

Urszula Zagóra-Jonszta

- ▶ University of Economics in Katowice
- ▶ e-mail: urszula.zagora-jonszta@ue.katowice.pl
- ▶ ORCID: 0000-0003-4904-1025

THE UPPER SILESIA INDUSTRY AND ITS EMPLOYEE DURING THE GREAT ECONOMIC CRISIS

| Abstract

- ▶ *Goal* – The article aims to analyse the situation in the Upper Silesian industry during the great crisis of 1930-1935. Due to the large concentration of mines, factories and steelworks in a relatively small area and the highest population density in Poland, the crisis was particularly severe for the workers whose main source of income was the work in industry. The lack of a plot of land from which to derive additional income made the situation difficult. The decline in industrial production resulted in layoffs and a lower standard of living.
- ▶ *Research methodology* – The article uses the method of literature analysis, source analysis and the descriptive method.
- ▶ *Score/results* – The analysis of data from the main route in the Upper Silesia shows that all working families experienced a decline in their quality of life. The tragic situation is particularly acute for those families with a special role. German industrialists were the first to expel Polish workers. The assistance from the Silesian provincial authorities was instrumental. Therefore, calls for the socialisation of mines and steelworks are frequently heard.
- ▶ *Originality/value* – The pre-war source materials as well as studies by pre-war and post-war authors were used regarding the condition of the Upper Silesian industry. Some data were taken from the press published in the Polish Upper Silesia.

| **Keywords:** Upper Silesian industry, the great economic crisis, the situation of workers

1. Introduction

The great economic crisis, which reached Poland with a slight delay, only at the beginning of 1930, but which lasted two years longer due to the agricultural nature of the country, had a negative impact on our economy. It was particularly severe for the population of the Upper Silesia, which was the most industrialised region of the country. The decline in industrial production resulted in an increase in unemployment, which was reflected in the standard of living of working-class families. The aim of the article is to analyse the course of the crisis in this area and the situation of the residents for whom work in industry was the only source of income. Based on source materials and on the pre- and post-war literature on the subject, an attempt was made to present the nature and effects of the crisis, especially for the residents of this region.

The article uses the method of analysing sources and compact studies and the method of description. An attempt was made to present as much data as possible confirming the depth of the economic collapse.

2. Ownership relations in the Upper Silesian industry

After part of the Upper Silesia was annexed to Poland, as much as 75% of the Upper Silesian industry was in German hands, which could not be changed due to the Geneva Convention. In order to limit the influence of German capitalists in Silesia, the government tried to encourage French, English and Italian capital to invest. Only the French responded favourably. Later, American capital joined in and during the years of the Great Depression, German capital accounted for only 52% of the total [Utis, 1934: 53]. However, American capital did not act in favour of Polish interests; it reached an agreement with German capital and represented its interests. French capital acted in a similar way to a large extent. Moreover, the desire for good relations with Germany, characteristic of the capital's government spheres, required very careful handling of the apparent abuses of German capital. This is evidenced by the agreement concluded on 31 October 1929 in Warsaw, Article III of which read: "The Polish Government declares that it waives any liquidation that the Polish Government has carried out or could carry out, using or complying with the provisions of Articles 92 and 297b of the Peace Treaty in relation to the German assets, rights and shares in Poland, still in the hands of their owners on 1 October 1929". This agreement was ratified in April

1931 [Ibid.: 16]. There are also known actions of German industrialists aimed at preventing the industry located in the Polish Upper Silesia from competing with the German industry on the international arena. For example, the director of the “Wspólnota Interesów”, Bernhard, forced to select several Poles for managerial positions, ordered less valuable railway tracks to be exported to Brazil, forging stamps in order to accuse the Silesian industry of poor quality of production and to withdraw from the trade with it. As a result, this largest mining and metallurgical concern had low turnover, paid low taxes and dismissed workers. The whole affair ended with the company being placed under judicial supervision. The years of crisis strengthened anti-German tendencies in the Upper Silesian society, and especially in the opinion of the Silesian provincial authorities. It was emphasised that “large industry in Silesia is the object of the game and speculation of foreign financial tycoons” and, therefore, “it is natural and mature to postulate the creation of such conditions in which the industry would be forced to take into account both the interests of the state as a whole and the area in which it operates” [*Założenia i postulaty...*, 1932: 31]. Michał Grażyński, the Silesian voivode, at the congress of economic activists in September 1933, strongly emphasised that the Polish state must take control of the Silesian industry, and the shared capital of Silesian companies should be transferred to the greatest possible extent to the possession of Polish citizens [*Zjazd Działaczy...*, 1933: 17 and next]. German companies were indebted to D-banks, which were dependent during the crisis years on the government and treasury of the Reich, which became the main creditor of the Silesian industry. Jan Jakub Kowalczyk, a Silesian senator writing under the pseudonym Teofil Utis, calculated that the share capital of all companies in the Polish Upper Silesia in September 1933 amounted to 932 million zlotys. The debt amounted to 807 million zlotys. The state treasury had 186 million zlotys here and did not participate in the debt. After deducting this sum from 932 million, it constituted 746 million zlotys of the value of foreign share capital in the Upper Silesian enterprises. Hence, the heavy industry of the Upper Silesia had to send 70 million zlotys abroad each year in the form of interest to enrich the D-banks and the Reich treasury [Utis, 1934: 55]. Economic activists therefore put forward a postulate to nationalize the share capital [“Polska Zachodnia”, 1932, No. 72: 7; 1934, No. 78: 5 and 7]. This was to consist in: state participation in enterprises, making all the employees of these enterprises shareholders and having delegates on supervisory boards, and allowing wide groups of domestic consumers to purchase shares [Utis, 1934: 64–65]. The idea was not implemented due to the still strong influence of German and other foreign capital.

In order to weaken the importance of German ownership, the Polish government tried to encourage other foreign capital to enter the market by granting various privileges. The American Harriman group, which was locating in the zinc industry, took advantage of them. Harriman demanded guarantees that within 25 years Poland would not impose, either import or export duties on zinc and lead ores and their products, would not expropriate the enterprise and would not collect property tax [Landau, Tomaszewski, 1968: 150 and next]. Unfortunately, foreign capital did not take over all of the shares of German enterprises, but only part, which meant that the Germans still had an advantage in them and could benefit from the granted privileges [Długoborski, 1974: 51–52]. Harriman's capital was linked to Flick's German capital and during the years of crisis it hindered investments in the Polish part of the Upper Silesia, did not pay taxes and other obligations to the state. Hence, the Silesian authorities began to implement a policy of Polonising heavy industry, which was reflected in the removal of German directors, but also of German workers loyal to the Polish state. The Upper Silesian Coal Convention (Górnośląska Konwencja Węglowa) was replaced by the Polonized Polish Coal Convention (Polska Konwencja Węglowa) (1931) [Ibid.: 62–63], and the Union of Polish Mining and Metallurgy Industry (Unia Polskiego Przemysłu Górniczo-Hutniczego) (1932) was established in place of the dissolved Upper Silesian Union of Mining and Metallurgy Industrialists (Górnośląski Związek Przemysłowców Górniczo-Hutniczych) [Biały, 1967: 213–215].

Unable to change the ownership relations in the Upper Silesian enterprises, the Polish state administration tried to at least carry out their internal Polonization, which consisted in introducing Polish as the official language and filling managerial positions with the largest possible number of Polish engineers and technicians [Jaros, 1969: 154–155]. In 1931, out of 305 engineers employed in 13 concerns, 240 were Poles, including 182 mining engineers. In 1935, the number of the Polish engineers increased to 376 (including 263 mining engineers). This constituted 91% of the engineering staff. Most of them did not come from Silesia. The Polonization of the administrative staff was also progressing. As of July 1935, out of 8270 technical and administrative officials employed in the mining and metallurgical industry, 5429 were Poles [Ibid.: 156]. The Hohenlohe Works resisted this process the most, where in the mid-1930s 32% of the concern's officials were Germans [Szaraniec, 1976: 188].

Tax abuse and concealment of real profits by German owners were common practices. Financial records were falsified by concealing or underestimating the

value of some transactions, and profits were transferred to Germany. Patents, materials and equipment were purchased abroad at exorbitant prices, prices of the exported goods were underestimated, high commissions were paid for the alleged trade intermediation, prime costs were inflated, etc. [Jaros, 1974: 76–77]. Hohenlohe built the “Sośnica” mine on the German side with profits earned on the Polish side [Landau, Tomaszewski, 1968: 74]. The list of companies accused of financial abuses was long. It is worth mentioning: Zjednoczone Huty “Królewska i Laura” S.A., Giesche S.A., Zakłady “The Henckel von Donnersmarck Beuthen” Ltd. [Ibid.: 74–79; Popkiewicz, Ryszka, 1959: 192–194; Jaros, 1969: 70–73]. This led to the gradual takeover of the largest concerns by the Polish state. In April 1934, 52% of the shares of the Huta “Pokój” were taken over. Also in 1934, the District Court in Katowice established judicial supervision over the largest concern “Wspólnota Interesów”.

3. The condition of the Upper Silesian industry during the crisis years

The crisis reached the Upper Silesia at the end of the first quarter of 1930. The bottom of the crisis came in 1932, when the index of general industrial production, compared to 1928, fell by 36.5%. Coal extraction in the country fell from 46 million tons in 1929 to 27 million tons in 1933¹, i.e. by almost half [Popkiewicz, Ryszka, 1959: 303–305], while the production of steelworks and blast furnaces in 1932, compared to the previous year, fell by 46.9% and 42.8%, respectively [Ibid.: 310–311]. The collapse in heavy industry affected the decline in production of other branches of industry. Losses were recorded in the chemical, processing and energy industries. The crisis conditions of the Silesian economy forced the use of dumping prices, which in turn reduced its profitability. Although it was possible to maintain almost all sales markets during the crisis years, they did not bring profits due to low prices and high transport costs. In order to apply for tax relief, lower railway tariffs and wages, foreign mine owners hid part of their revenues from the Polish tax office [Jaros, 1974: 73]. Losses in export were to be covered by high prices on the domestic market.

¹ In 1930, the Silesian Basin supplied 28.4 million tons of coal, in 1931 – 28.7 million tons, in 1932 – 21.5 million tons, in 1933 – 20 million tons, in 1934 – almost 22 million tons and in 1935 – 21 million tons. *Mały rocznik statystyczny*, 1936, GUS, Warszawa, p. 73.

The Polish Coal Convention raised coal prices so significantly that it caused the development of poor mines.

The table below shows the extraction and production rates of selected products during the crisis years.

Table 1. Production of selected products in the Polish part of the Upper Silesia in the years 1929–1933 (year 1928 = 100)

Years	Production of pig iron	Production steel	Production of zinc	Production of lead	Hard coal mining
1929	102.7	95.5	104.6	96.6	112.4
1930	69.8	96.4	112.6	108.5	92.5
1931	57.4	60.5	88.0	84.7	94.4
1932	32.0	27.8	60.0	31.8	70.6
1933	51.6	62.6	58.9	32.7	65.5

Source: Urząd Wojewódzki Śląski/PH 232: 33–38; 1303 II: 310; PH 224: 345–346, Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach.

In the next two years, the situation did not differ from the previous ones and only in 1936 a clear improvement could be noticed.

During the crisis years, German owners and plant managers forced semi-finished products from the Polish part to be refined in plants on the German side, which was detrimental to the Polish coking plants, rolling mills and steelworks [Długoborski, 1974: 51]. The unfavourable policy of the Upper Silesian industry, which pursued German interests, intensified the pro-intervention activities of the Polish government. Although they were inconsistent with the prevailing liberal doctrine, they were justified by the belief that they resulted from the immoral attitude of private initiative [“Polska Jutrzejsza Gospodarcza”, 1934, No. 39]. Where private capital could not cope, the state stepped in. During the crisis years, the process of cartelisation intensified, visible especially in the Upper Silesian industry. The government, initially supporting monopolisation, changed its attitude during the crisis, because the cartels maintained high prices of their products and despite several attempts to reduce them, it failed to effectively counteract this policy. A good example is the Polska Konwencja Węglowa (Polish Coal Convention), which made it possible to maintain high coal prices throughout the crisis.

4. The crisis and the working and living conditions of industrial workers in the Upper Silesia

In the Upper Silesia, some provisions of German labour law were in force, adopted before the division of the plebiscite area, which advantageously regulated the issues of representation of workers' crews, collective agreements or reduction of workers. Works councils, arbitration committees and the office of the demobilization commissioner owed their existence to the Geneva Convention [Biały, 1967: 183]. The dismissal of an employee was dependent on the consent of the demobilization commissioner, and collective agreements were given universally binding force [Jaros, 1969: 126]. Pay varied and depended on the collective agreement. Lower-level white-collar workers were entitled to free housing or a housing allowance, higher-level employees – directors, managers, department managers – were paid on the basis of individual agreements and, in addition to the basic salary, official housing and coal allowance, received high bonuses and royalties. A mine director in the Upper Silesia earned 4–5 thousand zlotys per month, in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie 2–3 thousand [Jaros, 1969: 135–136]. There were also differences in the workers' earnings in favour of the Upper Silesians. Miners were, in a sense, a privileged professional group; with hard and dangerous work they earned much more than workers in the processing industry; food products were relatively cheap and the network of shops was dense. Insurance for miners against illness, disability and old age was provided by the Górnośląska Spółka Bracka in Tarnowskie Góry and the Pszczyńskie Bractwo Górnicze in Katowice. There was also unemployment insurance, but during the crisis it proved insufficient [Jaros, 1969: 147–149]. Miners were associated in numerous trade unions, often with political overtones. During the crisis years, 50–70 thousand workers in the mining industry belonged to them, which constituted about 50% of the employed [Jaros, 1969: 151]. White-collar workers had separate, industry-specific unions. It should be remembered, however, that the engineering and technical staff were mostly German; Poles constituted the majority of the workers.

The great economic crisis lowered the standard of living of workers and contributed to the growth of unemployment, which was a serious problem in such an urbanised and industrialised area. Although the situation was more favourable in comparison to other regions of Poland, because German legislation was more favourable to workers, unfavourable changes occurred in this area during the crisis years. Already in 1932, the regulations concerning unemployment insurance were amended to the detriment of workers. The following year brought changes

for the worse in the area of legislation concerning working time, vacations and health insurance. Expenditures on kindergartens, nurseries and housing construction were reduced. Nominal wages were reduced and overtime pay was reduced by 50% [Wanatowicz, 1974: 85–86]. The provincial authorities tried to mitigate the effects of such actions and often took on the role of the mediator between employers and employees, often taking the side of the workers. They tried to prevent the complete closure of a plant, mine or steelworks, directed orders to private companies on condition that previous employment was maintained, they organised public works (which, however, shrank due to falling revenues to the Silesian treasury), established independent workshops for the unemployed and allocated them plots of land. However, these last two forms of assistance were not accepted by the unemployed. In 1931, the Silesian authorities put forward a proposal to establish work camps for unemployed youth, which began to be implemented throughout Poland in 1933. They also developed an emergency aid campaign in the form of distributing food, clothing and cash. However, when the crisis worsened, they gave up on financial assistance [Ibid.: 89–92]. Benefits in kind included basic foodstuffs (potatoes, flour, sugar, rice, salt) as well as soap, clothing, footwear and fuel.

The Silesian provincial authorities did not agree to reduce employment and to close unprofitable plants, fearing strikes and riots. Since the balance sheets showed losses, dividends were no longer paid to shareholders. At the same time, the owners of mines and steelworks transferred money abroad [Jaros, 1974: 74]. The reduction in employment was associated with an increase in labour productivity, which often enabled an increase in extraction and production.

Partial employment, or part-time work, was a common form. The employees worked only part of the week, which was reflected in their wages. The so-called holiday breaks (unpaid breaks from work) were used, the number of which increased with the deepening crisis. In 1930, they constituted 15% of the daily wages due, in 1932–25.06%, in 1933–19.8% [UWŚL/PH 1310: 49; 52: 1; 224: 103–105]. In the Hohenlohe Plants, which most often used this form of employment, in 1931 there were 34 holiday breaks per employee, and in the following year already 74 [Szaraniec, 1976: 164–165]. Employment “with reverse” was used, consisting of temporary, one- or two-month employment, and then dismissal of the employee after a 14-day notice period with his written consent. This form was particularly burdensome, because it took away family benefits, the right to leave and insurance [Pabisz, 1956: 519–525]. Vacations were used in rotations, lasting even several months. For example, from mid-1932, vacations were introduced

in the Hohenlohe concern, resulting from the order of the governor Grażyński for the Association of Employers of the Upper Silesian Mining and Metallurgy Industry, which clearly stated that in those plants where the principle of vacation employment was applied, there could be no holidays. However, the practice was far from the regulations [*Dyrekcja Policji*, sygn. 174: 246–247]. The Prince of Pless of Pszczyna also very often used this form of employment. Vacations could not be shorter than 1 month or longer than 3 months. The list of workers dismissed in rotations was transferred to the Unemployment Fund, despite their simultaneous inclusion on the list of employees. In this way, plants regulated their actual employment status depending on financial calculations. Returning from rotations meant hiring again, which deprived workers of their deputies. At the same time, the Employers' Union recommended that subordinate plants not pay insurance premiums to the Bracka Company for workers on rotational leave [UWŚI/PH 304I: 44]. On the other hand, the Union conducted an aid campaign for the unemployed and partially employed, providing workers with potatoes and coal.

The Table 2 below shows the number of unemployed people during the crisis years.

Table 2. The number of unemployed people in Upper Silesia in the years 1929–1936 in thousands of people (data for October)

Years	Workers					Employees white-collar	Juveniles	Total
	miners	ironworkers and metalworkers	other industries	unskilled	other professions			
1929	0.5	0.5	0.7	1.6	0.1	0.7	0.1	4.2
1930	5.8	5.6	4.5	18.0	0.3	2.6	0.6	37.4
1931	9.5	9.1	8.9	27.1	0.6	6.3	0.9	62.4
1932	15.5	15.5	12.9	16.3	1.4	8.4	0.5	70.5
1933	25.6	17.8	11.5	7.8	1.9	12.3	1.5	78.4
1934	22.6	15.0	10.1	27.8	8.0	9.9	1.0	94.4
1935	20.3	11.4	6.9	40.8	1.2	7.9	0.3	88.8
1936	19.4	9.9	6.9	37.0	1.3	6.8	0.2	81.5

Source: *Liczebność i struktura...*, 1961: 486–487.

As you can see, the lowest unemployment occurred in 1929. PUPP registered only 4000 unemployed people, including only 500 miners and the same number of steel and metal workers. However, unemployment increased significantly the following year and grew with each subsequent year of the crisis. However, this is not a true picture of the tragedy, because not all unemployed people could register. This concerned seasonal workers and adolescents looking for work. While in 1929 35.3% of unemployed people were entitled to the benefit, in 1931 only 28% were entitled to it, and in the following years it decreased to 13%, because in 1932 the act on unemployment insurance was amended – the period of work entitling to the benefit was extended from 20 to 26 weeks before dismissal and the amount of the benefit was reduced by 22% [Danowska-Prokop, 2013: 129]. The voivodeship officials made their own calculations and according to them the number of unemployed during the years of the Great Depression ranged from 52.1 thousand in 1930 to 132.4 thousand in 1933 [UWŚL/PH, 2500 and 2635]. After adding the families of the unemployed, this number increased to 320 thousand [Hrebenda, 1974: 99–116]. No wonder that strikes were a frequent form of protest on the part of the crews, even though it was associated with a high risk of dismissal.

The reductions mainly affected the unskilled workers employed in heavy industry, especially in mining and metallurgy – these were often group layoffs. The situation was worst in the years 1931–1932. The largest layoffs affected miners from the “Radzionków” mine (700 people dismissed), the “Hildebrand” mine (600 people), the “Knurów” mine (550 people), the “Florentyna” mine (520 people), the “Hoym” mine (470 people), and in the “Wirek”, “Wujek” and “Maks” mines 400 workers were dismissed each – in total over 4 thousand people lost their jobs. According to M. Grzyb, in the Silesian voivodeship in 1932 132 thousand people were looking for work, and in 1933 149 thousand [Grzyb, 1978: 142]. A similar situation occurred in the Upper Silesian steel industry, where in 1932 the number of employees was 61% of the level from 1929, when almost 42 thousand people worked [Popkiewicz, Ryszka, 1959: 275]. Mass reductions were carried out in the “Królewska” and “Laura” steelworks (over 6 thousand workers and 599 officials were dismissed, i.e. 40% of manual workers and 34% of the administration). Also in the “Pokój” steelworks 1300 workers were dismissed [UWŚL/WP, 224: 324–335]. It was easier to dismiss Poles than Germans, because the latter appealed to the Arbitration Commission for Citizenship or to the Arbitration Tribunal in Bytom, emphasising that the reason for dismissal was their German citizenship and not economic reasons, which was obviously untrue [Grzyb, 1978: 149].

Various methods of combating unemployment were considered in the press and in the Sejm. For example, W. Olszewicz put forward a proposal to expand the processing industry based on its own raw materials. He emphasised that the Upper Silesia had cheap coal, cheap electricity, a good communication network and an intelligent worker; therefore, it should use these advantages and focus on processing [Olszewicz, 1930: 463]. R. Brzeski believed that it was necessary to focus on international action, to abolish restrictions on the exchange of goods, services and capital, and, at the same time, to develop public works [Brzeski, 1931: 163]. Public works were discussed many times, drawing attention to the fact that “they should not contribute to the increase in the production of factory or food products, but should create opportunities for increasing internal consumption in the future, by creating new domestic markets, especially sales markets, increasing the areas of gravity, cheaper prices, transport, etc.” [W., 1932: 37]. It was therefore about non-productive investments. The author also proposed to establish an Economic Council at the Silesian Voivodeship Council, with the participation of economists, lawyers and sociologists, similar to the Economic Committee at the Council of Ministers. This idea was supported by F. Gerstman, who asked at the same time how new sales markets could be created with the help of public works? [Gerstman, 1932: 75]. E. Zaczyński proposed giving the unemployed a house and a piece of land, arguing that since the crisis would recur, this solution would to some extent make workers independent of fluctuations in the economy. The resettlement action was to consist in creating settlements for the unemployed on unused areas [Zaczyński, 1932, No. 11: 197].

In the face of the drastic reduction in employment, the mood among the workers became radicalised. When the management of the Giesche mine decided to dismiss 3100 workers, the outraged crew decided that this was not the way to maintain the workshops. Savings should be found, for example, by dismissing 12 unnecessary engineers who did not perform any function but received high salaries. However, it turned out that they were Poles and could not be dismissed, because the crew had to be Polonized. Such a policy was often used: Polish engineers were employed for high salaries and it was believed that they were not suitable for responsible work, so they could not replace Germans, but since the government and the Silesian provincial authorities demanded such a policy, it should be implemented, although it increased the costs [*Dyrekcja Policji*, 1933, sygn. 174]. On February 12, 1933, a congress of Workers’ and Officials’ Crews’ Councils and trade union representatives was convened in Katowice, demanding the abolition of coal cartels, which increased coal prices by 50%, the introduction

of a 40-hour work week, and the cessation of employment reductions [Ibid.]. Very often, workers opposed the policies of the Upper Silesian concerns, demanding statutory regulation of coal sales, the establishment of a coal commissioner, and even the expropriation of mines (e.g. the "Ficynus" mine). They protested against high compensation for retiring directors, the employment of foreigners and the policy of German directors carrying out orders from Berlin [Ibid.: 40]. At a meeting of the treasury mine staff in Bielszowice on 9 March 1934, a resolution was passed demanding:

1. "control of the predatory economy and exploitation of workers (...), complete abolition of unfair royalties and additional remunerations.
2. absolute limitation of excessive salaries and additional benefits received by various managers and directors, which only burden the efficiency of the worker.
3. socialisation or nationalisation of those mines which, through the predatory economy of coal barons and foreign capital, deprive Polish workers of work and bring thousands of hungry citizens to the state, who are able to work and become a burden to the Polish State" [Ibid.: 83].

Radical solutions were put forward by Silesian socialists. MP P. Glücksman (PPS) put forward demands for increasing coal sales on the domestic market, reducing administrative costs in industry, revising export policy, returning 300 million zlotys illegally taken from the state treasury, settling the unemployed on the land, reducing directors' salaries, socialising mines, steelworks and factories, expropriating large landed estates for settlement purposes, carrying out an agricultural reform and reducing land prices, and controlling cartels [Rechowicz, 1971: 258]. The Silesian Sanation submitted a motion concerning state control over the economy of heavy industry and establishing the institution of an extraordinary commissioner to combat unemployment, removing foreigners from industry and replacing them with Poles, and statutory termination of all private-law contracts providing for disproportionately high service salaries in industry [12 pos. S. Śl., 1931...].

The Labour and Social Welfare Committee submitted similar proposals, also demanding: stopping dumping, regulating world coal prices and reducing them on the domestic market, revitalising the domestic market by reducing the costs of state administration, stopping appointing people without education to high positions in industry, appointing a politically independent economist with legal training to the position of demobilisation commissioner, delegating factory

councillors to the supervisory boards of the province, centralising coal sales in one nationwide syndicate, employing Poles first, granting loans for the construction of flats and carrying out public works, stopping further mechanisation of work in industry, stopping the collection of overdue taxes from individuals and companies that are threatened with ruin, stopping rotational holidays, introducing a 6-hour working day, awarding orders to the Upper Silesian industry first, amending the legislation to eliminate the arbitrary dismissal of workers, helping the unemployed in kind and in cash [14 pos. S. Śl., 1932...].

However, when the 14th International Labour Conference was held in Geneva in May 1930 and England submitted a project to shorten work in the coal industry to 7.5 hours, the Polish delegate M. Szydlowski strongly opposed [Biały, 1967: 188].

The postulate of control over the industry, elimination of cartels and reduction of administrative costs was often repeated in resolutions and speeches of numerous organisations in the Upper Silesia [*Sprawozdanie z działalności...*, 1936: 49–50]. This opinion was shared by Governor Grażyński himself, speaking at the conference of the Miners' Union in 1933: "I am aware that as far as the coal industry is concerned, it is now necessary to put an end to the overgrowth of cartels and to establish government control over the entire activity of heavy industry" [Ibid.: 53]. In view of the harmful activities of monopolies, the Council of the Polish Trade Union demanded "the liquidation of cartels, concerns, conventions, etc., the expansion and strengthening of state control over large-scale industry and the establishment of a permanent institution to study the costs of production and exchange with the participation of the employee factor" [Ibid.: 74]. The idea of nationalizing mines and steelworks and government control over production and sales was present in many resolutions, which was characteristic of this region. Nowhere else did such a postulate resound so loudly and unanimously, both from workers and provincial authorities. The government in Warsaw had a different view of the issue. The most mature and comprehensive program for combating the crisis was presented by the Silesian Sanation at the economic congress in September 1933. "Against the background of discouragement and stagnation into which the ruling camp in Poland was sinking, the Silesian Sanators showed a great deal of energy and (...) proved that they had a certain program", which, despite limited possibilities, was quite broad and took into account the interests of hired workers. In January 1934, the Economic Council was established to supervise the implementation of the adopted postulates [Długajczyk, 1983: 193–194].

5. Conclusions

The great economic crisis left its mark on the financial situation of the Upper Silesia. Due to its industrial nature and weak links with agriculture, the living conditions of workers significantly deteriorated. The financial condition of the partially employed and unemployed was even worse. The large share of foreign capital (especially German) in the industry of this region certainly played a negative role. Frequent actions to the detriment of the Polish state and the Silesian provincial authorities contributed to the deterioration of the situation. The transfer of profits abroad, falsification of financial reports, failure to pay taxes, limiting production in order to provide employment and sales to plants remaining on the German side, firing Polish workers at first, all this had a negative impact on the financial situation of the residents and the provincial budget. At the same time, the authorities made efforts to provide financial assistance to the Silesian residents, especially the unemployed, although this assistance was not sufficient. In addition, the attitude towards the process of monopolization of industry, which was progressing during the crisis, changed. Demands for the socialisation of mines, steelworks and other plants here in Upper Silesia appeared during the years of crisis not only from workers' organisations but also, characteristically, the provincial authorities acceded to this postulate.

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