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**POLISH RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY
OF THE COMINTERN:
AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE
AND AN OUTLINE OF FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

Abstract

Although Polish research on the Communist International (Comintern) history began in the interwar period, the existing literature does not constitute a highly-developed field. This becomes particularly evident when Polish studies are compared to research produced in Russia, Germany, the United States, and Italy, or even India and Korea. This state of affairs is, to some degree, a result of political conditions that influenced, and continue to influence, access to archival sources. For this reason, interest in the Comintern after 1989 closely resembles the situation in research on the history of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), which was, after all, one of the sections of the Third International. In both cases – in research on the Comintern and on the KPP – the focus was on shedding light on historical “blind spots” rather than on developing systematic studies of political organisations. Largely thanks to Professor Jerzy W. Borejsza, improvements have become evident over the past two decades in Polish research on the Comintern and related issues. Indeed, many important case studies have emerged, although what Polish research still lacks are wide-ranging monographs and analytical syntheses. This paper offers a review of Polish historiography’s most important contributions to research on the Comintern, covering the period from the interwar era to the present. It also attempts to outline potential future perspectives in the field, including a brief overview of important international works.

Keywords: Communist International, Comintern, Third International, Communist Party of Poland, Polish historiography

I INTRODUCTION

Almost all communist parties were founded in close relation to the Comintern, and membership in it and submitting to Moscow's leadership was a source of prestige and honour for communists.¹ However, once the organisation became another instrument of the Stalinist power apparatus, affiliation with the Communist International proved to be a source of despair. This affected communist movements in many countries, but the fate of the disbanded Communist Party of Poland (KPP) and the murder of almost its whole leadership is an exceptional case.² The Third International, which existed from 1919 to 1943, was supposed to be, at least according to the slogans, the institutional prefiguration of the dream of "reconciling and unifying the inner human being and his or her labour",³ "overcoming the discord between human essence and human existence",⁴ and making "the leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom".⁵ In contrast, in practice, it was a "world party" that used various methods to provoke a universal proletarian revolution.⁶ It is also worth remembering that the establishment of the USSR and the Comintern presented a genuine alternative to the system of liberal democracy that prevailed in much of Europe in the initial post-First-World War

¹ Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–1943: Dialectics of Real and a Possible History* (Bakhrabat, 2011), 2.

² William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression: 1934–1939* (New Heaven–London, 2011), 146–216.

³ Stanisław Brzozowski, 'Likwidacja szlachecczyzny', in *id.*, *Pisma polityczne. Wybór*, ed. by Michał Sutowski (Warszawa, 2011), 152.

⁴ Leszek Kołakowski, 'Kapłan i błazen. (Rozważania o teologicznym dziedzictwie współczesnego myślenia)', in *id.*, *Pochwała niekonsekwencji. Pisma rozproszone sprzed roku 1968*, ed. by Zbigniew Mentzel (Londyn, 1989), 264.

⁵ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford, 1995), 1; I have used the Polish version, *Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii*, transl. Andrzej Walicki (Warszawa, 1996), 150–89.

⁶ The most important analytical syntheses of the history of the Comintern are: Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London, 1996); Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste 1919–43* (Paris, 1997); Александр Ваглин, *Коминтерн: идеи, решения, судьбы* (Москва, 2009); Serge Volikov, *L'internationale communiste, 1919–1943: le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution* (Ivry-sur-Seine, 2010).

period.⁷ Fulfilling the hopes outlined above proved impossible, while the Communist International itself was ruthlessly subordinated to Soviet policy. The organisation's significance has been played down by some researchers who view it as a tool of Soviet imperial interests, while others present a radically opposing view, declaring the Comintern to be "one of the most important global organisations ever to have existed... The ideals that it so vigorously spread around the world have already outlived several generations".⁸

The broad range of opinions outlined above might suggest that Polish researchers, too, have shown significant interest in the Third International. Although research on the subject stretches back to the interwar period, the number of books and articles offering detailed analysis of the history of the Comintern and the way it operated is hardly impressive. Indeed, it could be argued that the Comintern itself, as an autotelic reality, has never really interested Polish scholars and, with a few notable exceptions, it has been perceived by and large as a tool of Soviet interests or as a factor shaping the theoretical and practical objectives of one of its sections, namely the KPP. In this paper, evidence supporting these arguments will be offered, with an overview of the most significant Polish research on the Communist International, and a long-term perspective will be adopted, covering critical works from the interwar period to today. This article also outlines the context and specificities of the studies discussed, addressing the key question: why have the Polish scholars shown so little interest in the history of the Comintern? This question seems particularly relevant when Polish historiography is compared to the state of international research on the subject.

⁷ Joachim Häberlen, 'Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities: The Global Dimension of Interwar Communism', *Journal of Global History*, 3 (2012), 415–37.

⁸ Apollon B. Davidson, 'Introduction. Socialist Ideals and Bolshevik Realities. South Africa and the Archives of the Communist International', in *id.*, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov, and Sheridan Johns (eds), *South Africa and the Communist International*, i: *Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Fightsoldiers 1919–1930* (London–Portland, OR, 2003) (*South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History*).

II OVERVIEW: BEFORE 1945

The Third International, along with its auxiliary structures – the Profintern (Red International of Labor Unions, 1921–37), the Krestintern (Peasant International, 1921–37), Sportintern (International Association of Red Sports and Gymnastics Associations, 1921–35), the Youth Communist International (1919–43), and International Red Aid (1922–47), constituted an active realm of global communication and activities.⁹ It was, therefore, difficult in the period outlined here to conduct traditional historiographical research on the Comintern. Instead, studies at the time, both in Poland and abroad, focused on outlining the institutions, their structures, objectives and activities.¹⁰ The literature from this period is relatively rich and comes from two main sources: firstly, publications by various organs of the communist movement, and, secondly, writings on the Comintern from a variety of ideological positions, from the nationalist, through conservative and liberal views, to socialist perspectives, which all had one trait in common: their anticommunism, understood as “a position (attitude) that is opposed to ideology and practices of communism (Bolshevism) and the Soviet system”.¹¹ Both types of writing are marked by the same weakness that remained evident not only in journalism but also in scholarly research on the Comintern until the 1990s. In order to explain this phenomenon, it is worthwhile drawing on a metaphor that has been applied regularly in analyses on the subject,¹² namely that of the iceberg. The Comintern is depicted as an iceberg of which only a fraction is evident above the waterline, with the much larger part hidden below the surface. And, indeed, while the Comintern was

⁹ Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (London, 2015), 64.

¹⁰ Vilém Kahan (ed.), *Bibliography of the Communist International: 1919–1979*, i (Paris, 1990).

¹¹ Marek Kornat, ‘Antykomunizm i antysowietyzm w polskiej myśli politycznej podczas II wojny światowej’, in Piotr Kardela and Karol Sacewicz (eds), *Antykomunizm Polaków w XX wieku* (Białystok–Olsztyn–Warszawa, 2019), 199.

¹² Milorad M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch, ‘The Communist International’, in Milorad M. Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1964–1943* (Stanford, 1966), 196–7; Fredrik Petersson, ‘Melting Down the Iceberg – The Communist International, Organizational Perspectives and Archival Issues. A Research Report’, *CoWoPA. Comintern Working Paper*, 7 (2006).

formally an open institution, many areas of its activities were kept top secret, including the financing of communist parties, the work of the International Liaison Department, and its links to the Soviet intelligence service. Of course, the existence of these secret sections was suspected, but journalists and researchers were limited to presenting more or less accurate guesswork.

Polish publications on the Comintern produced by communist circles consistently resembled propaganda and information pieces. The information provided tended not to offer an in-depth image of the organisation and was limited mainly to offering basic details that necessarily accorded with the official agenda. In many places, the information was censored, with a good example of this being the publication responsible for presenting documents and minutes of the meetings of the Polish Commission that was established during the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924.¹³ This group of publications could also include various programmatic declarations, statements relating to institutions' ongoing activities and also column pieces appearing in periodicals related to the movement, including *Czerwony Sztandar* [The Red Banner] and *Nowy Przegląd* [New Review].¹⁴ Today, these publications are important sources for studying the Communist International, although they provide almost exclusively depictions of the institution that were aimed at the "outside world". It was rare for the published information to offer insight into internal affairs, but when this did happen, it was done with the intention of promoting the policies of the Comintern leadership at a given moment. The materials created after the disbanding of the KPP in 1938, for example, within the Initiative Group on Poland of the Comintern or in the eastern territories of the interwar Second Republic that were under Soviet occupation from 1939 to 1941, also served only propaganda and information purposes, offering no fresh insights as far as knowledge of the organisation and the activities of the Comintern were concerned. Following the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in June 1941, communist publications simply did not mention the

¹³ *Sprawa polska na V Kongresie Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej* (Moskwa, 1924).

¹⁴ Given their large number, it is impossible to list all of the individual publications and texts in the communist press. However, they can be found in the Polish Sejm Library, the National Library in Warsaw, and at the Central Archive of Modern Records (AAN).

Comintern as they sought to mask the actual subordination of groups active in particular countries to Soviet orders.¹⁵

Much more diverse in their descriptions of the Communist International were publications emerging in interwar Poland in non-communist circles.¹⁶ Most of these texts were shaped by opposition towards communist ideology and practices. In most such publications, reflections on the workings of the Comintern were accompanied by political and moral arguments centred on warning against the dangers that the existence of an organisation seeking to provoke and coordinate a world revolution posed to Poland and the world. The authors' attitude restricted the practical value of such discourse. It was also common to ignore differences between the Soviet government and the Comintern,¹⁷ which meant that no separate study of the Comintern was produced by the most important interwar centres for Sovietology, such as the Scientific and Research Institute of Eastern Europe [Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy Europy Wschodniej] in Vilnius (Wilno) and the Warsaw-based Institute of Social Economy [Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego], since the Comintern was treated exclusively as an integral element of Bolshevik Russia's foreign policy.¹⁸ The same can be said about the approach to the Communist International by such authors as Alicja Bełcikowska, Rafał Marcei Blüth, Adam Gryff-Keller, Waław Komarnicki, Adam Krzyżanowski, and Władysław Studnicki.¹⁹ It is crucial to note that between 1934 and 1939, the School

¹⁵ Piotr Gontarczyk, 'Wizja Związku Sowieckiego w propagandzie konspiracyjnej Polskiej Partii Robotniczej. Geneza, węzłowe problemy, egzemplifikacja', in Rafał Łatka and Bogdan Szlachta (eds), *Polskie wizje komunizmu po 1939 roku* (Kraków, 2015), 77–105.

¹⁶ For an extensive discussion on this subject, see Karol Sacewicz, 'Komintern w świetle polskiej publicystyki przeciwkomunistycznej II Rzeczypospolitej. Przyczynek do badań nad polskim antykomunizmem', *Komunizm*, 6 (2017), 7–27; *id.*, *Komunizm i antykomunizm w II Rzeczypospolitej. Państwo – społeczeństwo – partie* (Olsztyn, 2016), 28–55.

¹⁷ This was reflected in journalistic form in terms similar to those used by Stanisław Grabski: "the Moscow Comintern of the Bolshevik sect", Stanisław Grabski, *Rzym czy Moskwa* (Poznań–Warszawa–Wilno–Lublin, 1927), 144.

¹⁸ Marek Kornat, *Bolszewizm, totalitaryzm, rewolucja, Rosja. Początki sowietologii i studiów nad systemami totalitarnymi w Polsce (1918–1939)*, i (Warszawa, 2003), 57–92.

¹⁹ Alicja Bełcikowska, *Stronnictwa i związki polityczne w Polsce. Charakterystyki, dane historyczne, programy, rezolucje, organizacje partyjne, prasa, przywódcy* (Warszawa,

of Political Science at the Scientific and Research Institute of Eastern Europe offered each term a course on the key features of the Third International, titled, alternatively, 'Policies of the Comintern', 'Foreign Policy of the USSR and the Comintern' and 'The Comintern and Soviet Foreign Policy'.²⁰

The course was initially run by Henryk Kawecki and then by Stanisław Zabięło, both high-ranking state officials at the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively. Although their activities differed, both could claim significant achievements in recognising that there were specificities to Soviet and Comintern policy.²¹ It is crucial to stress that the two men's activities were not exceptional, as Sovietology and communist studies were significant elements of the work of state institutions, not only at those mentioned above but also, for example, in the Second Department of the Polish General Staff.²² Part of the material developed there remained secret, while some reached a wider audience, such as the highly valuable study by Gustaw Doborzyński on the Comintern's founding congress that was published by the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1919.²³ The contribution of state institutions was not limited to these publications as information that they gathered and analysed often found its way, through official channels, into publications by anti-communist social organisations, two of which deserve special mention – the Alliance of Organisations Collaborating in Combatting Communism [Porozumienie Organizacji Współdziałających w Zwalczaniu Komunizmu], also known as The Anti-Communist Alliance [Porozumienie Antykomunistyczne, PA], and the

1935), 32–3; Adam Gryff-Keller, *Komunizm* (Warszawa, 1926), 147–275; Rafał Marcei Blüth, *Likwidacja leninowskiej elity oraz inne pisma sowietologiczne 1933–1938*, ed. by Marek Kornat (Kraków, 2016), 226–31; Wacław Komarnicki, *Nowy ustrój państwowy Związku Sowieckiego* (Wilno, 1938); Adam Krzyżanowski, *Bolszewizm* (Kraków, 1920); Władysław Studnicki, *System polityczny Europy a Polska* (Warszawa, 1935), 193.

²⁰ Marek Kornat, *Polska szkoła sowietologiczna 1930–1939* (Kraków, 2003), 583–609.

²¹ Bogdan Gadomski, *Biografia agenta. Największy agent policji politycznej II RP. Józef-Josek Müntzenmacher (1903–1947)* (Warszawa, 2009), 22–4; Marcin Kruszyński, 'Moskiewski epizod Stanisława Zabięły', *Res Historica*, 26 (2008), 91–111.

²² Kornat, *Bolszewizm*, 88–92.

²³ Gustaw Doborzyński, *III Międzynarodówka* (Warszawa, 1919).

Research Institute for Communist Studies [Instytut Naukowy Badań nad Komunizmem, INBK].²⁴

These were not top-class research institutions, with their activities driven by specific objectives. These were expressed clearly in a programmatic article in the Anti-Communist Alliance's central organ, *Walka z Bolszewizmem* [The Struggle Against Bolshevism]: "It is only ... consistent, systematic resistance by all of those in Polish society who seek to uphold recently-restored independence in the face of the threat posed by the activities of the Third International that can protect Poland against the revolutionary tumult".²⁵ Publications by both organisations are marked by striking idiosyncrasies, first and foremost anti-Semitism, that were hardly relevant to the subject under discussion but did primarily serve to influence the interpretation applied to the texts. Nevertheless, it seems justified to argue that it was PA and INBK, as well as authors like Henryk Glass, T. Barski, Józef Mützenmacher aka Józef Bogusław Kamiński (using the pseudonyms Jan Alfred Reguła and Józef Bogusław Słoński), and Tadeusz Teslar, who made the greatest contributions in interwar Poland to developing knowledge of the structures and programme of the Comintern.²⁶ Although they still framed it as subordinate to Moscow, they nevertheless recognised it as a separate organisation deserving regular and close attention. What is also important is that the publications of both PA and INBK made use of an impressive range

²⁴ Maciej Marszał, 'Komunizm w poglądach Antoniego Kwiatkowskiego (1920–1939)', *Studia nad Autorytaryzmem i Totalitaryzmem*, 36 (2014), 87–100; Karol Sacewicz, 'Zorganizowane antykomunistyczne inicjatywy społeczne', in Kardela and Sacewicz (eds), *Antykomunizm*, 115–37.

²⁵ Redakcja, 'Słowo wstępne', *Walka z Bolszewizmem*, 1 (1927), 2.

²⁶ Henryk Glass (ed.), *Międzynarodówki socjalistyczno-komunistyczne eksploatujące sprawę robotniczą* (Katowice, 1938); *id.*, *Wpływy kominternu wśród nauczycieli. Materiały oświetlające cele i taktykę komunistów w Związku Nauczycielstwa Polskiego* (Warszawa, 1938); *id.*, *Zamach bolszewizmu na młodzież. Dokumenty* (Warszawa–Płock, 1927); T. Barski, *Akcja Kominternu. Fakty i dokumenty ze Wschodu 1920–1936* (Warszawa, 1937); Jan Alfred Reguła, *Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski w świetle faktów i dokumentów* (Warszawa, 1934); Józef Bogusław Słoński, *Agentura Kominternu w Polsce* (Warszawa, 1937); *id.*, *Komintern atakuje młodzież! Ratujmy zagrożone pozycje!* (Warszawa, 1937); *id.*, *Za Sowiecką granicą* (Warszawa, 1937); Tadeusz Teslar, *Polityka Rosji Sowieckiej podczas wojny z Polską. Trzy momenty* (Warszawa, 1937); *id.*, *Propaganda bolszewicka podczas wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1920 r.* (Warszawa, 1938); *id.*, *Przygotowania Kominternu do wybuchu wojny z Polską* (Warszawa, 1931).

of sources that came not only from cooperation with state institutions but also included official Comintern press and publications, as well as sources obtained through bilateral exchanges with several dozen social organisations involved in observing the work of the Third International and the USSR, including Entente Internationale contre la IIIe Internationale.²⁷

It is also worth paying attention to writings produced by democratic socialist circles in interwar Poland, with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Bund being its leading proponents. Their attitude towards Soviet communism shaped the general stance of both parties towards the Comintern.²⁸ Overall, it was marked by a certain ambivalence that was expressed in the fact that in the first decade of the Third International's existence, the parties were willing to engage in limited cooperation with the organisation while at the same time responding critically to the Comintern's various tactical shifts. What both parties and the Comintern shared, was the conviction that it was necessary to join forces in the struggle for the rights of the working class. In the case of the Bund, it did give serious thought to joining the Comintern, which led to a split in the party and the emergence of the Kombund.²⁹ The late 1920s brought an end to any illusions, with the twenty-first Congress of the PPS declaring the Comintern to be "a passive instrument in the hands of Russian state policy", while the Bund joined the Labour and Socialist International in 1930. A potential collaboration was reconsidered again in the mid-1930s, when the "united front" slogan emerged. Political discussions, however, failed to provide inspiration for serious reflections on the activities of the Comintern. Among the PPS writings, there are no significant attempts to outline the functioning and programme of the institution, even

²⁷ Stanisław Jankowski [Henryk Glass], *Metody ekspansji komunizmu. Dzieje ukształtowania systemu w latach 1919–1939* (Londyn, 1980), 9–11.

²⁸ Barbara Stoczewska, 'Antykomunizm w polskiej myśli socjalistycznej do roku 1939', *Przegląd Socjalistyczny*, 4/5 (2005), 121–35; Michał Trębacz, 'Bund – Międzynarodówka – PPS', *Biuletyn IPN*, 7 (2011), 27–36; Karol Sacewicz, 'Wstęp', in *id.* (ed.), *Antykomunizm socjalistów. Polska Partia Socjalistyczna wobec Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski/Komunistycznej Partii Polski. Wybór z prasy i dokumentów (1919–1938)* (Olsztyn–Białystok–Warszawa, 2019), 15–54.

²⁹ Michał Trębacz, *Izrael Lichtenstein. Biografia żydowskiego socjalisty* (Łódź, 2016), 83–96; Gertrud Pickhan, "Gegen den Strom". *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund "Bund" in Polen 1918–1939* (München–Stuttgart, 2001).

if the Comintern was regularly discussed in the press at the time.³⁰ The situation was somewhat more promising with the Bund, mainly thanks to one of its leaders, Wiktor Alter and periodicals including *Nowe Pismo* [New Journal] and *Mysł Socjalistyczna* [Socialist Thought]. Alter, who had been involved in the Third Congress of the Comintern, penned a short study on the policies of the Communist International in the mid-1930s. He also wrote the foreword to J. Artuski's pamphlet describing the vagaries of the Third International's policies between 1929 and 1935.³¹ At the same time, it is necessary to underline that neither publication is of significant empirical value.

The period of the Second World War saw significant regression in the state of studies on the Communist International. There were no attempts of scholarly research on the subject, while the underground, independence-oriented press, as Karol Sacewicz has argued, "treated the question of the activities and structures of the Comintern highly schematically, often in sloganeering terms, thus in-depth analysis was lacking, other than when it came to discussions over the dissolution of the Comintern".³²

III

OVERVIEW: POST-WAR ERA RESEARCH (TO 1991)

The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 did not constitute a caesura for research on the institution. There were political reasons for this. For fear that releasing information from the Comintern's archives could harm the interests of the USSR, research on the Comintern was rarely commissioned and was often prohibited. Like all documents on the most recent history of the Soviet Union, the archive was declared 'top secret' and was officially stored in the 'conservation stores' of the Central Party Archive. Access to them was strictly regulated, granted as it was exclusively by the highest party authorities.³³ The situation

³⁰ Sacewicz (ed.), *Antykomunizm socjalistów*.

³¹ Wiktor Alter, *Jedność i plan* (Warszawa, 1935); J. Artuski, *Metamorfozy Kominternu (1929–1935)* (Warszawa, 1935).

³² Karol Sacewicz, 'Komintern w świetle enuncjacji prasowych Polski Podziemnej. Przyczynek do rozważań nad antykomunizmem Polaków', in Marek Kornat and Rafał Łatka (eds), *Polskie wizje i oceny komunizmu (1917–1989)* (Warszawa, 2020), 79.

³³ Stefan Creuzberger and Ruud Veltmeijer, 'Forschungsarbeit in Moskauer Archiven', *Osteuropa*, xliii, 3 (1993), 271.

changed only in 1991.³⁴ This does not mean, of course, that there was no research on the history of the Comintern before then. Indeed, studies appeared both in the West³⁵ and in the USSR, although in both cases, they were severely limited.³⁶ The greatest weakness of Western research was the unavailability of the most important body of source material; thus, these studies relied on official published sources, as well as on memoirs and private diaries – most often by members of dissident circles. Meanwhile, the drawback of Soviet publications was their ideological homogeneity and the impact of both institutional and censorship restrictions. Historians writing about the Comintern were a carefully selected group, aware of existing limits and sensitive towards Party directives. Their particular ways of working were outlined in the memoirs of Fridrikh Firsov.³⁷

A group of Polish researchers associated with the Communist Party and the related institutions of the Department of the History of the Party and the Institute for the Education of Research Staff/Institute of Social Sciences/Higher School of Social Sciences (WSNS – their names have changed over the years), which were all linked to the Polish Party's Central Committee, were, though, given access to Comintern archival documents. Still, they faced significant restrictions, as well as suspicions, which was hardly unusual in the context of archival research in the Soviet Union. Historians from other socialist-bloc countries were treated in much the same way. The institutional difficulties experienced

³⁴ Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, 'At the Beginning of a History: Visions of the Comintern After the Opening of the Archives', *International Review of Social History*, xlii, 3 (1997), 419–46.

³⁵ Important studies include: Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943*, i–iii (London–New York–Toronto, 1956–1966); Kermit E. McKenzie, *Comintern and World Revolution 1928–1943: The Shaping of Doctrine* (New York, 1964); Witold S. Sworakowski, *The Communist International and its Front Organizations: A Research Guide and Checklist of Holdings in American and European Libraries* (Stanford, 1965).

³⁶ Example studies: Зинаида Алексеевна Замыслова, *Коммунистический интернационал и его роль в истории международного рабочего и национально-освободительного движения: курс лекций* (Москва, 1957); Александр Иванович Соболев et al. (eds), *Коммунистический интернационал: краткий исторический очерк* (Москва, 1969); Борис Моисеевич Лейбзон and Кирилл Кириллович Шириня (eds), *Из истории Коминтерна* (Москва, 1970).

³⁷ Фридрих Игоревич Фирсов, *34 года в Институте марксизма-ленинизма. Воспоминания историка* (Москва, 2013), 141–317.

by researchers conducting research between 1945 and 1965 in the Comintern Archive in Moscow have been described in detail by Jan Szumski.³⁸ The resulting studies did not focus only on the Communist International, but also on the history of the KPP. The first archival visits came in 1946–7 as part of the work of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) Historical Commission, which was led by Józef Kowalski (Samuel Natanson). Its aim was to gather documents relating to the prewar Communist Party of Poland that would then be crucial for academic studies, popular works and propaganda efforts. Even though the group was permitted to bring thousands of copies of documents back to Poland, its work did not enable a breakthrough in studies on the KPP, let alone the Comintern.³⁹ The history of the KPP remained an 'anonymous history', since it was not until the post-Stalin thaw that it became possible to write about the murder of its leadership in the 1930s. Another restriction on the scope of research was the Third International's 1938 decree on the dissolution of the KPP.⁴⁰

It was only the rehabilitation of the KPP and its leadership elites during the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 that enabled real progress to be made in research on the subject. Polish historians' archival research conducted between 1956 and 1966, when the CPSU ordered a change in archival regulations resulting in access to the Comintern archive being restricted for many years,⁴¹ was concentrated from 1956 to 1958. It brought a better understanding of the history of the KPP and its relations with the Communist International, even if the access to sources was limited in scope, thus leaving specific themes out of bounds. At a 1959 meeting with Polish historians, the Soviet representatives stated that "we are guided by the principle of not releasing to researchers documents that could harm our friendship".⁴² Any progress was thus accompanied by

³⁸ Jan Szumski, *Polityka a historia. ZSRR wobec nauki historycznej w Polsce w latach 1945–1964* (Warszawa, 2016), 178–83, 289–97.

³⁹ Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski, *Nauki historyczne w Polsce 1944–1970. Zagadnienia polityczne i organizacyjne* (Warszawa, 2007), 78.

⁴⁰ Henryk Cimek, 'Historia badań nad dziejami Komunistycznej Partii Polski', *Zeszyty Naukowe WSP w Rzeszowie. Historia*, 6 (1997), 165–74.

⁴¹ Ryszard Nazarewicz, *Komintern a lewica polska. Wybrane problemy* (Warszawa, 2008), 19.

⁴² Bogdan Musiał, 'Obrona dorobku naukowego z okresu PRL oraz haseł stalinowskiej propagandy. Replika na recenzję Andrzeja Garlickiego pt. "Popis

systematic weakness, which becomes evident in the monographs by scholars including Józef Kowalski, Franciszka Świetlikowa, Felicja Kalicka, and Henryk Malinowski.⁴³ Alongside analytical studies, it is also worth noting the publication of collections of source materials, some of which were crucial for developing knowledge of the relations between the KPP/PPR and the Comintern, which also gave access to some of the key documents on the Communist International.⁴⁴ The key role in this process was played by the journal *Z Pola Walki* [From the Battlefield], which published, for example, many valuable biographical materials. Of inherent value were the thousands of pages of copied documents that made their way in microfilm form to the Department of Party History at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).⁴⁵ They were an important source for subsequent studies even if they had been carefully selected by Soviet archivists and therefore reflected only to a limited degree the wealth of documents stored in the Moscow collections on the KPP or the KPP Representation at the Executive Committee of the Communist International. It was also impossible to cross-reference these sources with call numbers at the Central Party Archives. Nevertheless, these documents, now held at the Central Archives of Modern Records [AAN] in Warsaw, continue to be used by historians today.

Notably, the Soviet authorities set limits on the scope of research on the Comintern by scholars from Poland and other countries working

ignorancji", *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. 101, z. 1, s. 121–5', *Przegląd Historyczny*, cii, 2 (2011), 316.

⁴³ See e.g. Józef Kowalski, *Trudne lata, Problemy rozwoju polskiego ruchu robotniczego 1929–1935* (Warszawa, 1966); *id.*, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1935–1938. Studium historyczne* (Warszawa, 1975); *id.*, *Zarys historii polskiego ruchu robotniczego 1918–1939* (Warszawa, 1961); Franciszka Świetlikowa, *Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918–1923* (Warszawa, 1968); Felicja Kalicka, *Problemy jednolitego frontu w międzywojennym ruchu robotniczym (1933–1935)* (Warszawa, 1961), *ead.*, *Z zagadnień jednolitego frontu KPP i PPS w latach 1933–1934* (Warszawa, 1967); *ead.*, *Julian Brun-Bronowicz. Życie – działalność – twórczość* (Warszawa, 1973); Henryk Malinowski, *Program i polityka rolna Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski (1918–1923)* (Warszawa, 1964).

⁴⁴ See e.g. *Dokumenty z historii III Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej*, i–iv (Warszawa, 1962–1965); Czesław Madajczyk (ed.), *Korespondencja między sekretarzami PPR a Sekretarzem Generalnym Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej* (Warszawa, 1967).

⁴⁵ Andrzej Garlicki, 'W odpowiedzi Bogdanowi Musiałowi', *Przegląd Historyczny*, cii, 2 (2011), 323.

on the history of the workers' movement. This was evident in the efforts of Tadeusz Daniszewski, who in 1965 applied for access to materials on the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. He was denied permission because his research could contradict the interests of fraternal communist parties. Instead, he was given access only to documents on the Polish section of the Comintern together with official congress and post-congress publications.⁴⁶ Awareness of the impossibility of transgressing the abovementioned limits is also evident in a debate relating to the Third International that was published in 1966 in the journal *Z Pola Walki*.⁴⁷ This interesting, albeit conservative, discussion on the history of the institution featured contributions from, among others, Leon Grosfeld, Jan Kancewicz, Aleksander Kochański, Józef Kowalski, Romana Toruńczyk, Maria Turlejska and Feliks Tych. Research proposals on the subject of the Comintern were minimal at that time as scholars waited for Soviet authorities to 'unfreeze' the theme. This is reflected in what Polish historians wrote about or did not write about during the subsequent two decades. Beyond a few female historians, who addressed the question of the Comintern in a few publications discussing its initial period, other authors avoided the subject.⁴⁸ The publication of an official monograph on the Third International in the Soviet Union and a translation into Polish likewise did not lead to a breakthrough in research.⁴⁹ Thus, the trend established

⁴⁶ Szumski, *Polityka a historia*, 296–7.

⁴⁷ 'Dyskusja o działalności Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej', *Z Pola Walki*, 1 (1966), 69–93.

⁴⁸ Żanna Kormanowa, 'II Kongres Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej. Źródła i realia', *Z Pola Walki*, 4 (1977); *ead.*, *Trzy czasopisma. Na tropach ideologii polskiego ruchu robotniczego* (Warszawa, 1989); Teodora Feder, 'Sprawa przewrotu majowego 1926 r. na Komisji Polskiej Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej', *Z Pola Walki*, 2 (1967); *ead.*, 'Delegacja KPRP na IV Kongres Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej', *Z Pola Walki*, 3 (1976); Wiesława Toporowicz, 'Początki Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej', *Z Pola Walki*, 45 (1969); Maria Meglicka and Wiesława Toporowicz, 'Lenin a Polacy w III Międzynarodówce', *Z Pola Walki*, 1 (1970). In earlier years, the question of the Comintern was also addressed, albeit rarely, in *Z Pola Walki* by Helena Grudowa, Kazimiera Maj, and Henryk Malinowski. Wiesława Toporowicz is also the author of the textbook-style synthesis: *Zarys historii międzynarodowego ruchu robotniczego 1918–1928* (Warszawa, 1974), and of an article, in Irena Koberdowa *et al.* (eds), *Międzynarodowy ruch robotniczy, i: Wiek XIX–1945* (Warszawa, 1976), 393–708.

⁴⁹ A.I. Sobolev, *Międzynarodówka Komunistyczna 1919–1943. Zarys historyczny*, transl. Maria Wolska (Warszawa, 1974). The sole Polish synthesis on the Comintern is intriguing: Marian Leczyk, *Zarys historii III Międzynarodówki 1919–1943* (Warszawa,

in the late 1950s continued, with the focus in research remaining on the history of the KPP. This led to some successful studies, as evident in some noteworthy syntheses on the subject.⁵⁰ Interestingly, some Polish researchers shifted their research towards themes related to the Comintern's satellite organisations, including the Profintern and Krestintern, producing monographs on these subjects.⁵¹

A notable shift in the research landscape came in the period of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. 1987 saw the founding of a Joint Commission on overcoming blind spots in Polish-Soviet relations.⁵² This resulted in a group of Polish historians associated with Party institutions being given access to previously unknown materials from the Comintern archive on the KPP, the Polish section of the Communist International, and the PPR. A significant portion of these documents were archive materials relating to the dissolution of the Communist Party of Poland in 1938. It is worth noting that contrary to what was in the written agreement, Polish historians were not given access to all documents that they asked for. They were refused access to archival sources relating, for example, to the Comintern schools in Nagornoe, Pushkino and Kushnarenkov.⁵³ The Moscow archivists justified their decision by stating that they were still subject to the archival directive of 1966. Nevertheless, publications produced based on archival research in the 1980s remain empirically relevant as they significantly expanded knowledge of relations between the KPP and the Comintern.⁵⁴ At the

1971), although it does not possess significant scholarly value; it was a textbook prepared for students at the Felix Dzerzhinsky Political Military Academy.

⁵⁰ Henryk Cimek and Lucjan Kieszczyński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918–1938* (Warszawa, 1984); Antoni Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918–1938). Zarys historii* (Warszawa, 1985); Bogdan Kolebacz, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1923–1929. Problemy ideologiczne* (Warszawa, 1984).

⁵¹ Aleksander Koczański, *Czerwona Międzynarodówka Związków Zawodowych (Profintern) 1920–1937* (Warszawa, 1985); Henryk Cimek, *Międzynarodówka Chłopska* (Rzeszów, 2003). Although published later, Cimek's study was a result of research conducted in the 1980s.

⁵² 'ZSRR–Polska: cienie przeszłości. O pracy radziecko-polskiej komisji ds. likwidacji "białych plam" w historii dwóch krajów mówi korespondentowi "Argumentów i Faktów" doktor nauk historycznych I. Jaźborowska', *Czerwony Sztandar* (29 April 1989).

⁵³ Nazarewicz, *Comintern*, 19, 27.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Henryk Cimek, *Komuniści, Polska, Stalin 1918–1939* (Białystok, 1990); Benon Dymek, *Stalin a KPP* (unpublished); Lucjan Kieszczyński, 'Represje

same time, it is necessary to note that the most crucial contribution produced during this period, offering a synthesis of KPP-Comintern relations, was not written by Polish historians but by their Soviet colleagues Fridrikh Firsov and Inessa Yazhborovskaya.⁵⁵

The dissolution of the Central Archive of the Central Committee of the PZPR in 1990 and the subsequent opening up of the Comintern archive for wide-ranging international research the following year marked the end of an era of Polish research on the Communist International. The studies produced during this period indeed led to incomparable growth in knowledge on the subject of how this institution functioned. The value of the research from this era is limited, however, by its close links to the ideological principles of the Communist Party, with authors also avoiding certain aspects of the past or even falsifying it in some cases. It is not entirely accurate to state that the Comintern and its relations to the KPP was not a popular subject among Polish émigré scholars. Marian K. Dziewanowski's analytical synthesis reflected the weaknesses of Western studies generally,⁵⁶ while writings about the Comintern tended to continue in the spirit of the interwar period, as is evident, for example, in the works of Henryk Glass.⁵⁷ The articles appearing in the émigré journal *Zeszyty Historyczne* (History Notebooks), published by the Literary Institute (Instytut Literacki) in Paris, remain an important source today, in particular thanks to the range of sources used.

IV

OVERVIEW: RESEARCH AFTER 1991

A breakthrough might have been expected in Polish research on the Comintern, when the President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist

stalinowskie w ZSRR wobec działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego i ich rodzin', in Jolanta Itrich, Jan Kancewicz, and Irena Koberdowa (eds), *Oblicza lewicy. Losy idei i ludzi* (Warszawa, 1992); Jarema Maciszewski (ed.), *Tragedia Komunistycznej Partii Polski* (Warszawa, 1989); Ryszard Nazarewicz (ed.), *Zabójstwo Marcelego Nowotki w świetle dokumentów z lat 1942–1943* (Warszawa, 1990).

⁵⁵ Fridrich Firsov and Inessa Jaźborowska, 'Międzynarodówka Komunistyczna a Komunistyczna Partia Polski', in Maciszewski (ed.), *Tragedia*, 9–79.

⁵⁶ Marian K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History* (Cambridge, MA, 1959).

⁵⁷ Glass, *Metody ekspansji komunizmu*.

Republic, Boris Yeltsin, signed on 24 August 1991 a decree on the nationalisation of the Central Party Archive.⁵⁸ This act granted Russian and international researchers access to a collection that previously had been almost entirely inaccessible. There emerged a powerful impulse towards wide-ranging studies and reinterpreting the existing image of how the Comintern and the international communist movement functioned. However, Polish researchers made only limited use of the new resource.⁵⁹ There were many reasons for this, with the two most important being, firstly, that Polish historians almost completely abandoned interest in the interwar communist movement both in Poland and abroad; and, secondly, the collapse of research funding in the initial years of transformation.

For years it seemed that historians had forgotten that the history of communism in Poland did not begin on 22 July 1944 with the proclamation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) and that it indeed had a much longer history, without which events in subsequent decades would be difficult to understand. Rather a modest list of publications on the activities of the KPP and the PPR during wartime that emerged in the twenty years after the end of state socialism in Poland confirms that there were still significant gaps in knowledge.⁶⁰ Krystyna Trembicka and Zbigniew Zaporowski have

⁵⁸ Oleg Naumov, 'The Present Condition of the Comintern Archives', in Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rohahn (eds), *In Centre and Periphery – The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam, 1996), 13–16; Stephen Kotkin, '1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks', *Journal of Modern History*, lxx (1998), 389–90.

⁵⁹ A crucial moment in research on the Comintern and its Polish section came in 1993, with the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) preparing copies of some 1500 documents on the activities of various departments and divisions of the Third International. These documents were initially held at the Head Office of State Archives in Poland, but are currently stored at the Central Archives of Modern Records in the collection Communist International (call no. 151).

⁶⁰ Examples include: Henryk Cimek, *Tomasz Dąbal 1890–1937* (Rzeszów, 1993); Piotr Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy 1941–1944* (Warszawa, 2003); Emil Horoch, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski w województwie lubelskim 1918–1938* (Lublin, 1993); Nazarewicz, *Komintern*; Krystyna Trembicka, *Między apologią a negacją. Studium myśli politycznej Komunistycznej Partii Polski w latach 1918–1932* (Lublin, 1995); *ead.*, *Między utopią a rzeczywistością. Myśl polityczna Komunistycznej Partii Polski (1918–1938)* (Lublin, 2007); Zbigniew Zaporowski, *Między sejmem a wiecem. Działalność Komunistycznej Frakcji Poselskiej w latach 1921–1935* (Lublin, 1997).

described how dire the state of research was.⁶¹ What also failed to emerge was a reassessment of research on the history of the workers' movement, including the communist movement, although Andrzej Feliks Grabski had postulated such an endeavour in one of his articles in the 1990s.⁶² It is symptomatic that one of the most ambitious projects on the subject, *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego* [The Biographical Dictionary of the Polish Workers' Movement], saw only three volumes published (letters A to K), with the last of them appearing in 1992.⁶³ There are various reasons for this state of affairs, including systematic and generational factors.⁶⁴ However, it is undeniable that the financial difficulties that Polish scholarship faced in the first decade after transformation made it difficult to realise ambitious projects entailing several months of archival research in Russia. Indeed, even ordering copies of archival documents was not feasible.

Research on the KPP and Comintern was subject, understandably, to prevailing tendencies in scholarship as such. In the first years after 1989, the focus was on shedding light on the 'blind spots' of twentieth-century Polish history – those painful issues that were cast into oblivion and very often associated with national martyrdom. Interwar communists, even if they had been murdered on Stalin's orders, were generally considered renegades and turncoats, thus they attracted little interest from historians who focused their attentions elsewhere. Proposals from the older researchers, like Feliks Tych and Henryk Cimek were wholly overlooked. Over twenty years ago, Cimek wrote that "first of all, it is necessary to gain broader access than has thus far

⁶¹ Trembicka, *Między utopią a rzeczywistością*, 8; Zbigniew Zaporowski, 'Legalna działalność nielegalnej Komunistycznej Partii Polski w latach 1918–1939. Zarys problemu', in Eryk Krasucki, Tomasz Sikorski, and Adam Wątor (eds), *Lewica polska. Koncepcje – ludzie – działalność*, ii: *Działalność* (Wrocław, 2012), 37.

⁶² Andrzej Feliks Grabski, 'Historia partyjna – historia niechciana? O potrzebie rewaloryzacji badań nad dziejami ruchu robotniczego oraz myśli socjalistycznej (i komunistycznej)', in Andrzej Feliks Grabski and Paweł Samuś (eds), *Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Studia z dziejów polskiego ruchu i myśli socjalistycznej* (Łódź, 1995), 9–20.

⁶³ Feliks Tych (ed.), *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego*, i–iii (Warszawa, 1985–1992). The fourth volume of the dictionary was prepared for publication but has never been published.

⁶⁴ Lucyna Tychowa and Andrzej Romanowski, *Tak, jestem córką Jakuba Bermana* (Kraków, 2016), 218.

been possible to documents relating to the Communist International and VKP(b) in order to better understand, for example, the scope and types of dependencies that the KPP had in relation to these organisations, and thus establish to what extent KPP had to collaborate with the Stalinist regime and to what extent it did so willingly”.⁶⁵ These are just some of the research questions that could have been taken up. There are still no adequate answers to these questions in many cases because of the dearth of systematic studies that would avoid seeking out ‘sensation’ and instead work towards systematic, reliable research on institutional mechanisms.

This idea inspired Jerzy W. Borejsza to establish a research team comprising Polish and Russian historians that could regularly work in archives in both countries. Borejsza’s idea acquired institutional backing, and for several years, he led two research projects focused on questions related to the Comintern. The first project, ‘Stalin and Poles in the Third International’, was conducted between 2004 and 2006 at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN). The second project, ‘The Third International, Soviet Policy and Polish Affairs’, began in 2008 and was initially based at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and IH PAN. The Russian principal investigator was Natalia Lebedeva of the Russian Academy of Sciences, with Svetlana Rosental and Valery Shepelev of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History involved in a less formal capacity, offering support through their archival expertise. From 2011 to 2016, the project was conducted in collaboration with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).

Both projects were to culminate in the publication of an extensive collection of sources outlining relations between the Comintern and Polish communists. However, things became more complicated than initially expected, following the shift in the political climate in Polish-Russian relations. Despite the promises made and a ready document being sent to the heads of the partner archive in Moscow, IPN and RGASPI did not sign a memorandum of cooperation that would facilitate archival research and reduce the costs involved in reproducing documents, thus making it easier to publish them. The death of

⁶⁵ Henryk Cimek, ‘Stan i potrzeby badań nad dziejami ruchu komunistycznego w Polsce w latach międzywojennych’, in Grabski and Samuś (eds), *Między Wschodem*, 100.

Jerzy W. Borejsza in 2019, of course, meant that the original publication plans had to be abandoned.⁶⁶ However, the materials collected during archival research by project participants, including Mariusz Wołos, Agnieszka J. Cieślíkowa, Marek Radziwon, Eryk Krasucki, and Piotr Głuszkowski, has been – and will certainly continue to be – used in scholarly publications.⁶⁷

After decades of a relative dearth of publications, the 2010s saw evident growth in interest in interwar communism in Poland. This can be seen as a result of interesting university-based research projects,⁶⁸ but also as a consequence of the expansion of research horizons among historians at IPN.⁶⁹ Particularly significant at the latter institution is

⁶⁶ It is of great regret that Jerzy W. Borejsza did not write an extensive study using the source materials collected. He only mentioned the Comintern in brief and in essay form in several texts included in the volumes: *Stulecie zagłady* (Gdańsk–Warszawa, 2011); and *Ostaniec, czyli ostatni świadek* (Warszawa, 2018).

⁶⁷ Examples include: Mariusz Wołos, *O Piłsudskim, Dmowskim i zamachu majowym. Dyplomacja sowiecka wobec Polski w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1925–1926* (Kraków, 2013); *id.*, ‘Rosyjskie źródła do dziejów polskiego ruchu komunistycznego w międzywojennym dwudziestoleciu’, *Res Gestae*, 10 (2020), 8–23; Agnieszka J. Cieślíkowa, *Czerwona Pomoc w Polsce 1924–1938. Przybudówka – przykrywka – przyczółek* (Warszawa, 2018); Eryk Krasucki, ‘A jednak coraz silniej wierzę’. *Życie i los Witolda Kolskiego (1902–1943)* (Szczecin, 2019); *id.*, *The Russian Revolution and Polish Communism in Interwar Era*, in Valentine Lomellini (ed.), *The Rise of Bolshevism and its Impact on the Interwar International Order* (London, 2020).

⁶⁸ Examples include: Konrad Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Rad. Działalność polskich komunistów w Rosji Radzieckiej 1918–1922* (Lublin, 2011); Mirosław Szumiło, *Roman Zambrowski 1909–1977. Studium z dziejów elity komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2014); Anna Sobór-Świdarska, *Jakub Berman. Biografia komunisty* (Warszawa, 2009); Michał Klimecki, *Sowietyzacja Polski w 1920 roku. Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski oraz jego instytucja latem i jesienią tego roku* (Toruń, 2016).

⁶⁹ Focusing only on book publications, it is worth mentioning four important volumes of studies that have addressed various aspects of the subject: Elżbieta Kowalczyk (ed.), *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie* (Warszawa, 2014); Marcin Bukała and Mariusz Krzysztofński (eds), *Komuniści w II Rzeczypospolitej. Ludzie – struktury – działalność* (Rzeszów, 2015); Mirosław Szumiło and Marcin Żukowski (eds), *Elity komunistyczne w Polsce* (Warszawa–Lublin, 2015); Elżbieta Kowalczyk and Konrad Rokicki (eds), *W drodze do władzy. Struktury komunistyczne realizujące politykę Rosji Sowieckiej i ZSRS wobec Polski (1917–1945)* (Warszawa, 2019); as well as two volumes of selected published sources: Bohdan Musiał and Jan Szumski (eds), *Przewrót majowy w oczach Kremla* (Warszawa, 2009); and Bohdan Musiał and Jan Szumski (eds), *Geneza paktu Hitler–Stalin. Fakty i propaganda* (Warszawa, 2012).

the work of Elżbieta Kowalczyk, who has regularly conducted research at RGASPI.⁷⁰ It is also worth noting that new documents from the Comintern archive are increasingly entering into circulation among scholars. Nevertheless, these materials primarily supplement wide-ranging research endeavours.⁷¹ Finally, it is necessary to emphasise at the conclusion of this overview that in Poland today, no one is conducting research on the Comintern itself, even though it was an essential element of political reality as well as an interesting social and cultural phenomenon.⁷²

V

EXAMPLES FROM NON-POLISH RESEARCH – POTENTIAL INSPIRATION

The conclusion to the previous sections demonstrates just how much of a gap there is between Polish historiography and work in other countries where studies on the Comintern are highly advanced and embedded in research networks. Indeed, it is possible to speak of an ‘International’ of Comintern researchers that emerged from academic conferences organised in the early 1990s in, among other places, Wuppertal (Germany), La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland), and on several occasions in Amsterdam.⁷³ The meetings organised by the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis were particularly important, with an international group of scholars led by Jürgen Rojahn (including Feliks Tych from Poland) taking the first steps towards founding a group aiming at creating a bibliography of publications on the Comintern and tracing relations connecting various communist parties to the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The network aimed to produce a monograph on the

⁷⁰ Elżbieta Kowalczyk has been preparing a study on the Warsaw Committee of the KPP, making extensive use of the RGASPI archives.

⁷¹ Cf. Eryk Krasucki, *Międzynarodowy komunista. Jerzy Borejsza – biografia polityczna* (Warszawa, 2009); Katarzyna Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach władzy. Historia Leonarda Borkowicza 1912–1989* (Szczecin–Warszawa, 2020).

⁷² The only Polish scholar who wrote on the subject of the Comintern outside the Polish context after 1989, albeit focusing on historiography, was Małgorzata Gmurczyk-Wrońska, ‘Komintern we francuskich publikacjach’, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, xxxvi, 4 (2004), 183–94.

⁷³ Фирсов, 34 года, 407–14.

Third International. However, the ambitious plans have not come to fruition as initially planned, with only an extensive edited volume appearing.⁷⁴ This publication did, though, pave the way for others.⁷⁵

Among the most interesting, and probably also most important, projects to have emerged in the last decade to examine, describe and make accessible the records created by the Comintern, are two that brought together scholars from various parts of the world. The first is The International Committee for the Computerisation of the Comintern Archive (INCOMKA), which the International Council on Archives established in 1996. It emerged from three years of negotiations. Ultimately, the Russian Council of Archives and the Federal Archival Agency agreed to the proposal that sources on the history of the Comintern should be made more accessible to researchers from around the world. Nine institutions from countries including Russia, Germany, France, Switzerland, the United States and Hungary, and 167 people from 54 countries were involved in the project. Together they managed to create an open catalogue of all materials in the collection of Comintern sources.⁷⁶ From today's perspective, perhaps the most important achievement of the INCOMKA project has been the digitisation of 5% (thus over one million pages of documents) that were then made available either free of charge in European and US-American libraries, or as part of a paid service.⁷⁷ Since March 2015, this collection has been 'liberated' and 'attached' to the website of the Russian

⁷⁴ Narinsky and Rojahn (eds), *In Centre and Periphery*.

⁷⁵ Examples include: Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International* (Manchester, 1998); Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution – New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Bern, 2005); Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale. Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt* (Berlin, 2007); Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley (eds), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern. Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53* (Hampshire–New York, 2008).

⁷⁶ Олег В. Наумов, 'О международном проекте компьютеризации Архива Коминтерна: "Пройдена пилотная стадия" и "Методические основы подготовки информации о документах Архива Коминтерна для ввода в базу данных"', *Научно-информационный бюллетень РЦХИДНИ*, 10 (1998), 5–27.

⁷⁷ Ronald D. Bachman, 'The Comintern Archives Database. Bringing the Archives to Scholars', in <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/comintern/comintern-article.html> [Accessed: 9 Nov. 2020].

Federal Archives.⁷⁸ The importance of the project is made clear in the words of the Russian historian Aleksandr Chubaryan, who declared it one of the century's most significant archival projects.⁷⁹

A second particularly noteworthy initiative is the German-Russian project, 'Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale. Personen, Apparate und Strukturen im Internationalen Kommunismus 1919–45' that ran from 1998 to 2007. The project, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, was established at the Leibniz University Hannover by a research team led by Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat. The Russian partner on the project was RGASPI and its staff, who have excellent knowledge of the source material. The project leaders' key objective was to continue their earlier prosopographic studies of the communist movement that had yielded interesting findings. With this project, they had much more favourable conditions⁸⁰ and could also pursue the goal of developing more profound reflections on the relevant methodology for such studies.⁸¹ The most significant outcome of the project was the creation of a database including extensive information on some 12,000 communist activists about whom, in many cases, very little was known and who were often only known by organisational pseudonyms.⁸² The database is supplemented by a massive bibliography of publications on the subject of international communism. The final element is an extensive collection of studies on various aspects of biographical, prosopographical and statistical research. It is also worth noting that Feliks Tych was involved in this project. He contributed to the creation of the database and also prepared an article on the *Biographical*

⁷⁸ Документы Советской Эпохи, <http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/#!tematicsection§ionId=233826> [Accessed: 9 Nov. 2020].

⁷⁹ Александр Оганович Чубарьян (ed.), *История Коммунистического Интернационала 1919–1943. Документальные очерки* (Москва, 2002), 5.

⁸⁰ An example might be Hermann Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, i–ii (Frankfurt am M., 1969). Following the opening of the archives, Weber continued his work, publishing his findings in the monumental study: Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945* (Berlin, 2004).

⁸¹ Michael Buckmiller, 'Bilanz eines russisch-deutschen Forschungsprojektes', in Buckmiller and Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch*, 19–33.

⁸² Olaf Kirchner, 'Erläuterungen zum Aufbau und zur Nutzung der biographischen Datenmaske', in Buckmiller, and Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch*, 34–51.

Dictionary of the Polish Workers' Movement, depicting it as an interesting example of collective biographical research.⁸³ Svetlana Rosental of RGASPI also addressed questions related to Poland.⁸⁴

Indeed, it is necessary to underscore the significant input of Russian and Soviet researchers in developing knowledge on the history of the Communist International. In many cases, they were working on the records of the Comintern during the Soviet period already. This was the case with Fridrikh Firsov⁸⁵ and the much younger Alexander Vatlin, who has probably become the most recognised 'Cominternologist' in recent decades.⁸⁶ Important monographs, articles and handbooks providing insight into the complex structure of the organisation are one aspect of output,⁸⁷ while collections of published source materials, often of crucial significance for research, have also emerged in Russia following the archival 'breakthrough'. Such collections include volumes on the concept of international revolution, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War,⁸⁸ as well as extensive editions of documents on the attitude of the Comintern to particular countries and geographical regions. A model case is a five-volume publication bringing together documents on China, while those on Finland, Japan and

⁸³ Feliks Tych, 'Versuch eines Kollektivporträts polnischer Komintern-Mitarbeiter. Erfahrungen bei der Arbeit am »Biographischen Handbuch der polnischen Arbeiterbewegung« [Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego]', in Buckmiller and Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch*, 93–100.

⁸⁴ Svetlana Rosental, 'Repressionen gegen polnische und britische Kommunisten. Ihre Widerspiegelung in den Dokumenten des Kominternarchivs', in Buckmiller and Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch*, 346–60.

⁸⁵ Jerzy Kraszewski, 'O działalności Kominternu, sprzecznościach w jego rozwoju, o rozwiązaniu KPP i archiwach III Międzynarodówki', *Trybuna Ludu* (26 Oct. 1988).

⁸⁶ Фридрих Игоревич Фирсов, *Секретные коды истории Коминтерна 1919–1943* (Москва, 2007); *id.*, *Секреты коммунистического Интернационала. Шифропереписка* (Москва, 2011); Александр Юрьевич Ваглин, *Троцкий и коминтерн (1923–1933)* (Москва, 1991); *id.*, *Коминтерн первые десять лет. Исторические очерки* (Москва, 1993); *id.*, *Коминтерн: идеи*.

⁸⁷ Particularly useful is the work: Грант Мкртычевич Адиебеков, Э.Н. Шахназарова, Кирилл Кириллович Ширина, *Организационная структура Коминтерна 1919–1943* (Москва, 1997).

⁸⁸ Яков Самойлович Дабкин (ed.), *Коминтерн и идея мировой революции: Документы* (Москва, 1998); Светлана П. Пожарская (ed.), *Коминтерн и гражданская война в Испании: Документы Коминтерна* (Москва, 2001); Кирилл Михайлович Андерсон and Александр Оганович Чубарьян (eds), *Коминтерн и Вторая мировая война, i–ii* (Москва, 1994–1998).

Latin America are also significant.⁸⁹ These endeavours resulted from many years of archival research involving Russian and international scholars. Another outcome of this collaboration has been academic conferences and subsequent edited volumes and published sources.⁹⁰

In addition to this, there have also been various studies that have conceptualised in various ways the Comintern and its impact on different aspects of interwar realities, including aesthetics⁹¹ and women's rights.⁹² Particularly interesting are approaches that view the Comintern as a specific cultural phenomenon, a community of fate and part of the transnational circulation of individuals engaged in bringing about world revolution.⁹³

⁸⁹ Михаил Леонтьевич Титаренко *et al.* (ed.), *ВКП(б), Коминтерн и Китай*, i–v (Москва, 1994–2007); Наталия Лебедева and Киммо Рентола (eds), *Коминтерн и Финляндия. 1919–1943: Документы* (Москва, 2003); Грант Адibeков, Харуки Вада *et al.* (eds), *ВКП(б), Коминтерн и Япония. 1917–1941 гг.* (Москва, 2001); Николай Петрович Калмыков (ed.), *Коминтерн и Латинская Америка: сборник документов* (Москва, 1998); Харуки Вада and Кирилл Кириллович Шириня (eds), *ВКП(б), Коминтерн и Корея. 1918–1941* (Москва, 2007).

⁹⁰ An example is the volume edited by Jesper Jørgensen, Alexander Chubaryan, Andrei Sorokin, and Thomas Wegener Friis (eds), *Komintern og de dansk-sovjetiske relationer* (København, 2012).

⁹¹ See, *i.a.* Fredrik Petersson, 'Historiographical Trends and the Comintern – The Communist International (Comintern) and How it has been Interpreted', *CoWoPA. Comintern Working Paper*, 8 (2007); Bernhard H. Bayerlein, 'Deutscher Kommunismus und transnationaler Stalinismus – Komintern, KPD und Sowjetunion 1929–1943. Neue Dokumente zur Konzeptualisierung einer verbundenen Geschichte', in Hermann Weber, Jakov Drabkin, Bernhard H. Bayerlein, and Alexandr Galkin (eds), *Deutschland, Russland, Komintern*, i: *Überblicke, Analysen, Diskussionen. Neue Perspektiven auf die Geschichte der KPD und die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen (1918–1943)* (Berlin–Boston, 2014), 225–440; Amelia Glaser and Steven S. Lee (eds), *Comintern Aesthetics* (Toronto, 2020).

⁹² Lisa Kirschenbaum, 'The Man Question: How Bolshevik Masculinity Shaped International Communism', *Socialist History*, 52 (2017), 76–84; Brigitte Studer, 'Von der "Neuen Frau" zur Neuen Frauenbewegung: Emanzipationskonzepte auf Zeitreise', in *Vortragsreihe des Zentrums für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam, des Centre Marc Bloch und der Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*, <https://zeitgeschichte-digital.de/doks/frontdoor/index/index/docId/1145> [Accessed: 11 Oct. 2020].

⁹³ Karl Schlögel, 'Über Räume und Register der Geschichtsschreibung. Ein Gespräch mit Karl Schlögel', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 1 (2004), 396–413; Studer, *The Transnational World*; *ead.*, *Reisende der Weltrevolution. Eine Globalgeschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Berlin, 2020).

VI CONCLUSIONS

In the 1966 discussion recorded in *Z Pola Walki*, cited above, it was noted that research on the Comintern was at a very early stage. Reaching the same conclusion in 2021 would, of course, be utterly unjustified given the overall state of the literature on the Third International. Such a conclusion would also fail to reflect the situation in Polish historiography where the past few decades have seen a real increase in knowledge on the subject, with each generation of scholars contributing to its expansion. The truth is, though, that Polish research is today in the same position as German or Italian scholarship was in 1991. Researchers there also possessed general insights into the structure, activities and main objectives of the Comintern, while still facing gaps in knowledge regarding the relations between the German or Italian sections with the organisation's central authorities. At that point, they still could not see below the surface to reveal what the 'submerged iceberg' was hiding. They managed to rectify this reasonably quickly after 1991, and their underwater explorations continue successfully to this day. Polish historiography, however, could not, or did not want to, do the same for various reasons that at this point in time are not entirely crucial.

However, what is important is that Polish scholars by and large missed out on an opportunity to join the network of international scholars working on the Comintern. They also failed to realise even the modest research proposals, with the project of publishing a comprehensive selection of sources outlining relations between the Third International and the KPP in the interwar period, and between the Comintern and Polish communists during the Second World War, now at a standstill. Looking to the future, it would be advisable to focus on reviving this project, although this would require much time and financial support for extensive research at RGASPI. It is also essential to collaborate with Russian scholars and archivists, while also drawing on the expertise of Western researchers. It is, therefore, necessary to join the network of 'Cominternologists' and of communist studies more generally, including, for example, *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies*, which has been a bastion of transnational studies since 1993 (based since 2015 at the Ruhr University Bochum).

Another crucial thing to bear in mind is the remark that it is advisable to approach the sources in the Moscow archive with greater humility and lower expectations than has often been the case thus far. It is necessary to avoid seeking out sensational material, as it happens when one approaches it with a quasi-journalistic attitude. Instead, it would be sensible to use it to develop in-depth knowledge, understanding and analysis of the materials from the most important collections relating to interwar Polish communism: the KPP and Representation of the KPP at the Executive Committee of the Comintern, as well as the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and the Communist Party of Western Belarus. There is no doubt that engaging with the history of the Comintern and popularising knowledge on the subject of this institution would be a worthwhile endeavour. It is, after all, a significant element of twentieth-century political realities that, beyond a small group of specialists, remains largely unknown in Poland.

transl. Paul Vickers

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