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Were capitalists interested only in profit in the 19th century? An example of Jan Gottlieb Bloch

Abstract

The social class which was the *spiritus movens* of rapid economic transformation in the lands of the Kingdom of Poland in the nineteenth century was the bourgeoisie. In the public sphere, there is still a strong conviction among contemporary Poles about the moral defects of capitalists, for whom, according to the prevailing stereotypes, only profit was important. The author of this article, to contradict this claim, gives an example of the life and actions of Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836–1902). The aim of the article is to present the broad economic, social and scientific activity of Bloch as a member of the bourgeoisie of the Kingdom of Poland. The author also points to the need for further research on the work of Jan Bloch, especially in the field of his economic and irenological writing.

Keywords: nineteenth-century capitalism, the Kingdom of Poland, the bourgeoisie, Jan Gottlieb Bloch

JEL Classification: Z13

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Poland was experiencing rapid economic development in the second half of the 19th century, which resulted in changes in almost every sphere of life. Industrialisation intensified, the development of the railway revolutionised

transport, and cities and commerce were growing. The social class that was the *spiritus movens* of these changes was the bourgeoisie. In the public sphere, contemporary Poles are still quite strongly convinced that capitalists were morally defective and, according to common stereotypes, the only thing they cared for was their profit. This belief is primarily a result of socialist propaganda, which at the time of the Polish People's Republic presented the bourgeoisie in a unanimously negative light. The reality, however, was different from the image presented by the creators of historical policy under the communist regime. Members of the Polish bourgeoisie were involved in various social activities, sponsored public utility institutions, and dealt with philanthropy and patronage (more in Kołodziejczyk, 1974). Around their factories, especially the bigger ones, they built houses, schools and hospitals for their workers. The goal of this work is to present the vast social involvement of one member of the Polish bourgeoisie, Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836–1902), to exemplify the multidimensional social activity of the capitalist class in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the 19th century.

Jan Bloch was a railway tycoon, capitalist, great philanthropist and a man of science. He was a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1902 as the author of a multi-volume work, titled *Future war and its economic consequences*, hailed as “the bible of pacifism”. Bloch in his comprehensive work advocated the ideals of entrepreneurship, civic attitude, and raising the quality of education and science; in other words, he advocated raising the quality of life of civilised society.

2. From rags to riches

Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836–1902)¹ was born into a large Jewish family in Radom, one of nine children. The Blochs ran quite a large fabric dyeing shop; however, the financial problems that they experienced because of the economic restrictions² in the aftermath of the November Uprising forced them to apply for the help of the magistrate, which they used for many years to come. This was probably the reason why Jan decided to leave his family. In 1850 (when he was 14), he moved to Warsaw, where he became an intern at a bank owned by the Toeplitzes and started attending the Real Gymnasium. A year later he changed his denomination to Evangelical Reformed, which was most likely intended to facilitate his career.³

¹ Bloch's biography, or elements of it, can be found in: Bocheński, 1969; Bocheński, 1985; Kołodziejczyk, 1974, 1983; Małecka, 2000; Żor, 2005; 2014; Pieczewski, 2016.

² After the suppression of the November Uprising, the tsarist government, in addition to the use of repression, also introduced economic restrictions in the form of high tariffs on goods produced in the Kingdom of Poland and exported to Russia. Therefore, these restrictions mainly affected the textile industry, i.e. the basic occupation and livelihood of the Blochs.

³ Jews, about 10% of the Kingdom of Poland population at the time, did not have civic or citizenship rights. A way for them to make a career was to change their denomination to Christianity. It could be seen in numerous cases of Judaism being abandoned, especially by Jewish members of the wealthy middle class. They adopted Protestantism most often—it was less rigorous than Catholicism, more rational and closer to Judaistic deism. (cf. Hertz, 2003, pp. 150–151).

Another religious metamorphosis came when he was 20 and became a Catholic (Kołodziejczyk, 1983). He then started work as a controller at the Hołyński family estate in Podole. However, his career really took off when he went to Russia in 1856. Initially, he worked as a builder at a steam mill in St. Petersburg. Next, he found employment as a subcontractor at the construction of the Saint Petersburg–Warsaw Railway and became one of the railway builders in Russia during the railway boom. There has never been a clear explanation regarding how he got into the society of railway tycoons.⁴ One thing is clear, however—during the time of primitive accumulation, Bloch was successful. We know it because he appears in the Russian archives in 1860, four years after his arrival, as a serious entrepreneur—the owner of “Enterprise Bloch” (more details in Kołodziejczyk, 1983). His stay in Russia not only earned him a fortune but also resulted in marriage to Emilia Kronenberg, a daughter of a renowned doctor from Moscow – Henryk Kronenberg (30/08/1862), a beautiful and gifted woman, with whom he had five children (a son and four daughters). After marrying, the Blochs settled in Warsaw and bought a villa in Marszałkowska Street, known today as the Bloch palace. Emilia was a niece of Leopold Kronenberg and the two families competed against each other to become the best in the world of industry and finance.⁵

Unlike Kronenberg, Bloch did not participate in the preparations for the January Uprising, nor did he fight in it. His biographers believe that he did not want to take sides in the conflict (Żor, [n.d.], pp. 8–9). He left Warsaw and went to Berlin to complete his education. He did not go to regular university; instead, he obtained knowledge in economics, finance, and statistics, which he later used in his work and scientific enquiries. At that time, he got acquainted with the German Historical School. Fascinated by it, he adopted its goals and methods used in economic research, which clearly influenced his later writings on the economy.

It was typical of Polish capitalism at the time to join different types of economic activities. And so Bloch, having returned to Warsaw, set up a large bank. However, he did not run any large-scale business. Together with Leopold Kronenberg and the Natanson family, he focused on creating Bank Handlowy (1870). Bloch was one of the main shareholders of the bank and initially one of its managers, but he eventually decided to limit his contribution to just ownership. He was also one of the co-founders of the Warsaw Insurance Association. In 1873, he became president of the Warsaw Stock Exchange and remained in the post for 12 years. For many years he was also an “Elder” of the Merchants Assembly in Warsaw and a member of the top management of the Credit Association of Warsaw. Bloch invested his capital in various industrial enterprises; among others, he bought, rebuilt and modernised a steam mill and built a mechanical bakery hiring 150 people, and he also bought and modernised sugar plants (“Częstocice” in

⁴ Kołodziejczyk assumes that Bloch obtained initial financing for his enterprises from Nicholas Skvorcov—a Russian merchant and industrialist (more details in Kołodziejczyk, 1983).

⁵ The battle between these two entrepreneurs was fought mainly for obtaining a concession to build railways. Their antagonisms evolved into almost open argument in the press and even literature. A clear example of this is the pamphlet about Bloch, inspired by Kronenberg, by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski from 1875 *Roboty i prace. Sceny i charaktery współczesne*. Bloch is presented here in a negative light as Mr Płocki.

Radomskie, “Dobrzelin” in Kutnowskie, and “Żytyń” in Wołyń), creating one of the first cartels in Poland. He also worked in forest industry in Wołyń, building large sawmills and manufactures of railway sleepers, which were later used in building the railway. He set up the first factory of flooring and plywood in Poland (Żor, [n.d.], p. 5). Bloch was also a landowner and bought the Łęczna mansion in Lubelskie in 1883.

Bloch was incredibly entrepreneurial and active. He reached the peak of his career in 1875 (aged 39). He partook in various types of initiatives: industrial, financial, social, and literary. To his contemporaries, however, he was primarily the “King of the Railways”. Later, he was also nicknamed the “Father of Modern Pacifism”.

3. “King of the Railways”

Bloch earned this title because he earned a fortune building railways in the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland (Surmacz, 2008). When he returned to the Kingdom of Poland, he continued his work on railways. In 1861, together with Leopold Kronenberg, he tried to obtain a concession to build the Vistula line. In 1862, Enterprise Bloch worked on building stations from Daugavpils to Warsaw. At the same time, the Saint Petersburg–Warsaw Railway was opened, forking to Vilnius–Kaunas–Virbalis and Daugavpils–Riga, which were co-authored and co-built by Bloch (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 8). Bloch’s competition with Kronenberg—a Polish railway magnate, just as powerful as he was⁶—made him try and obtain an independent concession to build a short but extremely important and profitable railway branch from Koluszki station, located on the Warsaw–Vienna line, to Łódź—a rapidly developing textile industry centre. Although entrepreneurs from Łódź had been fighting for this concession for years, Tsar Alexander II granted it to Bloch’s company in 1865. It built the 27.5 kilometre-long line in only three months (more details in Pieczewski, 2014). Completing this investment granted Bloch large profits and a great deal of publicity. From that time, his name could be found in almost every railway enterprise in the Kingdom of Poland in the last forty years of the 19th century.

In 1867, the success of the factorial line in Łódź encouraged him to apply for permission to build a line from Piotrków to Ostrowiec, in cooperation with Z. Wielkopolski, L. and H. Epstein, L. and W. Laski and S.A. Fraenkel. This attempt did not succeed (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 48). Undeterred, Bloch decided to start building the Liepāja railway, joining the port Liepāja in the Baltic Sea with Kaišiadorys, located on the Saint Petersburg–Warsaw line. The two-year-long investment did not make him much money, but it solidified his image as a trustworthy entrepreneur. When building railways, Bloch was assisted by professionals. The designer and person responsible for the technical side of the investments

⁶ Leopold Kronenberg was the owner of the majority stock in the Vienna–Warsaw railway and monopolised the creation of the Terespol railway.

was, in most cases, the engineer Hipolit Cieszkowski, and the works were usually organised by his brother-in-law—Maksymilian Jellinek (Żor, [n.d.], p. 6).

In 1873, the conflict with Kronenberg intensified. It happened during their battle for the concession to build the Vistula River Railroad, including the route from Kovel to Mława, leading through Warsaw. The stocks turned out to be immensely popular. The two great rivals tried to surpass one another and borrowed money from banks and even private individuals to get the majority stake. Kronenberg won the battle and collected around 70% of the stocks. Bloch, owning ca. 30% of it, effectively hindered his opponent. Even though this spectacular “battle for the railway”, in which both parties resorted to means of shaping public opinion, was won by Kronenberg, the final victor of the “railway war” was Bloch (Żor, [n.d.], p. 7).

In 1874 Bloch, together with S.A. Fraenkl and W. Rau, tried again to obtain a concession to build a mining railroad from Piotrków to Ostrowiec. A year later, he bought the majority stake of the Kiev-Brest Railway, and later of the Odessa Railway. He also obtained concessions for the Brest–Grajewo Railway and the Dęblin–Dąbrowa Railway. In 1878, he set up and chaired the South-Western Railways Company, managing three of the more important routes in the European part of the Russian Empire (Brest–Kiev, Brest–Grajewo, Kiev–Odessa) (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 49). In 1876, Bloch became the Chairman of the Committee of Representatives of Railroads of the Empire and the Kingdom of Poland and a member of the National Committee for Controlling Railroads’ Income and Expenditure. Thus, he managed the Railway from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea, from Odessa to Grajewo, which amounted to over 3000 kilometres of railroads in the Empire and the Kingdom (Żor, [n.d.], p. 7). In 1881, the Tsar approved the statute of the Dęblin–Dąbrowa Railway Company. After many years of work, this was a great success for Bloch and his associates. Started in 1882, the construction of the longest railroad in the Kingdom was finished in 1885 at 462 km (Podolska-Meducka, 2014, p. 87–100).

4. Bloch’s social activities

Apart from his industrial and railway engagements, Bloch was heavily involved in a wide range of multi-dimensional social activities. The list of his achievements in this context is very long and contradicts the common belief that capitalists of the “golden age” were interested only in their own gains.

In 1879, he set up in Warsaw the first truly working Bureau of Statistics in the Kingdom of Poland. Operating on its founder’s own resources, it tried to collect statistical data regarding industry, commerce, agriculture and everyday life. Bloch appreciated the great importance that statistical information had for scientific research. He emphasised:

Modern science rightfully expects from a historian a different, more thorough evidence, which can be found in numbers. They are mute but impartial witnesses and convey truth better than even the most faithful chronicles. (Bloch, 1883, p. I)

The work of the Bureau was at the time so innovative that the imperial government, and, even worse, the whole of Polish society often took a dim view of it. Bolesław Prus, one of the Bureau workers, shared his thoughts on this situation in “Kurier Codzienny”:

Twenty years have passed since the enfranchisement of peasants. Despite this, we know absolutely nothing about how this momentous change influenced the well-being, mentality and morality of the most numerous class of our compatriots. [...] Our patriots complain, as they used to, about the unfortunate location of our country, but...Alas! This cruel world works in such a way that even the most emotional yearnings cannot replace statistical data, and the most ardent patriotism – a statistical bureau. [...] The statistical food of the bureau made me fat [...] but we could do nothing. All the ideas of our director were faced with... the cold blood of the country’s “citizens” and “fervent patriots”. It happened that we would send thousands of questionnaires, J.G. Bloch would spend hundreds of roubles on paper and marks and...we would receive five or six replies, whose authors suggested that we should not be interested in their affairs... “The old man” is mad, the bureau is confused and doesn’t want to do what it’s been suggested, salaries are paid, but the numbers...are nowhere to be seen. Go to hell with this kind of patriotism! (Prus, 1888)

Bloch was also actively engaged in the life of Warsaw. He took part in the famous sewerage argument. Quite early on, Bloch and his engineer Hipolit Cieszkowski drew up a plan to instal sewerage for the capital. However, it was rejected because of its costs. When, several years later, the President of Warsaw started working on the issue, Bloch raised his strong objection to the plan to install toilet sewerage and advocated sewage disposal, justifying it with ecological matters (the sewage was to end up in the Vistula river) (Żor, [n.d.], p. 10). Despite his opposite stance, in 1882 he became a member of the Committee for Building Sewage and Waterworks (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 49).

Bloch was also involved in social activities in education. His greatest achievement in this field was his assistance in creating the University of Technology in Warsaw. When Emperor Nicolas II visited the capital in 1897, the Warsaw community launched a campaign to create a higher technical educational facility. It worked—the Tsar agreed. Bloch played an important role in this enterprise by providing, for 100,000 roubles, the space he owned in the centre of Warsaw, which was later adapted for didactic use (Surmacz, 2008).

His second and biggest educational project, realised in part while he was still alive, was community centres. These institutions were intended to facilitate the development of culture and morality among the poorer classes of Polish society. In his will, he devoted a then huge sum of 250,000 roubles to this end. The mission to create these community centres was given to his wife (Żor, [n.d.], p. 11).

He was also involved in the life of Jews. The second half of the 19th century saw a government-inspired increase in discrimination against Jews in the empire, and it was planned to introduce it in the Kingdom of Poland.⁷ Bloch intended to stop this anti-Semitic trend. The Stock Exchange Committee, chaired by Bloch, appealed to the authorities to ask for a chance to present its views. The authorities agreed and the Committee prepared in the form of a memorial a reply to questions regarding the role of Jews in the economic development of the Kingdom of Poland. The document found its way to the press and resulted in a heated debate on the Jewish community. This argument finally caused the legislators to cease any work on laws discriminating against Jews in the Kingdom of Poland. Bloch achieved his goal but was targeted by anti-Semitic newspapers.⁸

As a renowned railway tycoon, he also paid attention to social issues, which was uncommon at the time. He was the initiator of pension funds, which were intended to provide workers with a fair standard of living after they retired. The project was presented and discussed at the VI Assembly of the Representatives of the Russian Railroads in 1874 (Zor, [n.d.], p. 11). Bloch was also a philanthropist. He was famous for his generosity. He helped build a children's hospital, organised a credit fund for poor university students, contributed a legate to Warsaw Charity Society, gave land to the Saint Francis de Sales Almshouse, and collected money for charity. In his will, he devoted significant sums of money to charity and offered some to create the "Biblioteka Żydowska" publishing house. His collection of books, 10,000 volumes strong, was given to the Warsaw Public Library (Surmacz, 2008).

One last element of Bloch's social activism was his participation in social events and patronage of culture and the arts. In this context, he built his family residence in the city centre, which served to show his status but also helped artists find buyers for their works and support them in other ways. He also ran a so-called salon, which was not only a meeting spot but also a platform for exchanging ideas, intellectual debates, and shaping public opinion.

Hensel wrote about Bloch's salon:

Although the Bloch palace was not as attractive with its size or architecture as the nearby Kronenberg palace, it became famous because of its salon created by Emilia (Bloch's wife), which was considered to be the first in the 1880s. It was

⁷ Tsar Alexander III, after his enthronement, created a number of anti-Jewish bills, restoring Jewish settlement zones and eliminating them from cities. At the turn of 1881 and 1882, many Russian cities witnessed Jewish pogroms. In December 1881, there was also a pogrom in Warsaw. In the first half of the 19th century on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, both communities—Polish and Jewish—lived in separated enclaves. The only way for Jews to get assimilated and gain civic and citizenship rights was to change their denomination. At the time of the January Uprising, the uprising government changed the law to grant them equal rights. The relationship between Poles and Jews improved. In the second half of the 19th century, the situation worsened. Anti-Semitism bloomed in Polish society while the Zionist movement gained momentum among Jews. The first mentions of plans to set up a Jewish settlement in Palestine date back to 1876. The first gathering of the Polish Zionists took place in 1884 in Katowice. Cf. Zor, [n.d.], pp. 12–13.

⁸ In 1899, Waclaw Gąsiorowski published a novel titled "Zginęła głupota!" ("Stupidity is Lost!"), whose villain protagonist was Jan Bloch.

visited by several hundred people. Among the most esteemed guests were Wilhelm Rau, Leon Loewenstein, Leon Goldstand, Stanisław Bruno, Juliusz Herman, Mieczysław Epstein, and Jakub Natanson. As for artists, there were most surely their portraitists, among others, Leopold Horowitz, Stanisław Makowski, and also Franciszek Kostrzewski and Leon Wyczółkowski. (Hensel, 1974, p. 39)

5. Jan Bloch—the economist

Bloch, apart from his economic and social activities, was also a prolific writer. He wrote over sixty books and articles.⁹ Their number would not be shocking if it were not for the fact that some of them were multi-volume works a few thousand pages long. Bloch's scientific output was closely connected to his practical work. As a rule, the enterprises he participated in as a financier, industrialist or railway builder were closely reflected in his scientific works. As mentioned before, he was fascinated by the German Historical School.¹⁰ He created his writings in its spirit and according to its methods.

His railway experience resulted in many works on the topic (cf. for instance Bloch, 1874, 1875, 1877, 1881). Among them stood out the five-volume book "The impact of railways on the economic condition of Russia" (Bloch, 1878–1880). It was awarded the first prize at the Geographical Congress in Paris. Bloch was ennobled for his writing.¹¹

He also published works on economics and finances (cf. Bloch, 1878, 1882). His greatest work was the two-volume "Finances of Russia" (Bloch, 1883) with an appendix concerning the finances of the Kingdom of Poland. This book also received recognition and was awarded the first prize at the Paris world fair.

He also wrote a great deal about his experience as an entrepreneur and landowner. Some outstanding works on industry and agriculture are "On the industry of the Kingdom of Poland" (Bloch, 1884), "Land and its debt in the Kingdom of Poland" (Bloch, 1892), and "On the drainage credit and the condition of domestic and foreign agriculture" (Bloch, 1890). His works were commented on in various ways. It is emphasised that Bloch as an economist cannot be said to belong to any particular school of thought. He was a practical writer, with a mind sensitive to topical issues.

It cannot be doubted that Bloch had a wide range of interests. Apart from those already mentioned, he was also interested in sewage and waterworks in Warsaw (Bloch, 1889), social issues and the Jewish case (Bloch, 1891)¹², and international affairs.¹³ However, in the last decade of the 19th century, he was

⁹ Bąbiak (2005, pp. 50–53) found 66 articles and books.

¹⁰ More details on German Historical School in Schumpeter, 1954/2006; Samuels, Biddle, & Davis, 2008; Milonakis & Fine, 2009.

¹¹ Bloch was ennobled in 1883. He received the Ogończyk coat of arms and a motto *Omnia labor*.

¹² The work did not survive to this day since almost all its copies were burnt and was not renewed.

¹³ Jan Bloch wrote several articles on China and Southern Africa, i.a.: J.G. Bloch, 1900b, 1900c, 1902.

almost exclusively preoccupied with the timeless and universal question of war and peace.

6. A theoretician and practitioner for peace

In the last years of his life, Bloch developed an interest in universal issues—of war and peace. Never before had he dealt with military matters, nor had he served in the army.

At the end of the 19th century, tensions were rising because of the preparations for war in Europe.¹⁴ Bloch, on behalf of Warsaw merchants, applied for information on the Kingdom's defences in case of potential military conflict. To his horror, he realised that the documents contained almost solely military information and lacked any plans regarding provisions, healthcare or civilian evacuation. It was not a trivial matter since the area of the Kingdom was where the opposing forces would clash. His care for the fate of the capital forced him to investigate the matter more closely. Thus, a small essay was created, then a few articles, which eventually evolved into a thorough five-volume, 3000-page long analysis of the many aspects of the war to come (Žor, [n.d.], p. 14) titled "The future of war and its technical, economic and political relations" (1900a). Bloch himself wrote that his original goal was to:

project what conditions a war coming from the West would face and what phenomena it would involve. We didn't think of purely military studies. What we did find quickly, however, was that if you don't know exactly what war is, what it will be, what means it employs and what methods, it is impossible to imagine in any clear way how long it will last and how it will affect the population. (Bloch, 1893, p. 576)

He became completely immersed in his work on what turned out to be his life's masterpiece – suspending his business, he spent many nights writing.

Its essence and message are surprisingly simple. War, in its present shape, makes no sense; there will be no winners and losers. The effort that participating countries put into it weakens them economically, and destabilises them politically and socially. As Grzegorz Bąbiak writes (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 7), Bloch in his considerations proved the unlikelihood of war ever occurring. It was, in a way, an attempt to influence his contemporary statesmen, an attempt to prove that, from the point of view of political logic, war can mean the end of humankind, and so it is impossible.

In his cycle of articles he wrote:

¹⁴ In 1893 France and Russia signed a pact. Austria and Germany started a closer cooperation and the tension between Austria and Russia was growing.

A war started by Germany would, in fact, be equal to suicide. It would devour millions of people of everyday bread, so no ordinary tax collection for the budget would be possible. Meanwhile, for a million strong army that Germany would gather, they would need more than 20 million Deutschmarks a day. (Bloch, 1901, p. 3)

He tried to prove that the trade issue, which can cause conflict to arise and will most surely be its most dire consequence, can trigger revolutionary changes. He thought that the only way to resolve a conflict peacefully was by means of international treaties, especially “because of America’s competition, gaining an advantage in the European markets with each passing day, and because of the interest of global agriculture” (Bloch, 1901, p. 2). As Bąbiak writes in *The Future of War*, Bloch also tried to prove that the rapidly developing American economy, which was possessively seeking new buyers, unless faced with unhesitating resistance in a Europe weakened by war, would be able to push it out of its own markets, causing economic losses that would be impossible to make up for (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 14).

Usually, the predictions made by writers in the social sciences are not very precise. In this case, however, Bloch’s accuracy turned out to be outstanding. WWI destabilised Europe. In Russia and Germany, because of the economic and social turmoil, it gave rise to two inhuman ideologies—communism and Nazism. Nazism led to the catastrophe of WWII, while communism, for decades, fuelled military conflicts around the globe. Consequently, in line with Bloch’s predictions, Europe’s civilisational and economic primacy was superseded by America.

The future of war gained Bloch international fame. In August 1898, the young Tsar Nicholas II proposed an initiative to organise an international peace conference in The Hague. He published a manifesto against war, in which he repeated verbatim Bloch’s argumentation (Žor, [n.d.], p. 17). The Hague Peace Conference took place between 18 May and 29 July 1899 in Maison du Bois, in the suburbs of the Hague. It was attended by 26 mainly European states, along with the USA, Mexico, China, Japan, and Persia. The conference passed several conventions and created the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In its closing act, it recommended that states should consider reducing their arms race (Osmańczyk, 1982, p. 261). Bloch was not a member of any of the official 26 state delegations, but he participated in the proceedings as an observer (Małecka, 2000). Although the Hague Conference did not prevent the breakout of The Great War, it was the first such widely attended gathering of this type and definitely drew the attention of international public opinion to matters of peace. Bloch commented on it thus:

Renouncing the madness of the arms race cannot be avoided. But why does it have to cost unnecessary lives and undeserved misery? [...] Not all is lost, however. The propaganda of the sane mind and progress must eventually prevail. The results of civilisational work in The Hague—of that we are certain—are just somewhat postponed. (Bloch, 1901, pp. 2–3)

Bloch's original idea was to create the Museum of War and Peace at Lucerne. The reason behind its creation was to show what war is and why we should strive for global peace. To this purpose, he set up a stock company, which he presided over. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the museum's opening, which took place several months after his death. Although the museum did not survive WWI, it gave rise to many such facilities created all over the world (Żor, [n.d.], p. 18).

Bloch's work for peace was met with international recognition. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by six institutions, including the Polish Academy of Learning. Unfortunately, the most likely recipient of this prize died in 1902, before it was awarded (Bąbiak, 2005, p. 13). Despite his international fame, he was not popular among his compatriots. His pacifist beliefs were in contrast to the atmosphere in his homeland, where the dominating view was that only a universal war could help Poland regain independence. Bloch, however, believed that disarmament was the only chance for the peaceful coexistence of nations. The first step to achieve this was to help countries, and especially their elites, to realise the threats that modern warfare entailed.

7. Conclusions

Jan Bloch was a member of the bourgeoisie in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the 19th century. However, he contradicted the stereotype that capitalists were interested only in their own profit. Bloch was active in many fields—he was a man of industry, finance, a railway tycoon, a great community activist, philanthropist, scientist and an advocate for global peace. His biographer, Jan Kołodziejczyk (1983, p. 306–307), wrote:

Bloch was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable representatives of this social class in Poland. Never before and never again will we find a similar case of momentum, diversity of activities, their effectiveness, and the authentic success achieved by him alone. [...] And it is likely that here lies one of the reasons why he was so disliked—plain envy.

In Polish historiography, Bloch's life still awaits thorough analysis. He is known mainly as an entrepreneur and a builder of railways. We know less about his work for peace and do not fully appreciate his contribution in this field. Bloch's economic work, conducted in the spirit of the German Historical School and contesting the economic reality of the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian Empire, is completely obscure. We can only hope that these areas of his work will one day be more comprehensively analysed by economic and peace scholars.

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