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State Archive in Łódź

The Łódź War Losses Assessment Committees – an undervalued source for research into the Great War in the Łódź region

Abstract: An attempt to analyse the course of the Great War in the Łódź region based on the information drawn from archival materials of the War Losses Assessment Committees. This information is a good reflection of the impact of the War on all aspects of local community life.

The State Archive in Łódź preserves two archival fonds that are potentially excellent material for extensive research of the history of Łódź and its region during the Great War.

This study refers to the archival material of the War Losses Assessment Committee of the Łódź *powiat*¹ (*Komisja Szacunkowa Strat Wojennych Powiatu Łódzkiego*) (8244 archival files accounting for almost 12 linear meters) and the Local Assessment Committee in Łódź (*Komisja Szacunkowa Miejskowa w Łodzi*) (5923 archival files covering over 15 linear meters)².

Most likely, this impressive size of the fonds together with the absence of collective or statistical materials (the fonds preserve only appraisal studies of incurred losses) mean that these holdings remain pristine materials, untouched by the hand and unseen by the eye of researchers who prefer to use press materials and general reports³.

1 *Powiat* is the second-level unit of local government and administration in Poland. The term “*powiat*” is most often translated into English as “county” (trans.).

2 The fonds are complex and comprise documents from numerous appraisal committees constituted already in 1914. This paper is not concerned with a complicated history of how the archival files were inherited and taken over. The interested parties should refer to the introduction to inventory of Local Assessment Committee in Łódź by Anna Rynkowska. Cf. Rynkowska, Anna: *Komisja Szacunkowa Miejskowa w Łodzi* (wstęp do inwentarza). Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi: Łódź.

3 Vide: Pietras, Tomasz: *Zniszczenia wojenne z okresu I wojny światowej w okolicach Łodzi* – a paper presented on 18 October 2013 during a conference *Łódź w drodze do niepodległości* organised in the Institute of History of the University of Łódź.

The appraisals comprise a declaration of the injured party concerning the type and value of incurred losses (usually drafted on a printed form which also included instruction⁴), the injured party interview report, sometimes a separate statement of the State Main Assessment Committee in Warsaw (*Państwowa Komisja Szacunkowa Główna w Warszawie*) which functioned in this case as the second instance entity. The Committee statement was of a decisive nature and determined the final value of losses: very often it reduced the size of the claims. On many occasions, in the absence of comments from the State Main Assessment Committee, the declaration was stamped with the Committee's stamp of approval.

The first losses were reported by the injured parties as soon as the beginning of 1915, mainly to the Assessment Section (*Sekcja Szacunkowa*) established at the Citizens' Committee of the City of Łódź (*Główny Komitet Obywatelski m. Łodzi*) or to the Imperial-German Police Headquarters in Łódź (*Kaiserlich-Deutsches Polizeipräsidium in Łódź*). Appraisal reports submitted during warfare, i.e. from 1916 to 1917, before the Municipal Assessment Committee (*Komisja Szacunkowa Miejska*)⁵ include the pledge: "I solemnly swear that, as a party injured in warfare, I will give truthful evidence concerning assessment of my losses, knowing that I might be called to account for my testimony"⁶. Probably due to the large number of submitted declarations, members of the Municipal Assessment Committee could estimate the damages first hand and evaluate them in a short time: The documents suggest that in practice, the Municipal Assessment Committee members assessed personally only the damages declared by injured institutions such as charity associations, religious associations or the railway.

Sometimes photographs documenting the scope of damages and technical drawings of destroyed or burnt down houses can be found. The losses were estimated in roubles paid in gold according to pre-war rates. If the injured persons estimated their losses in German marks (which happened very rarely), this amount was converted to roubles. The losses were subdivided into five categories:

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- 4 Interestingly, a separate instruction concerning requisition of organ pipes and organs was prepared for parish priests. Cf. State Archive in Łódź (Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi subsequently referred to as APŁ), Komisja Szacunkowa Strat Wojennych Powiatu Łódzkiego (subsequently referred to as KSSWPŁ), 2490.
 - 5 The Committee was linked to the Department of War Damages Registration of the Central Welfare Council in Warsaw (*Wydział Rejestracji Szkód Wojennych Rady Głównej Opiekuńczej*). It should not be confused with the Local Assessment Committee in Łódź, which was an agency of the Central Local Assessment Committee (*Główna Komisja Szacunkowa Miejskowa*) in Warsaw.
 - 6 All quotations in the text have been translated by the translator unless stated otherwise.

- I. Losses resulting from army requisitions including lodging infrastructure,
- II. General losses (regulations of occupying and civil authorities, confiscations, contributions and penalties, forced sale, administration or operation),
- III. Losses due to damages resulting directly from warfare,
- IV. Losses due to a direct material losses (theft, robbery, flight from the approaching war front or flight from the areas occupied by enemy, relocation or deportation by authorities),
- V. Losses due to claims (financial).

According to materials included in the fonds, the most obvious subject of research seems to be the evaluation and presentation of material losses incurred during the Great War by the citizens of Łódź and its industry.

Apart from military action, the basic causes of misfortune included forced sale and confiscation or requisition. They concerned mainly industry machines and facilities, raw materials, fabrics and metals, livestock and fixed assets, food and firewood. Interestingly the injured parties addressed their claims to all three occupant countries⁷ but the majority were addressed to the German party⁸. According to the preserved documents, the first requisitions were performed by the Polish civil committees on their own initiative or pursuant to the decrees of the German authorities and concerned weapons owned by citizens⁹.

The order on forced sale of goods and raw materials (only for drastically reduced prices) was applicable not only to production plants and warehouses but also to regular citizens. Together with the introduction of this duty, citizens were banned from selling objects covered by forced sale to any entities apart from the

7 The claims against the Austro-Hungarian authorities were related mainly to the legions' residence in Łódź from 11 to 28 October 1914.

8 The last instalment of war reparations for France and Great Britain was paid by the Federal Republic of Germany, a successor of the Reich, on 3 October 2010 i.e. 92 years after the end of World War I. The issue of reparations for Poland has never been finally settled. Our country received a small portion of the allowed 6,5 per cent of German reparations, i.e. 8,5 billion German mark in gold. The reparations were paid in the form of army surplus equipment and railway engines.

9 Among others, Józef Pałowski, a priest from Zgierz handed over as many as two revolvers in October 1914. Cf. APŁ, KSSWPL, 2520. What is interesting is the fact that in Łódź the Central Committee of Citizens Militia (*Centralny Komitet Milicji Obywatelskiej*) transferred the confiscated weapons to Legionnaires on a confiscation receipt.

ones indicated by the occupation authorities¹⁰. They were also prohibited from processing raw materials. The German authorities usually paid a small advance on the sale¹¹, deposited due amounts in German banks or “paid” them in the form of war loans receipts. The discovery of any earlier undisclosed goods resulted in their confiscation, which was performed at the slightest excuse. Additionally, the persons suspected of non-disclosure of goods were punishable by up to five years of prison or with a penalty of up to 10,000 German marks¹².

Apart from the list of obvious “goods and products necessary for the army” which were subject to requisition and confiscation, the records include such unique items as a school globe and three blackboards taken from a school in Rzgów¹³, and the disassembled wooden surface of a bridge on the Ner river in the vicinity of the village of Zdziechów¹⁴. The groundskeeping of a church in Łągiewniki reported, apart from losses resulting from shelling, the theft of “a halter for burying the dead” and 72 candles¹⁵. Likewise, the injured party, Łódź Nursing Association (*Łódzkie Towarzystwo Pielęgowania Chorych*) *Bykur Cholim*, submitted a requisition for four pillows for a Russian field hospital¹⁶. The administration of a Julianów-Marysin property reported a requisition by the German government of 330 carts with field stones intended for road construction¹⁷. Mendel Burak,

10 Most often it was the War Resources Department, Second Division in Łódź (*Kriegsrohstoffstelle Warschau Zweigstelle Łódź*) seated by 18 Cegielniana St. (currently Jaracza St.).

11 For example, company N. and F. Hanftwurcel in Konstanyń received a cash equivalent of 765,40 rouble for a forced sale of material and equipment worth 8392,34 rouble. The equivalent equaled only 9% of the due amount. Cf. APŁ, KSSWPL, 2071.

12 The Łódź textile industry, as already described on numerous occasions, did not pick itself up from war damages and devastation (also the loss of a large outlet in Russia played a part here). During the interwar period the large factories of I.K. Poznański, Scheibler and Grohmann basically fought for survival instead of expanding further. The issue of requisitions and confiscations that devastated industry in Łódź has been discussed broadly by Krystyna Radziszewska, cf. Radziszewska, Krystyna: “Korespondencja Związku Przemysłowców Królestwa Polskiego z szefem zarządu Generalnego Gubernatorstwa Warszawskiego 1915–1916. Prezentacja źródła archiwalnego”. In: Radziszewska, Krystyna/ Zawilski, Piotr (eds.): *Między wielką historią a codziennością*. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi/Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego: Łódź 2012, pp. 37–48.

13 APŁ, KSSWPL, 1161.

14 *Ibid.*, 135.

15 *Ibid.*, 1229.

16 *Ibid.*, 1697.

17 *Ibid.*, 1656.

forced to provide lodgings for Prussian officers, reported the theft of bed sheets and a hamper¹⁸.

The requisition receipts or copies thereof that were often attached to appraisal reports indicate the entity that performed the requisition, the exact date of the requisition and even the destination of the requisitioned materials and raw materials¹⁹.

From the beginning of 1915, requisitions covered also machines and equipment²⁰. They were carefully checked before being dispatched from the city. As the files include the manufacturer's name, production date, weight, dimensions and value, it is now possible to assess the condition of the machinery in Łódź factories at the outbreak of war. The machine metrics were signed by the Łódź owner, the German "buyer" and a representative of the company where the machine was sent²¹.

Another type of loss, purely a financial one, arose in consequence of the lost bank deposits and interest rates²², a ban on practising law by lawyers and notaries and the loss of income from the lease of flats occupied by reservist women (wives of reservists conscripted into the Russian army)²³. During submission of appraisal reports, testimonies were collected from women²⁴. The testimonies detail the

18 APŁ, KSSWPL, 502.

19 Company M. Kleczewski i ska: a finishing and dyer shop in Zgierz presented confirmations of receipt (certified copies thereof) of velour, satin, cashmere, etc. that were "expropriated" in 1917 and 1918 and sent to Saarbrücken, Königsberg and Münster. Cf. Ibid., 2434.

20 Machine Sequester Commission (*Maschinen-Beschlagnahme-Kommission*) located by 30 Przejazd St. (now: Tuwima St.) was responsible for these activities.

21 Machines were transported among others to Altona (now a district of Hamburg), Essen, Ludwigshafen, Kassel.

22 In the situation of general poverty and destruction even the smallest losses were reported. Mariavite Credit-Saving Association (*Mariawickie Towarzystwo Pożyczkowo-Oszczędnościowe*) in Zgierz reported that five rouble, with a due interest rate, was lost in consequence of evacuation by the Russian authorities of the Zgierz Postal Office Savings Bank (*Pocztowa Kasa Oszczędnościowa*) in which the Association deposited its money. Cf. APŁ, KSSWPL, 2525.

23 The related losses constitute the largest part of the archival material in the Municipal Assessment Committee in Łódź and comprise ca. 1100 files. According to the decree of the Russian government of 10 August 1914, servicemen and their families could not be forced to vacate the flats they occupied. Still, the reservist women, deprived of livelihood, could not pay their rent.

24 Lack of a testimony led to automatic rejection of a claim for payment for a flat occupied by a reservist woman. Only 46 out of the 52 reservist women reported by the Cotton Products Joint-Stock Company of I. K. Poznański in Łódź (Towarzystwo Akcyjny Wyrobów Bawełnianych I.K. Poznańskiego w Łodzi) submitted their testimonies

address, the number of occupied rooms and the due rent. In addition, the number of crosses used instead of signatures indicate that about 50% of women were illiterate. Using the same documents, we can also estimate the scale of conscription into the Russian army. The Joint-Stock Company of Widzew Cotton Manufacture (*Towarzystwo Akcyjne Widzewskiej Manufaktury Bawełnianej*) reported a loss resulting from rent that had not been paid by as many as 104 reservist women. And not all the workers of this factory lived in multi-family houses for factory workers²⁵: Losses due to unpaid rent were also estimated in the event of a forced evacuation of residents by the Russian authorities²⁶. Similar losses resulted from the forced provision of lodgings for servicemen²⁷. This was particularly painful for the Łódź hotels and in particular for the Grand Hotel, which had been fully taken over by the Prussian army and was banned from renting rooms to civilians until October 1916²⁸. The appraisal reports contain questionnaires with the family name and the rank of the owner of the lodgings, the number of months and sometimes the name of a military unit.

Declarations presented in front of committees can also provide material for historians studying the development of industry in the Łódź region. The documents contain, for example, lists of confiscated machines with indication of the

and the loss was estimated only on the basis thereof. Cf. APL, Komisja Szacunkowa Miejskowa w Łodzi (subsequently referred to as KSMŁ), 3818.

25 Ibid., 1649.

26 This refers to Russian administration clerks evacuated to the East as well as to the interned subjects of Germany or Austria-Hungary. Cotton Products Joint-Stock Company of K. Scheibler in Łódź (*Towarzystwo Akcyjne Wyrobów Bawełnianych K. Scheiblera w Łodzi*) reported a war loss consisting of a rent due for the first nine months of 1914 for the rental of the Company's buildings by 20/22 Konstanyńska St. (now: Legionów St.), which were used as army barracks. Cf. Ibid., 4333.

27 Pursuant to the laws concerning provision of lodgings all unoccupied flats were subject to registration and had to be made available for servicemen and German clerks. A general was entitled to a three-room flat, a staff officer to a two-room flat, and a captain to a one-room flat. The cost of the lodgings was calculated according to the rank: lodgings of a general cost 3.50 German Marks, lodgings of a captain or a lieutenant – half of this cost, i.e. 1.75 German Marks, lodgings of privates and orderlies – 0.50 German Marks for three persons. The army of course did not pay for anything. Some facilities were occupied throughout the whole war. The Posselt Villa belonging to the Zgierz Manufacture Joint-Stock Company (*Towarzystwo Akcyjne Zgierskiej Manufaktury*) was occupied by the Germans from 17 November 1914 to 13 November 1918. Cf. APL, KSSWPL, 2480.

28 For example General Gerecke paid three German Marks per day for a room, which before the war had cost 20 Roubles, so he only covered 10% of the due amount. Cf. APL, KSMŁ, 1806.

machine type, manufacturer and even the year of production. Thanks to the lists of confiscated finished goods, it is possible to determine exactly the production profile, its assortment breakdown and the market value of individual products and raw materials²⁹.

Very detailed lists and declarations presented by the farmers in the Łódź area enable the condition of the farmsteads to be determined in terms of livestock, the type and volume of their agricultural produce, as well as the farming equipment, furniture and facilities of the farms³⁰. This group of injured parties described their losses in a particularly meticulous way and did not focus on an exact determination of the time when their losses occurred.

The foundations and associations that appeared before both Committees often described, apart from their lost assets, a detailed profile of their business and the composition of authorities. While studying the lists of these organisations, it can be easily seen that they were mostly of a philanthropic and charitable nature.

The losses were only partially caused by the direct military actions of 1914: only ca. 10% of claims in the Municipal Assessment Committee and ca. 30% of claims in the War Losses Assessment Committee of the *Łódź powiat*. However, it is thanks to these materials that a map of the sites affected by German bombing or the route of the front line in November and December 1914 can be drawn.

It is generally believed that contributions were imposed only by occupying authorities but there are materials that indicate that some were also demanded by the Russian side. For instance, the majority of Starowa Góra inhabitants reported that in November 1914, the Russian army imposed on the village a fine of 500 roubles for the breakage of the field telephone cable lines by unknown perpetrators³¹.

29 Particularly unfortunate entrepreneurs incurred all possible losses caused by both warring parties. The Grossbart & Heyman company in Konstantynów initially suffered as a consequence of collection by the Russians of finished woolen goods worth over 30 thousand Roubles. Then, as a result of the German shelling, the factory buildings worth more than 27 thousand Roubles were destroyed or damaged. Next, heirloom jewelry worth 2700 rouble was stolen from a broken safe. Finally, during the German occupation, the remaining machinery and raw materials were confiscated. All plagues culminated in a verdict of the German court which imposed a penalty of 300 Roubles for selling resources without permission of the occupant authorities. Cf. APŁ, KSSWPEŁ, 2038.

30 Based on the review of declarations submitted by farmers it can be claimed that the condition of the near-Łódź farmsteads was very good. Nearly every farmer reported a loss of a silver watch. It seems that especially these declarations should be taken with some caution.

31 *Ibid.*, 597.

It was also common to apply financial penalties for opening business premises or a bakery too early or for closing too late, for underweighing or overweighing goods, or for offering bread for sale that was too fresh (less than 24 hours).

Confiscation of the church bells is one of the best known facts often quoted to illustrate the policy of the German occupation. This fact is also reflected in the materials of both Committees, in which we can find data concerning not only the weight and the value of the bells but also the names of their founders, their proper names, the year of casting, the exact date of confiscation and even information that the bells were destroyed immediately after they had been taken down. The fonds of the War Losses Assessment Committee of the Łódź *powiat* contains surprising information concerning a Catholic parish in Aleksandrów which instead of two large requisitioned bells received one smaller bell that had most likely been taken from a cemetery chapel³². It is unclear what the Aleksandrów parish priest had done to deserve such “special” treatment.

The material also depict numerous intermediate losses that are difficult to classify. Yet, the removal of these losses was surely very important for the injured parties. For instance, “a church organ detuned by soldiers” was reported by a church in Łągiewniki³³. Apparently, the church organ was in a condition that prevented musical setting of the masses, and the re-tuning of this very complex instrument required the hiring of an expensive tuner. Another unusual loss covered the remuneration of forest workers due for the clearance of the forest in Kały which had been hit by shelling³⁴. This loss entailed another: the forest owner not only lost lumber but also had to bear additional costs for the removal of forest down timber. The burning of all accounting documents of the Credit-Savings Bank in Konstantynów (*Kasa Pożyczkowo-Oszczędnościowa w Konstantynowie*), including a register of savings deposits and loans, meant that it was “almost brought to ruin” and was unable to enforce liabilities and properly estimate claims of its members, who wanted to withdraw their savings³⁵.

I feel it is important to mention a document included in one of the appraisal reports. The archival files include a copy of a confirmation issued in German by the Imperial-German Powiat Bank in Rawa (*Kaiserliche Kreis Kasse in Rawa*) dated 12 November 1918. This small piece of paper is a reminder that the regaining of independence was not an outcome of a one-day upsurge but a continuous,

32 Ibid., 10.

33 Ibid., 1229.

34 Ibid., 1697.

35 Ibid., 2096.

long and complex process³⁶. Withdrawal of the German army and administration from the areas of the former Russian annexation was gradual and continued in 1918. Withdrawal from the Prussian annexation (in particular from Pomerania) lasted until 1920.

Due to the limitations of this report, the author has randomly selected only an individual sample chosen from over 1400 files. Nevertheless, it is the author's wish that the selected examples are interesting enough to attract researchers who will study this extensive material in a more disciplined way.

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36 Ibid., 4626.

