

## Preface

When I first met Tadeusz Kowalik in the late 1990s, I knew him as an intellectual belonging to the remaining part of the Polish left that had grown out of the Solidarity trade union movement of the 1980s. Over the next decade or so we met on numerous occasions, usually in his cluttered study at his home in Warsaw, to discuss matters mainly concerning Poland and the left. During this time, Poland was still recovering from the shock-therapy reforms that had rushed the country into capitalism. The left had largely submerged itself in the neoliberal ideology of the age, an act that would soon usher in its demise. Kowalik often warned that if the left did not meet the needs of working people, the conservative and nationalist right would take its place. He differed from most of his colleagues, in the former opposition movement, by vehemently opposing the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. He spent most of his energies, after the fall of socialism, trying to show that there were alternatives to the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism.

One day I came across a photograph of Kowalik, taken at the Gdańsk shipyard during the historic strikes in 1980. Diminutive in stature, he was pictured alongside some of the most famous figures from this time, including the trade unionist Anna Walentynowicz, future Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek and later Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. When I asked him about this he confirmed that he had been in Gdańsk in 1980, but talked more about the events of the time rather than his role in them. When I read further, I learnt that Kowalik had not only been present at the Gdańsk shipyard but had personally proposed and helped to organise the delegation of intellectuals assisting the strikers during these momentous events.

During our discussions, Kowalik also introduced me to the work of some of the great left-wing figures of Polish political economy, such as Michał Kalecki and Oskar Lange. He also referred to some of his writings on Rosa Luxemburg and how she had greatly influenced the likes of Kalecki. Unfortunately, our discussions on such topics did not proceed much further, both due to my ignorance of these matters and because Kowalik

preferred to discuss contemporary issues in Poland or ask me about events in Britain. I only read in depth about Kowalik and his place within Polish political economy after he had died. The more I read, the more I realised that Kowalik was a key figure and link between different events, people and ideas. As Kowalik was primarily a historian of economic ideas, so he carried out many analyses of different political economists and their theories. Moreover, Kowalik knew, befriended and worked alongside some of the historic icons of Polish political economy, such as Kalecki, Lange and many others.

That Kowalik did not talk much about his role and place in this history is characteristic of the man. All of Kowalik's friends and acquaintances that I spoke to when researching this book testified to his modesty and generosity. He was that rare kind of individual who lived his life according to his ideals of equality and justice and never forgot the poverty and terror he had experienced when growing up in pre-war Poland and then under Nazi occupation.

This book primarily focuses on the work and activities of Tadeusz Kowalik. It is not a personal biography, although some aspects of his life are covered when they are relevant to his intellectual and political endeavours. The book is constructed around his writings spanning from the 1950s to the 2010s. The chapters run chronologically, covering the main periods of Polish history during his life. We see these through his eyes and also come to understand them better via his analysis of these events and those of other political economists. Luxemburg, Kalecki and Lange are some of the central characters in this book and together they help form what I suggest is a Polish School of left-wing, largely Marxist or *Marxisant*, political economy. Those connected to this school, including Kowalik, wrote extensively about both capitalism and socialism, seeking ways to overcome the former and revitalise the latter. Much contained in this work is of interest and relevance today, as economic instability, war, nationalism and authoritarianism blight our contemporary landscape. Many of the issues that Kowalik grappled with during his early life returned during his final years, as history came full circle and tragedy once again turned into farce.

Whilst researching this book I tried to read all of Kowalik's published work and as many of his unpublished materials as I could obtain. Kowalik's archives are held by the Polish Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, these have not yet been sorted and collated properly and much of his handwritten material is extremely difficult to decipher. Whilst I have been able to use many of the materials from the archive, there are perhaps hundreds of letters, written to and from many important figures of his time, that I was not able to fully use in this book. His archive, therefore, remains a source that has yet to be completely utilised. I have also carried out interviews

with many of those who knew or were influenced by Kowalik, including family, friends, colleagues and experts.

I have tried to write this intellectual biography of Tadeusz Kowalik in the same spirit that he wrote about others. This means that I have critically as well as generously engaged with his ideas and provided my interpretation of his work and activities. I hope that it will contribute to reviving the memory of Tadeusz Kowalik and the rich Polish left-wing intellectual tradition that he belonged to. It has lain dormant for too long.