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The text discusses the album of Stefan Stattler, an employee and technical director of the "Lilpop, Rau i Loewenstein" factory from 1872 to 1912. The album presents the story of the company's growth and success; however, on its final page, Stattler compares himself to a draft horse. This emotional gesture radically changes the reception of the narrative and raises questions about the hidden protagonists of the album.

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From the Factory Director's Perspective

In the autumn of 1872, Aleksander Głowacki, later known as Bolesław Prus, took a job as a laborer at the Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein factory. He recalls the experience in his article "Szynk i zepsucie społeczne" (The Tavern and Social Corruption):

I remember walking to the factory, without breakfast, at six in the morning, feeling so hollow that halfway there I had to step into a tavern—the only establishment open at that hour—and at least wet my lips with vodka. Otherwise, I would have fainted at work. I stopped making those unpleasant visits only when the factory began to serve us "mint tea" due to the cholera outbreak at the time.¹

Also in 1872, Stefan Stattler, an engineer, found employment at the same factory. Prus worked there for several months, whereas Stattler stayed for forty years, until 1912, primarily serving as the technical director responsible for the plants and production. Probably after retiring, Stattler created an album devoted to factory work, with 150 photographs. In the 1980s, his grandson donated the album to the collection of the Museum of Warsaw.

When I worked on the exhibition *Lovely Is the Youth of Our Age: Photo Albums 1850–1950* (*Śliczna jest młodość naszego wieku. Fotoalbumy 1850–1950*), the album played a particularly important role. I realized that how we read an album depends on several factors in addition to the photographer or the circumstances of creation. Those other factors include the album's owner or intended recipient, its form, the method of affixing photographs to the pages, the way of decorating the pictures, and their captions.

Some albums conceal histories that we cannot immediately recover. However, once recognized, those very histories become the story's center and key to interpretation. Attention then shifts to what the album does not contain—the omitted, erased, or torn

away. The album interested me as a multidimensional medium that evokes not only histories and memories but also emotions, ideas, and questions.

Only the final page of Stattler's album reveals its multilayered character. On this page, the author pasted four portraits of himself taken over the years from 1890 to 1916, including an oval photograph with a handwritten inscription:

in the year 1916
 This old man for forty years
 Forged all sorts of wonders...
 for that dump.
 And when he grew old and
 stopped wielding the hammer
 The esteemed shareholders
 showered him with
 from Judah's treasury!
 So what?



On the same page, he also glued an image of a horse's head in a collar, with the caption:

Worked for that dump for many years, to good effect,
 Took no vacations, only holidays and Sundays.
 Did what they told him, ate what they gave him.
 Work sustained him, and work killed him!... and that's that!

In this way, Director Stattler compared himself to a draft animal after forty years of work. In the rhymed captions below the photographs, he expresses disappointment with how the factory treated him. This gesture stands out from the 150 photographs and captions in the album, prompting many questions. What emotions did the author wish to evoke? Regret? Perhaps bitterness? Are we reading a spontaneous outburst or

a carefully crafted commentary? Will we find other traces of disappointment on other pages? Or could this be a wink to the recipient—a suggestion that what one has been viewing is not quite what it seems?

Most of the photographs pasted into the album prior to this exceptional punch line depict the factory's history, buildings, workshop interiors at two successive locations in Solec and Wola districts, machinery, and the products manufactured there, mainly railcars and steel structures. The images constitute a meticulous documentation of the factory grounds, especially those in Solec. Based on these pictures, one could accurately reconstruct the factory's topography. Stattler usually arranged two prints of the same format per page and added handwritten captions, such as "Factory entrance from Smolna Street" or "Railcar delivery to the railway." By doing so, he developed the story of the plant by showing its grounds and buildings: the management office, boiler house, forge, pattern shop, brass foundry, and workshops, including mechanical and bomb workshops, as well as numerous other spaces, also the less representative spots—for instance the iron warehouse, the pond area, or a quiet corner.

The description and photographs of these spaces are so precise that while browsing through the album, one can imagine walking through the Solec factory grounds. For example, to reach the pond, one would enter from Smolna Street, immediately turn left, walk alongside the pattern shop and then the forge, continue toward the carpentry shop, turn right, and pass the old depots (until 1895) or, in later years, the newly built railcar depots, also shown and labeled in the album. The iron warehouse stood behind the last depot; behind the warehouse, another right turn



led to the bushes, which hid the pond.



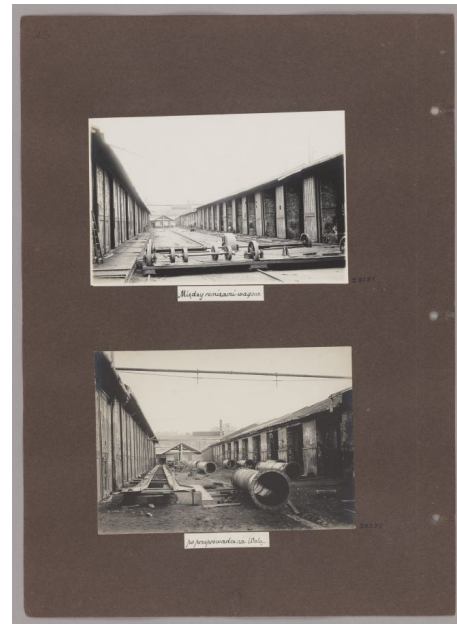
Since no trace of the factory remains today on this site,² such a photographic stroll can both serve as a journey in time and offer the viewer a sense of pleasure. In his album, Stattler included photographs of the inside of the buildings, so one can imagine a similar walk through the interiors of the power station, the boiler house with the switch division, the mechanical and machine workshop, the shrapnel workshop, the bomb workshop, the rail planing shop, and others. The photographs span over forty years, from the 1870s to 1916. Thus, they constitute a proud testament to the growth and success of Akcyjne Towarzystwo Przemysłowe Zakładów Mechanicznych Lilpop, Rau i Loewenstein (Joint-Stock Industrial Company of the Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein Mechanical Works), the factory's official name.



However, these walks become problematic when viewed through the lens of the album's ending: the portrait and the image of the horse. With these pictures, Stattler challenges us to reread this visual narrative through the filter of a strong emotion that he may have sought to conceal, as he did not reveal it until the very last page. The ending lends the album's documentary character a new tone, opening it to critical interpretation. The intended recipients remain unknown, as the album contains no official dedication. The final page redirects attention from the factory's history to the figure of the director. Did Stattler design a reflection on work at the factory? I looked at the photographs page by page, this time reading them as testimony to labor. Above all, emptiness emerged from the images, and the following question arose: where are the people?

Most of the buildings, factory grounds in Solec and Wola, workshop interiors, and manufactured products present no human figures. The captions remain exact, concise, and impersonal: "Construction of new railcar depots, 1895," "Between the boiler house, forge, and bolt shop," "Forge, larger steam hammers," and others. Stattler executed his work with great precision, which seems typical of an engineer. Still, it puzzled me that the album pages vary in shades of gray and brown. Some have three holes on the side for binding with a string, others five, as if Stattler deliberately assembled an album about the factory and his professional career from a larger amount of materials drawn from different binders, arranging the pages in this sequence from a distance, already in retirement. The album's spine, too narrow for the number of pages, indicates this as well. As a result, the pages tended to slip out, and the holes tore. Julia Kłosińska and Piotr Popławski, conservators at the Museum of Warsaw, even considered widening the spine. Ultimately, in accordance with the conservation principle of minimal necessary intervention, they decided to store the disassembled album in a single box, with the pages and cover kept separately.

Photography clearly served Stattler as a tool for documenting technological achievements, helping him remember the changes in the factory and visualizing the passage of time. Furthermore, photography narrated the factory's history—from its first location on Świętojerska Street and then in Solec, through the branch in Slavuta and the purchase of Rephan's factory grounds in Wola around 1903–1904, to the later move of part of the railcar



production to Wola, approximately in 1909.



However, who decided to photograph the factory without its workers? Was this the management's order or Stattler's idea? What time of day do the pictures show, given that the factory sometimes operated in two shifts? Bronisław Dziubek, who took a job as an administrative employee at the Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein factory in 1905 and worked there until 1918, describes Stattler in his memoir:

Often, when we entered the factory, beginning work at 6:30 in the morning, Director Stattler, loaded with technical drawings, was already returning from the factory floors to the office. ... Photography constituted Stattler's favorite pastime. Every Sunday, he took the suburban train to Wilanów and took pictures there.³

Therefore, perhaps Stattler himself took the photographs at dawn. But would his duties have allowed for that?

People appear very rarely in this album. In a few photographs, a figure stands in the background, providing a sense of scale for the buildings or machines.

Only on the thirty-sixth page (of sixty-two) did Stattler include his own portrait. He placed it the center, surrounded by four photographs of workers standing beside wheels and spokes. The images have captions, though not with names or professions, but with machine names or the tasks performed, such as "Spoke lathe" or "Manufacture of spoke pins." These remain the only posed photographs of laborers at their machines found in the album.



How, then, did Stattler see himself and his position in the factory? He did not paste his portrait on the album's first page dedicated to the company's key figures, with the photograph of President Władysław Kisiel-Kiślański, the image of the Management Board, including Władysław Kisiel-Kiślański, Henryk Marconi, Stanisław Rotwand, and Szymon Neuman, and the portrait of Managing Director Henryk Marconi. Notably, the image of the Board is a cropped enlargement from a photograph taken at Marconi's jubilee. A different crop could have included Stattler, placing him in this important group. Instead, he glued photographs of two jubilees—his own and Director Marconi's—together on another page. Thus, Stattler understood his place in the hierarchy, somewhere between the decision-makers and the laborers, between the top and bottom of the company's social structure.

Dziubek depicts Stattler as follows:

He knew the factory and all its workers very well. He always knew which craftsman worked on which machine and how he performed his tasks.

... No one dared approach Marconi for a rise. Instead, one would go to the second director—Stattler—who almost always resolved such matters favorably for the requester.

He promoted all the department heads (foremen) from the ranks of the most skilled craftsmen.⁴



If Stattler took such an interest in photography, why did he omit the photographers' names in his album? Did he do so because he took the pictures? A note in *Tygodnik Warszawski* (Warsaw Weekly) reports that at Marconi's jubilee, "Mr. K. Brandel took a photograph of all the participants."⁵ Did Konrad Brandel also take the photograph of Stattler's jubilee? Or perhaps Brandel photographed the factory grounds? This remains unclear.

We do not know the creators of the remaining photographs in the album, but we can still appreciate the photographer's skill, evident even in the full-range grayscale prints. The images likely had more than one author. The prints differ in tone, framing style, and composition. However, one can identify photographs likely taken by the same person, possibly Brandel.

Surprisingly, the photographs included in *Nasz numer przemysłowy* (Our Industrial Issue), the supplement to *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (Illustrated Weekly) from June 9, 1906, do not bear the names of their authors. The newspaper editors provided a detailed overview of the state of industry in Polish lands following the revolution and numerous strikes of 1905–1906. They interviewed factory owners in Łódź, Żyrardów, Warsaw, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Częstochowa, and Sielec, and near Olkusz. Their perspective proves one-sided: the 1905 revolution caused a severe industrial crisis.

The extensively illustrated articles credit some images to specific photographers: "Photo by Wł. Roland," "Photo by the Altman Brothers," or "B. Handkie." Thus, we can presume that the editors valued photographic authorship and would have included credits if they had known the photographers' identities.

However, the photographs of the Lilpop plants appeared without captions. The magazine describes the factory itself as

follows:

Enormous, long buildings, buzzing and roaring. Narrow pipe necks release steady streams of white steam. Smolna No. 2. ... I enter. ... The walls display gold medals, honorary diplomas, awards from Moscow, Warsaw, Chicago... I see drawings of various complex agricultural and sugar-refining machines. In the corners stand massive metal cones—artillery shells. I am in one of the largest ironworks in our country.⁶

Director Marconi speaks about factory work in the same newspaper:

In 1903, our workday lasted ten and a half hours, now it lasts nine. Meanwhile, in the Empire, even after all the violent strikes, workers in the same industry branches still work eleven to twelve hours. You understand that in light of this, even competing with the Empire becomes difficult.⁷

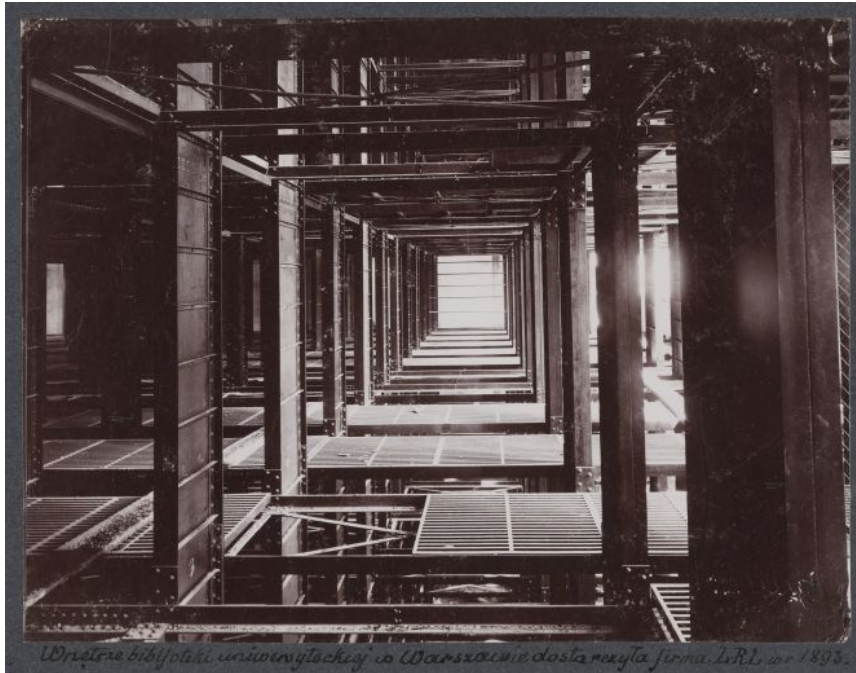
In the same issue of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, Prus dedicates his weekly chronicle to the subject of labor. He states that work

is an essential condition for human happiness, the foundation of excellence, and, finally, the creative force without which neither societies nor people could exist. ... Work not only sustains our lives but also perfects us and develops all our skills. ... A shoemaker, tailor, carpenter, actor, violinist, painter—through years of labor in their trades, they all produce works that none of us could create and consequently fill us with admiration... The more a nation works, the greater its prosperity, and the more it has perfected, satisfied individuals. And conversely: poverty, barbarism, and discontent rank among the calamities of nations that work little... ... While we, Poles, work about 300 days a year and still complain about overwork, Parisian women work 365 days!... As for male workers, I myself have seen painters in Paris working on a Sunday.⁸

Written by a man who lasted only a few months in the factory...

By 1906, when this issue of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* appeared, the laborers at the Lilpop factory had already been fighting for their rights for a long time. Ludwik Waryński likely influenced this struggle to some degree. Having taken a job as a locksmith apprentice at Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein in 1877, he advocated social justice among his fellow workers and organized worker circles. Nevertheless, Waryński found his activities frustrating, as he could not instill these concepts in the young representatives of the working class. He worked at the factory twice, for short periods in 1877 and 1878. In an article published in 1880 in the socialist journal *Równość* (Equality), Waryński writes about the unfair methods used to determine workers' wages and gave examples of wage fraud, drawing on his experience at the Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein factory. He also describes the creation of "artificial competition" among workers. However, he still believes that:

no efforts by the bourgeoisie will prevent the development of consciousness in the "docile" working masses. ... They must eventually stand up ... to a deadly struggle against a social system that allows a handful of owners to keep millions of workers in poverty and degradation!⁹



Yet, workers do not serve as the main characters in Stattler's album story. Stattler situates himself on the margins of history, though the page with the two photographs of the directors' jubilees—his and Marconi's—suggests that he aspired to join the ranks of the company's most significant figures. Perhaps this ambition makes the album center around the work, the factory preserved for posterity, and the important, interesting iron structures manufactured there at the time, such as the viaduct over the Warsaw–Vienna Railway tracks or the steel bookshelves for the University of Warsaw Library. Maybe Stattler wanted to showcase works that “none of us could create” and “consequently fill us with admiration,” as Prus notes. This might explain why the final page's shift in narrative—from triumphant to bitter—feels all the more painful and telling.

At the same time, the album's structure, with its focus on architecture and workshop interior—without people but with traces of their labor—encourages viewers to populate these places with their own images. The empty industrial spaces open a field of imagination, inviting us to fill them with figures and events from the past. The factory becomes a stage where

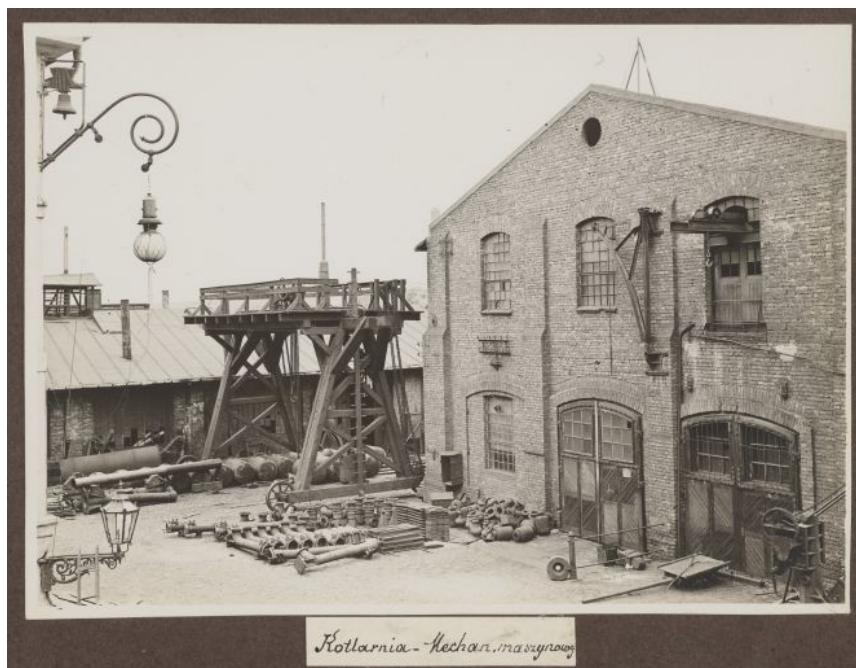
history—the political and social transformations of the early twentieth century—can unfold once again. In this way, the album allowed me to both imagine walking through the factory grounds as if through my own neighborhood and create photographs that never existed but seem plausible.

Thus, I invoke images missing from the album. Pulled away from their tasks just for a moment for a photography session, workers stand in a crowd behind the photographer. They watch his strange work, which also requires hands and a machine, but one much smaller than theirs. While watching, they try to understand how he operates the machine, and then move with him to another angle, viewing the factory grounds from an unusual perspective. Perhaps they watch what the photographer sees through his machine. They have never had the chance to look at the workshops and buildings for this long. They come to work before dawn and often leave after dusk. Besides, to keep from fainting on the job, one needs to “at least wet [one’s] lips with vodka” in the morning, to use Prus’s words. After the photo session, the workers quickly return to their stations, building new depots, operating steam hammers, or stacking newly manufactured shrapnel shells. The factory stage again fills with the life so absent from these photographs.



Maybe some of these pictures come from the days of strikes, when production stopped and the laborers attended Rosa Luxemburg’s rally. Although the album contains no visible traces of the strikes from the revolutionary period of 1905–1906, “besides sporadic short actions ..., three long strikes lasting four to five weeks”¹⁰ took place at the Lilpop factory. In his book *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa* (I Started at Lilpop’s), Dziubek writes: “During the numerous strikes of 1905–1906, Director Stattler

himself conducted all negotiations with workers' delegates in his office on the first floor of the office building."¹¹ Therefore, Stattler directly participated in those events. Unfortunately, the album lacks a photo of Luxemburg addressing the laborers at the Lilpop factory in late autumn 1905 or early 1906. As Dziubek recounts, "against the backdrop of the mechanical workshop stood a makeshift platform, from which this famous and energetic activist spoke."¹²



We can easily imagine this situation thanks to a photograph of the mechanical workshop pasted into the album. In this setting, the following action unfolds in my mind: workers stand in the foreground, and we see their backs. A large crowd has gathered in front of the mechanical and machine workshop building. Luxemburg's bright hat sticks out from between the men's heads. A short person, she herself remains invisible. She shouts, "Comrades, comrades!" Perhaps because the crowd cannot see the speaker, the men in the front suddenly lift her up. Unfazed by this sudden change in perspective, she speaks confidently:

Where ten years ago factory owners' prosperity and profit flourished in peace and quiet, today outraged people cry out:

"This profit means lawlessness and exploitation!" Where once a docile, thoughtless anthill toiled from dawn to dusk for rags and a piece of dry bread, now a great army of Polish proletarians stands with pride, resilience, and a sense of dignity and strength, fighting for bread and freedom. The echoes of this struggle resound across our entire land. The awakened worker has risen against those who live off his labor, against the capitalists, and demands the abolition of exploitation.¹³

The workers cheer. At precisely this moment, the photographer presses the shutter, capturing the political rally in a slightly blurred shot. Maybe the crowd's emotions affected him too.

How did Stattler experience the transformations in factory work after 1905–1906? Did he belong to any of the numerous organizations? Which political milieu could he support: the Polish Socialist Party or the National Democracy? Did he act as a tough negotiator on working hour concessions? The album offers no clues, and we find little information in books about the then factory owners or engineers. Stattler simply remained insufficiently known. According to Dziubek's book and *Minakowska's Great Genealogy (Wielka Genealogia Minakowskiej)*, he was the son of Marianna Lilpop Stattler, sister of Stanisław Lilpop, one of the factory's co-founders. Moreover, he graduated from the polytechnic in Aachen, married, and had two children. Stattler lived with his family in a villa in Konstancin. In retirement, he moved to Krakow, where he died and was buried.



On a page dedicated to the factory's move to Wola—into larger buildings on a much larger site—Stattler included what one might call a photographic timeline. Among other things, the page presents a view of the Solec factory from 1882 with a handwritten note: "Clouds everywhere, worry everywhere, what will come of it, what will come of it?" Next to this photograph, we see a view of the new Wola factory from 1912, captioned as follows: "Bright everywhere, lively everywhere, for the cash registers are full, the sheds are full!" Thus, the strikes and changes of 1905–1906 clearly did not harm the Lilpop factory. Quite the opposite: the captions indicate that Stattler evidently enjoyed this progress, though not for long, as he retired in 1912. This might explain why the album contains only a few photographs of the Wola factory.

Occasionally, the captions reveal small jokes, expressions of affection, or moments of sentimentality. For instance, some pages depict the "repair of the large chimney known as 'Papa'"; another page compares steam hammers, juxtaposing "the youngest machine, 1911" with "the oldest machine, produced in 1828 at the Government Machinery Factory in Solec." Do these

features signify nostalgia for the passing time?

Stattler's album serves as both a director's career retrospective and a reckoning with a professional life. For this reason, the bitter reflection only comes at the end. Before that, neither the album nor life itself offered room for such deliberations. Still, I imagine

that I paste a dreamed-up photograph: in the evening, two men sit in the hand-forging workshop after work, drafting a letter to the factory management. These men are Stattler and Waryński. Stattler suggests beginning with the words: "Enough treating workers like draft horses." Could such a situation have ever occurred?



I want to believe that Stattler authored the photographs of laborers at their machines that he glued around his own portrait. I hope that the laborers' fate mattered to him. Or, better yet, that he took a picture in the collection of the Museum of Warsaw (AF 30581). It shows workers in the carriage builder's workshop of the Lilpop, Rau, and Loewenstein factory before 1914. The photographer centered people, not machines. He wanted to create a group portrait of the workers from a single workshop—an image capturing the communal nature of factory labor. The photograph's author identifies the factory with people, not the place or machinery.



Stattler did not include this photograph in his album; perhaps he did not have this particular image. Nevertheless, he pasted two other group portraits of workers, labeled with names. However, instead of simple laborers, we see foremen, standing against the backdrop of large, new railcars. The photographer's focus, and consequently mine, remains on the railcars.

Unsurprisingly, the album contains no photographs of accidents, as no factory felt proud about those. Still, reports of accidents prove easy to find in the press. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* from 1889 features Henryk Pillati's drawing, based on Jan Mieczkowski's photograph, along with a description of a boiler explosion.

Two workers died instantly.
Fortunately, the explosion
occurred during a shift change, when the night crew had



already left the factory and the day crew had not yet arrived; otherwise, the death toll would certainly have been much higher. Our drawing gives a sense of the destruction and power of the blast: the entire building collapsed into rubble; around 300 ells of iron roofing were torn away; more than 4,000 windows shattered in the factory and surrounding buildings. The estimated losses amount to roughly 50,000 rubles. Blind force, unrestrained by the skilled and careful hand of a human superintendent, took a terrible toll on both the guilty and the innocent.¹⁴

The album raises the question about how to represent labor, prioritizing the work, goals, and success. For Stattler, technology and achievements proved more representative of the story. Perhaps he intended the album to serve as the official version of the plant's history, development, and prosperity. Maybe he even identified himself with the factory. Yet, the final page escaped this narrative, changing the way of reading the album. This shift opened space for parallel stories about the factory and its workers, the growth of self-governments, and the struggle for labor rights.

Since the album concludes Stattler's forty-year career, it also prompted me to pause and reflect on my own work. What animal—or perhaps bot—would I place alongside my portrait if I wished to summarize my professional life in photographs or memoirs? Looking through the album helps me ask questions about my own career path, which aligns more closely with Stattler's experience than with that of the laborers. I identify less with the legacy of enslavement and exploitation that fueled the 1905 revolution and more with the deep intertwining of identity and work. I think about the consequences of spending a life in a state of "employment," and I would like to have this conversation with the album's author. So much has changed, and yet so much stays the same.

- 1 Bolesław Prus, "Szynk i zepsucie społeczne," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 264 (1881): 3.
- 2 None of the buildings from the factory grounds in Solec have survived; the buildings in Wola have partially remained to the present day.
- 3 Bronisław Dziubek, *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1969), 72, 74.
- 4 Dziubek, *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa*, 71.
- 5 *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 328 (1899): 7.
- 6 *Nasz numer przemysłowy* supplement, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 23 (1906): 433–43.
- 7 *Nasz numer przemysłowy* supplement: 433–43.
- 8 Bolesław Prus, "Kronika Tygodniowa," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 23 (1906): 445–7.
- 9 Ludwik Waryński, "Czy jest u nas kwestyja robotnicza?," *Równość*, nos. 8 and 9 (1880): 24.
- 10 Dziubek, *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa*, 93.
- 11 Dziubek, *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa*, 93.
- 12 Dziubek, *Zaczynałem u Lilpopa*, 93.
- 13 Róża Luxemburg, "Zadania polityczne polskiej klasy robotniczej," *Sprawa Robotnicza*, no. 1 (1893): 1.
- 14 *Kłosy*, no. 1236 (1889): 154.

