Was it possible for the popular classes to rise up the social hierarchy? Did workers' and peasants' historical circumstances provide them with the opportunities and support necessary to succeed? How did the old elites – or the intellectuals who facilitated these ideas – react when their projects were put into practice, often with unforeseen consequences? This panel will examine these issues from a number of angles, including global exchanges of correspondence dealing with the education of peasant girls in the early twentieth century, the autodidacticism of working-class militants around the 1905 Revolution, and the push among intellectuals to open up higher education to the popular classes after WWII.

Kathleen Wroblewski

Vocational Education and the Modernization of the Peasant Girl in Poland and the United States

Bolesław Prus's *Antek*, a short story first published in 1880, criticizes the supposedly backward education given to young peasants in the Polish partitions. The work, which revolves around the adventures of a boy who dreams of a world beyond the harsh discipline and rote memorization of the village school, nonetheless showcases how gender played a role in the debates surrounding peasant education—and, in fact, peasant entry into “modern” society. This can be seen, most palpably, in the global exchange of published letters between Prus and the editor of the Polish-language newspaper *Ameryka-Echo* in Toledo, Ohio, Antoni Paryski, who disagreed with Prus about whether parish priests should supervise the education of peasant girls in Kruszynek, a village in the Kingdom of Poland. (Prus argued yes; Paryski vehemently objected.) The dispute and ensuing media campaign provided an opportunity for migrants in the United States to show their support for the school (and anti-clericalism), which demonstrates the close conceptual links that some elites and non-elites made between vocational education, financial health, and modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Wiktor Marzec

Proletarian Readings and Resubjectification in Russian Poland around the 1905 Revolution

During the popular upsurge commonly known as the 1905 Revolution, workers in the Russian-controlled Polish Kingdom were involved in one more revolution. Unprecedented political mobilization was accompanied by profound intellectual invigoration. The vehicle for the new intellectual endeavors were often political pamphlets and abundant socialist and Marxist literature. Political leaflets, brochures and Marxist books, not representing proletarian discourse as such, are examined in relation to extensive biographical testimonies of proletarian militants. As a result, specific politics of self and a Marxist way to the world of letters are revealed. The subsequent goal is to study the vernacular Marxists' worldview and its political capacities. Marxism was for the proletarian readers the main political language ushering them into the public sphere and allowing them to comprehend the emerging capitalist world. As a particular liaison of scientific knowledge and practical political weapon, it activated new enunciatory positions allowing its adherents to redefine their selves and make political claims. I argue that it was this resubjectifying dimension of Marxism which gripped the workers and was a solid base for (partially) successful Marxist politics.

Agata Zysiak

The Socialist Project for a New Intelligentsia and its Limits. Academic Careers in the Polish Postwar University: a Biographical Perspective.

The paper examines the postwar period of reconstruction of the Polish academic system and an attempt to create a democratic and egalitarian university. The generation born in the 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a profound change of Polish society, when its intelligentsia and universities had to face the dramatic events of the war and its direct aftermaths. The forthcoming reform of science and the higher education system was an attempt to build a socialist university, open to workers and peasant children. Those processes are often viewed as the political domination of academia, the captivity of professors, and seduction of students. On the contrary, it is argued herein that the existing academic field and its associated processes shaped the biographical paths of erstwhile scientists/academics as strongly, if not stronger, than the political factors which usually are brought to the forefront by researchers. Three chosen academic biographies present the complexity of those processes, and at the same time they reveal different patterns of the interplay between political changes, the university, the academic habitus and higher education reform.