

*Anna Jarosz-Nojszewska**

UNEMPLOYMENT IN POLAND IN 1918–2018

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Abstract

The article presents a synthetic analysis of unemployment in three periods of Polish history: the Second Polish Republic, the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) and the Third Polish Republic. In all these periods, unemployment was a consequence of historical conditions as well as economic and social changes. In the interwar period, the unemployment was a result of a traditional economic structure, the Great Depression and the post-war demographic boom. After the Second World War Poland became part of the Soviet bloc, and the official ideology declared full employment. In the Polish People’s Republic the consequence of this policy was hidden unemployment, which proved a heavy burden for the economy. Official unemployment returned after 1989, as a result of economic and social changes. In all the three abovesaid time spans, women and young people were most significantly affected by the unemployment. This issue is still regarded as crucial, though thanks to government programmes and aid provided by the European Union, its effects appear to be less severe.

Keywords: unemployment, work, employment, the Second Polish Republic, Polish People’s Republic, the Third Polish Republic

Introduction

In the last hundred years after Poland regained its independence in 1918, the phenomenon of unemployment has been one of the most important social and economic issues, although in different periods it was taking different forms, and its structure and scale were changing as well. The objective of this article is a synthetic analysis of the issue of unemployment in three periods of Polish history – in the era of the Second

* Collegium of Socio-Economics, SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

Polish Republic, the Polish People's Republic (PRL) and the Third Polish Republic. The problems related to unemployment have been at the centre of public interest. However, in each of these periods it was not always possible to carry out objective research into this phenomenon. As a consequence, there were no sources, including statistical data, which would allow to precisely examine the dynamics and the extent of unemployment. What is more, there were no scientific studies devoted to this subject-matter which would cover the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL).

In the era of the Second Polish Republic, the issue of unemployment generated keen interest among scientists. The sociological literature appears to prevail among many publications of this period, and there are considerably fewer economic studies. A special contribution to the study of unemployment in this regard was made by the Institute of Social Economy, whose competitions for the presentation of diaries of the unemployed provide extremely valuable sources of knowledge on the social effects of unemployment.¹ In the post-war period, the issue of unemployment in the Second Polish Republic was examined by Maria Ciechocińska² and Zbigniew Landau,³ Marta Dolecka,⁴ Marcin Graban⁵ and Krystyna Mlonek,⁶ and the issue of insurance against unemployment in this period was analysed by Jan Nowacki and Anna Jarosz-Nojszewska.⁷

Only in recent years has the research on unemployment in the PRL been carried out on a larger scale. In the period of the Polish People's Republic, the issue of unemployment was not the focus of the scientists' attention. The latter resulted from the

¹ *Pamiętniki bezrobotnych*, Warszawa 1933; presentation of the condition of research on unemployment in 1918–1939. See: A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, *Ubezpieczenie od bezrobocia w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] *Ekonomia, społeczeństwo, polityka. Studia ofiarowane prof. dr. hab. Januszowi Kalińskiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin*, A. Zawistowski, (Ed.), Warszawa 2012, p. 211; K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce w XX wieku w świetle badań*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 17–67.

² M. Ciechocińska, *Spis roku 1931 jako źródło danych o bezrobociu wśród ludności miejskiej w Polsce*, "Przegląd Statystyczny" No. 4, 1960; M. Ciechocińska, *Położenie klasy robotniczej w Polsce 1929–1939. Studia i materiały*, Warszawa 1965; *ibidem*, *Próby walki z bezrobociem w Polsce międzywojennej*, Warszawa 1965.

³ Z. Landau, *Bezrobocie w Polsce w latach 1930–1935*, Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny "Sobótka" No. 1, 1969, pp. 57–91; Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Robotnicy przemysłowi w Polsce. Materialne warunki bytu 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1971.

⁴ Inter alia: M. Dolecka, D. Raczkiwicz, *Bezrobocie w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym w kontekście jakości danych w spisach ludności*, "Annales UMCS", Sectio H "Oeconomia" No. 48(2), 2014; *ibidem*, *Próby ograniczenia skutków bezrobocia w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] *Idee gospodarcze Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Lublin 1996, pp. 125–142; *idem*, *Przyczyny i charakter bezrobocia w Lublinie w okresie międzywojennym*, "Annales UMCS" Sectio F, Vol. LXVII, No. 1, 2012.

⁵ M. Graban, *Unemployment and Homelessness in the City of Poznań in 1929–1939*, "Studia Historiae Oeconomicae" No. 32, 2014, pp. 77–108.

⁶ K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce...*, *op.cit.*

⁷ J. Nowacki, *Ubezpieczenie na wypadek braku pracy*, [in:] *Rozwój ubezpieczeń społecznych w Polsce*, Cz. Jackowiak, (Ed.), Wrocław 1991, pp. 151–157; A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, *Ubezpieczenie od bezrobocia...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 211–225.

country's policy of full employment implemented due to ideological reasons. Ideological considerations did not allow for objective research, and statistical sources from the period did not reflect the scale of this phenomenon. After the post-October Gomulka's thaw, the Institute of Social Economy (IGS), which was reactivated after the war, carried out research into unemployment on local labour markets.⁸ In 1990, the new publication by Józef Nowicki undertook to estimate the scale of hidden unemployment in the Polish economy.⁹ Only after the systemic transformation was it possible to conduct wider and more comprehensive studies on unemployment in the socialist economy. The authors who discussed the issues related to unemployment in the period of the Polish People's Republic (or more broadly to the functioning of the entire labour market in this period) from the historical perspective included Tomasz Terteka,¹⁰ Paweł Grata,¹¹ Jerzy Kochanowski¹² and Sławomir Kamosiński.¹³ On the margin of the broader scientific works, the subject-matter of unemployment was also discussed by, inter alia, Natalia Jarska,¹⁴ Marcin Zaremba¹⁵ and Dariusz Jarosz.¹⁶ Even though this issue has attracted greater interest in recent years, to this day there has existed no monograph which would be fully devoted to the issue of unemployment in socialist Poland.

However, there are considerably more studies on unemployment which concern the period after political transformation. A majority of them are works written by sociologists and economists. Only in recent years have the studies on unemployment in the Third Polish Republic of Poland become the focus of interest of economic historians.¹⁷ It is expected that in the coming years, monographs which would discuss the issue of unemployment in Poland after the period of transformation would

⁸ The studies have been more widely discussed in the work by K. Młonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce...*, op.cit., pp. 67–101.

⁹ J. Nowicki, *Paradoksy pełnego zatrudnienia w Polsce*, Warszawa 1990; studies on the subject were also carried out by: M. Góra, M. Rutkowski, *Popyt na pracę oraz bezrobocie ukryte w Polsce w latach 80-tych*, "Ekonomista" No. 2–3, 1990.

¹⁰ T. Terteka, *Propozycje pomocy socjalnej dla bezrobotnych w programach opozycji demokratycznej w latach 1979–1989*, "Białostockie Teki Historyczne" Vol. 6, 2008, pp. 217–227.

¹¹ P. Grata, *Przemiany w polskiej polityce zatrudnienia w latach 1944–1949*, [in:] *Od kwestii robotniczej do nowoczesnej kwestii socjalnej. Studia z polskiej polityki społecznej XX i XIX wieku*, Vol. V, P. Grata, (Ed.), Rzeszów 2017, pp. 75–96.

¹² J. Kochanowski, "Niepotrzebni muszą odejść", czyli widmo bezrobocia 1956–1957, "Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i Materiały" Vol. XIV, 2016, pp. 61–98.

¹³ S. Kamosiński, *Praca jako obowiązek a praca jako źródło satysfakcji. Studium historyczne roli i znaczenia pracy w dziejach Polski*, "Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym" Vol. 19, 2015, pp. 63–79.

¹⁴ N. Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru. Robotnice w Polsce w latach 1945–1960*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 35–44, 219–225.

¹⁵ M. Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947*, Kraków–Warszawa 2012, pp. 233–246.

¹⁶ D. Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm 1948–1956*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 120–124.

¹⁷ A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, *Bezrobocie i wykluczenie*, [in:] *Problemy gospodarcze Trzeciej Rzeczypospolitej*, A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, (Ed.), Warszawa 2017, pp. 175–190.

appear. The publications and databases of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) are an invaluable source of knowledge on the period.¹⁸

1. The Second Polish Republic

Unemployment in the Second Polish Republic was a constant phenomenon, which was caused, on the one hand, by large overpopulation of the rural areas and on the other, poorly developed industry. Regardless of the full unemployment, partial unemployment was a frequent phenomenon. We do not know the exact number of the unemployed in this period. The Central Statistical Office (GUS) collected information only on the number of individuals who were registered in the National Employment Agencies (Państwowy Urząd Pośrednictwa Pracy, PUPP), but the data presented lower values than the actual number of individuals who were unemployed.

The first period of severe unemployment occurred in the months immediately after regaining independence due to the fact that, as a result of wartime devastation, many manufacturing plants were destroyed. The unemployment in the period was estimated at 650,000–1 million people.¹⁹ In November 1919 the Sejm passed a law on provisional relief efforts for the unemployed. In accordance with its provisions, the group entitled to receive unemployment benefits included the workers who were making their living through hired labour and did not have their own assets or income which would allow them to support themselves and their families. The maximum period these individuals were entitled to benefits was 13 weeks.²⁰

However, the situation changed quickly.²¹ The economic recession of 1924–1926 resulted in the fact that in April 1926, the number of unemployed workmen reached 310,500.²² In this period, the Act of 18 July 1924 introduced insurance against unemployment,²³ which covered individuals who were over 18 and worked in industrial enterprises which employed more than 5 people. The act stated that workers are eligible

¹⁸ <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/> [retrieved on 10.01.2018].

¹⁹ Z. Landau, *Bezrobocie*, [in:] *Encyklopedia historii gospodarczej Polskie do 1945 roku*, vol. I, Warszawa 1981, pp. 32–33.

²⁰ Ustawa tymczasowa z dnia 4 listopada 1919 r. o doraźnej pomocy dla bezrobotnych, DzU 1919, nr 89, poz.483 (Temporary Act of 4 November 1919 on temporary aid for the unemployed, Journal of Laws of 1919, No. 89, item 483; see also: J. Drecki, *Bezrobocie w Polsce niepodległej*, [in:] *Bilans gospodarczy dziesięciolecia Polski Odrodzonej*, Vol. II, Poznań 1929, pp. 280–281.

²¹ Z. Landau, *Bezrobocie*, op.cit., pp. 32–33.

²² Ibidem, p. 33.

²³ DzURP 1924, nr 76, poz. 650 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 1924, No. 76, item 650); J. Łazowski, *Wstęp do nauki o ubezpieczeniach*, Sopot, n.d. [1998], p. 57.

to receive benefits only in the case when the party to terminate the employment contract was the employer, and the termination was due to the reasons non-attributable to the insured.²⁴ The unemployment benefits could be collected for a maximum period of 13 weeks in a year, and its amount depended on the insured person's family situation. The lowest amount was given to single people, and it increased in line with the number of dependants of the individual.²⁵ Following the abovesaid act, the Unemployment Fund (Fundusz Bezrobocia) was created, which operated under the supervision of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. Half of the Ministry income came from the Treasury, and half from the contributions paid by the employers (75%) and the insured (25%).²⁶

In January 1925, the amendment of the law allowed the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare to extend the statutory period of the payment of benefits to 26 weeks, and in subsequent years – to 17 weeks.²⁷ Using the powers conferred upon him, the Minister, among others, introduced the benefits paid to seasonal workers.²⁸ The amount of benefits also increased. In 1929 the allowance increased by 10%, with a 10% reduction of the contribution rate.²⁹ The favourable economic situation of 1925–1928 was conducive to the implementation of these changes.

The Act of 26 October 1925 extended the compulsory insurance against unemployment to also cover white-collar workers earning more than 500 zlotys per month.³⁰ Two years later, under the Presidential Decree of 24 November 1927 on the insurance of white-collar workers,³¹ the insurance covered all white-collar workers over the age of 16, regardless of the amount of their salary.

White-collar workers benefited from more favourable rules for granting allowances. In the case of losing their job, they received benefits for the period of 6 to 9 months, in the amount of 30% of the basic wage for a single person and 40% of the rate for a worker who had to support their family. The basis for determining the amount of the benefit was the average basic wage of the insured. In addition, the insured was entitled to collect a family allowance. In contrast to the insurance of workmen, the insurance of white-collar workers was financed entirely from contributions.³²

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ J. Nowacki, op.cit., pp. 152.

²⁶ J. Drecki, op. cit., pp. 381.

²⁷ DzURP 1925, nr 15, poz. 97 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 1925, No. 15, item. 97).

²⁸ More on the subject, see: A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, *Ubezpieczenie od bezrobocia...*, op.cit., pp. 217–218.

²⁹ DzU 1929, nr 48, poz. 401 (Journal of Laws of 1929, no.48, item 401)

³⁰ DzU 1925, nr 120, poz. 185 (Journal of Laws of 1925, No. 120, item 185).

³¹ DzU 1927, nr 106, poz. 911 (Journal of Laws 1927, No. 106, item 911).

³² Ibidem.

Regardless of the introduction of unemployment insurance, in the second half of the 1920s, the government tried to organise financial help for the unemployed.

The government also continued to hire the unemployed to perform public works, which were conducted by local governments and social organisations and financed from low-interest loans granted by the government. In 1925 14,500 people were engaged to carry out public works, and in 1926–1929 the number reached 26,000–34,000 people.³³

A huge rise in unemployment led to the Great Economic Depression. The percentage of the unemployed in Poland exceeded 43% at the time. The greatest decrease in the number of workers was recorded in the construction (61%), mineral (51%) and in metallurgy industry (48%).³⁴ The crisis also popularised the practice of partial employment, which resulted in the increase in the rate of partial unemployment, especially in the textile industry.

The crisis has brought about changes in the current state policy towards the unemployed. Initially, the partly unemployed workers were granted the right to receive benefits under special regulations of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.³⁵ Nevertheless, in the following years, as a result of increasing unemployment and a lack of funds, the aid for the partially unemployed was abandoned.³⁶ The government planned to introduce the shortening of the working day, hoping to eliminate unemployment. However, in 1932, the policy of the government has changed radically, which consequently led to the deterioration of the legislation as regards the labour law – for example, in March 1933, the working week was extended by two hours (from 46 to 48 hours) without changing the payable remuneration.³⁷

A sudden increase in the number of the unemployed resulted in the fact that, due to increased expenditure, the Unemployment Fund had to incur considerable loans from the Treasury.³⁸ Under the circumstances, in March 1931, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare restored the original rates of the contributions and benefits.³⁹ In March 1932, the regulations concerning insurance against unemployment were amended.⁴⁰ The rules concerning entitlements to receive benefits were stricter,

³³ Z. Landau, *Roboty publiczne*, op.cit., pp. 184.

³⁴ J. Skodlarski, *Zarys historii gospodarczej Polski*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 274–276.

³⁵ More on the subject, see: A. Jarosz-Nojszewska, *Ubezpieczenie od bezrobocia...*, op.cit., p. 221.

³⁶ M. Ciechocińska, *Położenie klasy robotniczej...*, op.cit., pp. 88.

³⁷ DzU [Journal of Laws] 1933, No. 27, item 227; Z. Landau, *Polskie ustawodawstwo...*, op.cit., p. 11.

³⁸ J. Nowacki, op.cit., p. 154.

³⁹ DzU 1931, nr 27, poz. 187 (Journal of Laws 1931, No. 27, item 187).

⁴⁰ DzU 1932, nr 39, poz. 399; (Journal of Laws 1931, No. 27, item 187) and subsequent amendments after the adoption of the following acts: DzU 1933, No. 45, item 349 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 45, item 349); DzU 1933, nr 9, 57 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 9, item 57); DzU 1933, nr 26, poz. 215 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 26, item 215).

the amount of the contribution was decreased with the introduction of the new methods of its calculation, and the right held by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare to extend the benefit period was limited. As a result of the implemented changes, the number of the unemployed receiving benefits decreased by nearly 50%. Thus, it was possible to reduce the expenditure on the benefits for the insured and increase the Fund's income. Near the end of 1932, the Fund recorded a surplus, which was used to repay the debt incurred in the previous years.⁴¹

In the period of the Great Depression, a serious financial deficiency occurred also in the case of the unemployment insurance covering white-collar workers.⁴² This deficit was covered by the funds allocated to retirement benefits. In 1933, the government issued an act amending the rights concerning the recipients of insurance benefits. The act excluded pensioners from the group entitled to collect the allowances and discontinued the abovesaid payments to seasonal workers. The period of waiting for the benefit payments was extended to 12 months of being insured during the 24 months preceding the loss of employment.⁴³ and the amount of the premium was increased.⁴⁴

Seeking new opportunities to solve the problem of unemployment, the government organised an initiative of provisional assistance. Special institutes were created; they included: the National Committee for Unemployment, The Departmental Committee for Unemployment, the Unemployment Assistance Fund and the Labour Fund.⁴⁵ Established in 1933, the objective of the Labour Fund was to offer employment opportunities to the unemployed.⁴⁶ Its activity mainly consisted in organising and carrying out public works. However, the Labour Fund also offered employment services and emergency assistance to the unemployed, and in 1934, after its merger with the Unemployment Fund, the entity became responsible for the matters related to unemployment insurance.

The number of individuals employed to carry out public works was increasing incrementally, reaching 360,000 people in 1937, which, as a consequence, contributed to alleviating the unemployment problem.⁴⁷ Apart from public works, the government also undertook the task of offering employment to young people entering the job market. Recent graduates could not register in Local Employment Agencies,

⁴¹ L. Mackiewicz-Golik, *System finansowy ubezpieczeń społecznych*, [in:] *Rozwój ubezpieczeń społecznych w Polsce*, Wrocław 1991, p. 74.

⁴² DzU 1933, nr 45, poz. 349 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 45, item 349).

⁴³ DzU 1933 nr 50, poz. 394 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 50, item 394).

⁴⁴ DzU 1933, nr 45, poz. 349 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 45, item 349).

⁴⁵ M. Ciechocińska, *Próby walki...*, op.cit., pp. 234–235.

⁴⁶ DzU 1933, nr 22, poz. 163 (Journal of Laws 1933, No. 22, item 163).

⁴⁷ Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, op.cit., pp. 529–530.

and they could not be hired to participate in public works. Therefore, the government started to establish the Voluntary Labour Corps. With a limited scope, however, this initiative did not play a very important part in eliminating youth unemployment.⁴⁸

The increase in the employment rate, which took place after the crisis, however, did not cause changes in the labour market due to the fact that the workmen who were able to find jobs were replaced by individuals who decided to leave overpopulated villages and seek employment in urban areas.

2. The Polish People's Republic

After the end of the Second World War, under the changed political conditions, the state started to pursue the policy aimed at full employment. The Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22 July 1952⁴⁹ guaranteed every citizen the right to work. Full employment was not only an important economic factor of the socialist state, but also its important social objective. In a communist country, unemployment was to be eliminated in its entirety or it did not exist officially. Thus, no statistical data records were available, the only registered individuals were those seeking jobs, i.e. the people who contacted employment agencies.

The situation in the labour market was extremely difficult in the first period after the liberation. At the end of 1944, the devastation of war, the dismantling of manufacturing plants by the Red Army and shortages in supplies resulted in the fact that in some regions unemployment occurred on a massive scale. Inhabitants of central, north-eastern and southern Poland experienced the greatest problems when looking for employment. In turn, in the region of Upper and Lower Silesia, there were shortages of available workers. In some regions of the country, local government started to organise intervention works for the unemployed, which usually consisted in clearing the cities of rubble or establishing and operating municipal enterprises. However, these activities were limited in scope. The migration to the so-called Recovered Territories⁵⁰ appeared to be the solution to the problem.

In 1945, along with the gradual reconstruction of the areas after the wartime devastation, the situation started to improve; however, the unemployment was still a very serious problem. In the period of post-war rebuilding of the country and the

⁴⁸ M. Ciechocińska, *Próby walki...*, op.cit., pp. 234–235.

⁴⁹ DzU 1952, No. 53, item 232 (Journal of Laws 1952, No. 53, item 232).

⁵⁰ P. Grata, op.cit., p. 80; M. Zaremba, op.cit., pp. 243–244.

implementation of the Three-Year Plan, a high level of unemployment was recorded in the urban regions. In 1947, 81,000 people were officially seeking jobs, and there were only 21,000 available workplaces. In 1948 the situation deteriorated – 125,000 individuals were looking for jobs, and there were 21,000 vacancies. In the subsequent year (1949), 71,000 people were looking for employment opportunities, and there were 75,000 available positions.⁵¹

In the first period after the war, the pre-war period legislation was still in force. The changes, however, were being introduced gradually. In 1945 the benefits for the unemployed were abolished, and in 1950 the Labour Fund was liquidated.⁵² The organisation of the system of employment agencies was initiated in 1945, with the establishment of national employment offices, which were the bodies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.⁵³ They had operated until 1950, when they were transformed into the departments of the national council bureaux.⁵⁴ The employment offices were associated with the national council at the level of voivodship and district (powiat), while still being subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. After the liquidation of the abovesaid ministry in 1960, the supervision was exercised by the Labour and Wages Committee (Komitet Pracy i Płac).⁵⁵ In 1972, the Ministry of Labour, Wages and Social Affairs was established, while after the administrative reform in 1975, employment services were provided by the employment and social welfare departments subordinate to the ministry, cooperating with the voivodeship and municipal offices.⁵⁶

During the implementation of the Six-Year Plan, the state carried out strenuous industrialisation of the country, which resulted in a large increase in the employment rate. The demand for work in this period led to the employment of tens of thousands of people, who so far were not professionally active, and to the elimination of the unemployment in cities. To a large extent, this was related to the migration from the villages and the formation of a large social stratum of farmers-workers.⁵⁷ In 1952, there were approximately 2,000 people officially looking for work, and 165,000 positions available.⁵⁸ However, in the following years, the situation started to change. In 1955, 26,000 people were seeking employment opportunities, and there were 70,300 vacancies. In subsequent years, the number of job seekers was increasing,

⁵¹ P. Grata, *op.cit.*, p. 80, 82; J. Kochanowski, *op.cit.*, pp. 63.

⁵² P. Grata, *op.cit.*, pp. 77–78.

⁵³ DzU 1945, nr 30, poz. 182 (Journal of Laws 1945, No. 30, item 182).

⁵⁴ DzU 1950, nr 14, poz. 139 (Journal of Laws 1950, No. 14, item 139).

⁵⁵ T. Szumlicz, K. Młonek, *Polityka zatrudnienia. Materiały do studiowania*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 129; DzU 1972, nr 11, poz. 80 (Journal of Laws 1972, No. 1, item 80).

⁵⁷ J. Obodowski, S. Spotan, *Polityka zatrudnienia w PRL*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 10–12.

⁵⁸ J. Kochanowski, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

while the number of offered workplaces was decreasing. Finding employment proved to be particularly difficult in the case of women. According to the estimates by Dariusz Jarosz, in 1956, women accounted for as many as 70%–80% of the job seekers.⁵⁹

In the second half of the 1950s, local unemployment was officially a social issue. It concerned mainly workers with low qualifications, the youth and women. Its cause was the increased professional activation of women seeking their first jobs as an additional source of income to support their families, a large inflow of rural population to the municipal labour market, reduction of employment in administration, military and security offices, no work for graduates of vocational schools, whose curricula were not adapted to local employment opportunities.⁶⁰ It is estimated that at the end of November 1956, in Poland there were approximately 180,000 unemployed individuals.⁶¹ It is worth noting that unemployment mainly affected small towns in which no investment was made, and no industrial facilities were built. In large cities – Warsaw, Cracow, Gdynia – there were still more jobs than those interested in finding employment, and this was especially true in the case of qualified workers.

State intervention became necessary due to the permanent and structural character of the unemployment in the local labour markets in the 1950s. In 1956, the Intervention Fund was established, whose main objectives were: economic activation of the regions which were underdeveloped and the reduction of unemployment by financing the creation of new jobs and vocational training for the unemployed. In the absence of statutory unemployment benefits to mitigate the social effects of the unemployment, the government introduced *ad hoc* assistance in the form of an allowance paid from social welfare funds at the request of the employment office. The resources of the Intervention Fund were transferred in the form of non-returnable subsidies and long-term, low-interest bank loans at the disposal of the presidium of the national councils of the towns where open unemployment occurred. The money was allocated to 80% of the unemployment offices – the majority of funds were disbursed in the Lodzkie, Kieleckie, Poznanskie, Gdanskie, and Rzeszowskie provinces (50% of all funds of the Intervention Fund in total), the smallest funds were granted to the regions of the Koszalinskie, Szczecinskie, Olsztynskie, Zielonogorskie and Katowickie provinces. A significant part of the funds was allocated to the financing of public works, in particular in the first period of the Intervention Fund activity. With the aid provided in 1957, 19,000 of unemployed individuals obtained

⁵⁹ D. Jarosz, op. cit., p. 122.

⁶⁰ K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce...*, op.cit., p. 81.

⁶¹ J. Kochanowski, op.cit., p. 64.

permanent jobs, 9,000 were offered seasonal positions and 9,000 could participate in vocational training courses.⁶²

The issue of youth unemployment proved to be a particularly challenging problem, and the unemployment to a large extent resulted from the inadequacy of the vocational education, which did not comply with the local employment opportunities. The government's objective was to make it possible for students to find employment immediately after graduation. In the years of post-war reconstruction, there was no system of employing recent graduates. From 1950, the Act on planned employment entered into force.⁶³ Pursuant to this act, graduates, after selecting a position among various available vacancies, were given a work order and were delegated to a particular unit or entity, which was obliged to hire them.⁶⁴ In 1957, changes were introduced in this system,⁶⁵ taking the form of an internship. In order to implement this new principle of employing recent graduates, organisations had to inform schools and universities about vacancies and job offers for graduates.⁶⁶ Students received the work orders (placements) issued by School Graduate Employment Commissions (Szkolne Komisje Zatrudnienia Absolwentów), and university graduates were delegated to particular jobs by College Employment Commissions (Uczelniane Komisje Zatrudnienia). In 1959, the state introduced scholarships funded from the resources of national councils, enterprises, banks, etc. operating in the regions where there were shortages of qualified workers.⁶⁷ After leaving school, the people collecting scholarships were obliged to take up employment in the institution which provided the funds for the scholarships.

High unemployment risk emerged also in the 1980s in connection with the deepening social and economic crisis. The implementation of the principle of self-financing of socialised enterprises, lower capital expenditure and a tense social and economic situation threatened to destabilise employment. In this situation, the government decided to create vacancies through the professional deactivation of the previously employed. In 1982, the government introduced the right to early retirement and the benefits for mothers with small children. The economic reform of 1982 did not change the situation. The estimates carried out in the 1980s suggest that hidden unemployment covered a large share of the employed.⁶⁸

⁶² K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce...*, op.cit., pp. 92–97; J. Obodowski, S. Spotan, op.cit., p. 18.

⁶³ DzU 1950, nr 10, poz. 106 (Journal of Laws of 1950, No. 10, item 106).

⁶⁴ T. Szumlicz, K. Mlonek, op.cit., p. 133.

⁶⁵ MP 1957, No. 27, item 103.

⁶⁶ T. Szumlicz, K. Mlonek, op.cit., p. 134; MP 1958, No. 33, item 191.

⁶⁷ DzU 1959, nr. 7, poz. 35 (Journal of Laws 1959, No. 7, item 35.)

⁶⁸ T. Teterka, op.cit., p. 218.

The hidden unemployment was a significant problem for the socialist economy throughout the entire period of the existence of the Polish People's Republic. By the end of the 1980s, Jan Nowicki undertook an attempt to estimate the hidden unemployment for the Polish economy in 1985. According to his calculations, the number of the employed in the socialised sector amounted to 50%, i.e. 6,226,000 with the group of formally employed estimated at 12,452 thousand. This resulted from the hidden unemployment due to economically unjustified employment of women (2,001,000), artificially shortened working time (1,996,000), unused working time (1,606,000), excessive employment in the state administration (187,000), unnecessary expansions of security forces (250,000) and the share of those studying in schools for non-working students (186,000).⁶⁹ It was the case of structural unemployment which became a heavy and ever-growing burden for the Polish economy since the "hidden" unemployed collected the same wages as those employed, and they were interested in maintaining their *status quo*. Therefore, handling of the hidden unemployment was much more difficult and much more expensive than in the case of market economy. The social effects such as less respect for work, many cases of abuse, a lack of commitment on the part of the workers and numerous instances of thefts from workplaces⁷⁰ were also important.

3. The Third Polish Republic

The policy of full employment, which had been in force until 1989, was one of the factors providing the society with a sense of social security. However, the change of the Polish political regime and the implementation of the market economy resulted in, *inter alia*, the emergence of the legally sanctioned unemployment. In the 1990s, this was the result of both the demographic factors (the people born during the period of the second post-war baby boom entering the market), as well as economic factors (economic recessions and the associated decrease in the number of individuals employed in the public sector, ownership transformation and the liquidation of the manufacturing plants). The legislation changed as well, among others, the acts on employment and collective redundancies were introduced.⁷¹

⁶⁹ J. Nowicki, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 71–72; S. Kamosiński, *op.cit.*, pp. 66–67.

⁷¹ DzU 1989, Nr. 75, poz. 446 (Journal of Laws 1989, No. 75, item 446); DzU 1990, Nr. 4, poz. 19 (Journal of Laws 1990, No. 4 item 19); K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie*, [in:] *Polityka społeczna*, A. Kurzynowski (Ed.), Warszawa 2006, p. 100.

In contrast to the previously discussed periods, in the case of the Third Polish Republic more comprehensive statistical data is available. It allows estimating the level of unemployment. The system for registering the unemployed started to be organised as early as 1989. Initially few people decided to register.⁷² however, in the period of 1990–1992, the situation began to change rapidly due to the liberal principles concerning granting the benefits. In order to collect the allowances, many people who did not work before 1990, decided to register as unemployed.⁷³ As a result, the statistics corresponding to the number of the unemployed in this period is believed to be overestimated. The situation was additionally complicated by the fact that, at the time, there occurred an increase in the cases of non-registered employment.⁷⁴ The statistical data did not take into account hidden employment, i.e. for example shortened working time, early retirement, etc.⁷⁵

In January 1990, the number of the unemployed amounted to 55,800 and throughout 1991 and 1992, it was growing steadily.⁷⁶ The fastest increase was recorded in northern and south-western Poland. During the period of the Polish People's Republic, there were many state-owned farms (Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne) and production cooperatives in these regions, which after 1989 were largely liquidated.⁷⁷ The issue of unemployment also affected individuals from private farms. In addition, in the period of 1990–1991, many people previously employed outside agriculture returned to the countryside. As a result, there occurred a considerable increase in the number of people living in the countryside who were registered as unemployed. Also, the hidden unemployment rate in the rural areas was high. In November 1993 it amounted to approximately 700,000 individuals.⁷⁸ The lowest unemployment rates were recorded in Warsaw, in large urban agglomerations and in several smaller towns, for example Sopot or Siemiatycze.⁷⁹

In 1993, the rise in the unemployment was smaller, and, for the first time in several years, an increase in wages and real incomes of the population and a decrease in the number of the unemployed were recorded in 1994.⁸⁰ The positive change in the

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ A. Dudek, *Pierwsze lata III Rzeczypospolitej 1989–2001*, Kraków 2002, pp. 92–93.

⁷⁴ U. Sztanderska, *op.cit.*, p. 227.

⁷⁵ M. Szyłko-Skoczny, *op.cit.*, p. 268.

⁷⁶ A. Muszyńska, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

⁷⁷ A. Chwalba, *III Rzeczpospolita raport specjalny*, Kraków 2005, p. 183.

⁷⁸ K. Młonek, A. Kurzynowski, *Bezrobocie*, [in:] *Polityka społeczna*, A. Kurzynowski, (Ed.), Warszawa 2006, p. 102.

⁷⁹ A. Chwalba, *op.cit.*, p. 183; pp. Golinowska, *Ubóstwo w Polsce w pierwszej połowie lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Synteza wyników badań*, [in:] *Polska bieda. Kryteria. Ocena. Przeciwdziałanie*, S. Golinowska, (Ed.), Warszawa 1996, pp. 351–354

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 355.

labour market was brought about by more favourable economic conditions, the slowdown of the restructuring processes in some sectors as well as the improvement in the functioning of the labour law institutions. The society has already become accustomed to the changes in the labour market which took place in previous years, and the Poles already managed to partially adapt to them.⁸¹

The years of 1998–2002 were another period when the high unemployment rate was recorded in Poland. In this period, the change was associated with the economic slowdown, as well as the expiry of the obligations imposed by the privatization agreements concluded at the beginning of the 1990s. Individuals who lost their jobs experienced great difficulty finding a new position. As a result, 76% of the unemployed were supported by their families, 40% performed odd jobs, and 16% – resorted to using the benefits provided by social welfare.⁸² The allowances were paid in the amounts which were no match for the real costs of living.⁸³ Some of the unemployed, looking for a job, decided to emigrate. These tendencies were especially visible in the late 1990s. Poles were mainly emigrating to Germany, Austria and the USA.⁸⁴

Initially, the government was undertaking mainly emergency measures and did not devise a long-term plan to combat unemployment. The first programmes to prevent unemployment were created in 1990–1993; and the authorities established the Labour Fund, whose task was to finance these initiatives. Initially, its main responsibility was to pay benefits to those entitled to collect them.⁸⁵ In subsequent years, new programmes were created to counteract unemployment and mitigate its effects. New activities included training courses, loans granted to the unemployed to start their own business activity, loans offered to factories and manufacturing plants to create new jobs, intervention works, public works, vocational training and internships for recent graduates.⁸⁶

Creating a system of unemployment benefits was another important element of the strategy. Since 1989, unemployment benefits could be collected by the unemployed as of the eighth day of being registered at the unemployment office throughout the entire period of seeking employment. However, soon the government started to impose restrictions on the availability of the abovesaid benefits. From September 1990, the allowances were granted only in the case where the unemployed had been

⁸¹ M. Kabaj, *Strategie i programy przeciwdziałania bezrobociu. Studium porównawcze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 61.

⁸² A. Chwalba, op.cit., p. 182.

⁸³ W. Bonusiak, *Trzecia Rzeczpospolita (1989–2007)*, Rzeszów 2008, p. 151.

⁸⁴ A. Chwalba, op.cit., p. 185.

⁸⁵ W. Bonusiak, op.cit., pp. 47, 100; K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie*, [in:] *Polityka społeczna*, A. Kurzynowski, (Ed.), Warszawa 2006, p. 104.

⁸⁶ K. Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce...*, op.cit., p. 105.

previously paying social insurance contributions for the period of six months over the period of the last twelve months. In 1991, access to benefits for people of retirement age was limited. Also, the period of time when the benefits could be collected changed. Since 1991, the unemployed could only receive the allowance for the duration of 12 months. In the following years, the authorities aimed to shorten the benefit period, making it dependent on the length of service and place of residence, because those living in the regions with high unemployment rates could collect their benefits for a longer period of time.⁸⁷ The value of the allowance was also subject to change. Initially, it amounted to 70% of the employee's salary for the first three months, 50% for the subsequent six months and 40% for the entire time of being unemployed. In 1992, the principle of calculating the amount of the benefit changed: the authorities departed from linking the allowance to the previously earned remuneration, and the amount of the benefit was set at 36% of the average salary or wage. Since 1995, the allowance was estimated in amounts. As a result, its value was decreasing compared to the average remuneration. In 1997, the principle of linking the amount of the allowance with the length of service was reinstated.⁸⁸ Individuals in the pre-retirement age were in a more favourable position. The unemployed who were over 55 (women) and 60 (men), were entitled to receive higher benefits, the value of which was the equivalent of 75% of their remuneration. From March 1995, the amount of the benefits was raised to the level exceeding the average wage. However, these allowances were abolished in 1997, when the pre-retirement benefit was introduced.⁸⁹ Two years later, the possibility of obtaining early retirement benefits was limited by the next pension reform entering into force.⁹⁰

Poland's accession to the European Union contributed to the decline in the unemployment rate. The opening of the European labour market has created an opportunity of seeking jobs abroad. A period of large economic migration began. Poles' emigration intensified in 2006–2007. It is widely estimated that approximately 2 million people have left Poland to work abroad.⁹¹ After the accession to the European Union, the government's policy on counteracting unemployment changed as well. More programmes aimed at activating the unemployed were devised, and foreign investment and the funds from the EU financing the programmes to actively combat

⁸⁷ *Polityka dochodowa, rodzinna i pomocy społecznej w zwalczaniu ubóstwa i wykluczenia społecznego. Tendencje i ocena skuteczności*, B. Balcerzak-Paradowska, S. Golinowska, (Eds.), Warszawa 2009, pp. 22–23.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–24. This principle has been applied to date.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 24.

⁹⁰ DzU 1998, nr 162, poz. 1118 (Journal of Laws 1998, No. 162, item 1118).

⁹¹ A. Bobrowska, *Migracje Polaków po przystąpieniu do Unii Europejskiej*, "Coloquium Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych" 2, 2013, p. 53.

the unemployment had a considerable impact on the creation of new jobs, education and training of the unemployed.

From the beginning of 2004 (with the exception of February and March 2005) until March 2008 the unemployment rate was decreasing. This positive trend resulted from the emigration as well as high economic growth, increase in the expenditure on labour market programmes aimed at activating of the unemployed as well as the use of the EU funds. It allowed reducing the number of the unemployed by over 2 million.

In 2008, the number of the unemployed increased once again. The changes in the labour market were caused by the international financial crisis. Starting from November, the increase in the number of unemployed Poles was much faster, and for 17 subsequent months the index increased to reach the level of over 500,000 people without work.⁹² In the following years, the unemployment rate remained high. Only in 2014, together with a slight improvement in the economic situation in the European economy, in Poland the rate of economic growth was higher than in the two previous years.⁹³ In subsequent years, up to date, we have observed a rapid decline in unemployment. Changes in the labour market in recent years have contributed to the emergence of new circumstances where, faced with staff shortages, Polish employers are forced to employ foreigners, and Ukrainian workers appear to constitute the largest share of the group.

Conclusion

In summary, for the last 100 years, the unemployment has been the most important social and political issue which the state authorities had to deal with. It was the result of historical conditioning and economic and social changes. Demographic conditions have also played a significant role. In the interwar period, unemployment was the result of the post-war population boom, overpopulation of the rural areas, backwards-looking economic structure of the country as well as the Great Depression period. In Polish People's Republic (PRL), the implementation of the full employment policy ultimately resulted in the hidden unemployment, which has been a considerable burden for the state economy. Regardless of the hidden unemployment occurring immediately after the Second World War and in the 1950s, there was also open

⁹² P. Pasierbak, *Zmiany na Polskim rynku pracy 2008–2010*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska" Sectio H, z. XLVI, No. 2, 2012, p. 183.

⁹³ *Rynek pracy w Polsce w 2014 r.*, <https://www.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/raporty-sprawozdania/rynek-pracy/sytuacja-na-rynku-pracy/rynek-pracy-w-polsce-w-2014-roku/> [retrieved on 10.01.2018].

unemployment in the local markets. The political transformation contributed to the emergence of the open, legally sanctioned unemployment, which was the result of the economic and social transformations in Poland in the 1990s. In all the discussed periods, the unemployment mainly affected the youth and women. The problem of unemployment, even though decreasing in recent years, is still a major issue in the Polish economy. However, owing to the aid of the European Union, governmental labour market programmes and the dynamic changes currently occurring in the labour market, this phenomenon is a less acute problem.

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