Both professional and lay historians have long accused their beloved discipline of grievous flaws in the conduct of her affairs. The former complain that far too often amateurs produce works that are harmful with their lack of solid scholarship, while the latter feel that, with alarming frequency, the historian becomes so involved in the research and problems of a particular topic that he tends to ignore considerations of form and style, lapsing into esoteric language which deprives the book of any appeal beyond the narrow circles of the profession. In an age of increasing specialization, this second tendency appears to have become even more acute, as monographs, either obscure in their limited scope or tendentious in their use of jargon, proliferate. In recent years the trend to synthetic studies of a problem or period of history has gained popularity as a means to broaden the perspectives of historical work while simultaneously exploiting methodological techniques and approaches already attempted or proven in other disciplines. This so-called “inter-disciplinary” system is still in the embryonic stage of development in the West, as regards history, for a variety of reasons—not least of which is the difficulty involved in amassing the necessary data and formulating a conceptual framework within which to develop a program of research.

Polish historiography, long regarded as excitingly dynamic in the realm of new and stimulating approaches, has recently presented us with a superb example of how to successfully execute this demanding task. Marian Marek Drozdowski, of the Instytut Historii PAN and hitherto best known for his excellent studies Polityka gospodarcza rządu polskiego, 1936-1939 and Alarm dla Warszawy, here emerges as a master of the interdisciplinary approach and, in so doing, establishes himself unquestionably as one of Poland’s leading historians. Noting that the vast majority of books on the working class were “almost exclusively concentrated on problems of the workers’ movement and, despite their methodological declarations, separate the history of this movement from the history of the working class itself, from its place and function in the structure of the entire society, as well as from its own internal structure”, Drozdowski remedies this defect and additionally presents a good Überblick of Warsaw’s society in the Dwudziestolecie. The geographical and chronological framework was selected not only to avoid the superficiality which a broader survey would have made inevitable, but also because the capital’s workers, “more powerfully than the workers of other industrial centres, reflected the rhythm of the changes of the 20th Century,” which in turn meant that “the processes of social mobility among workers had a greater intensity than in other cities of the II Republic (except for Gdynia and the COP cities).”

As already implied, the author produces much more than promised in the title. The lead chapter alone, on the “methodological problems of research on the composition and social structure of the working class,” embracing almost a hundred pages, should be required reading for anyone examining the social history of any group or period. Drawing upon a wealth of American, German, French and British as well as Polish theoretical works, Drozdowski skillfully fashions the conceptual framework within which his work is moulded, and which proves durable indeed when confronted with the reality of application. Any departure from the safe fold of traditional history, with its “developed research methods, its own rich conceptual apparatus, its highly-developed specialization”, is a hazardous venture; “this is not only a search for new sources . . . it is primarily a search for new thoughts, new problems, a search full of risk and danger.” The scholar must beware of a blind acceptance of
sociological methods without attention to historical perspective, or a simple
summary of sociological conclusions implemented with historical data, and
rather should aim at a viable synthesis of the two. The author quite correctly
commences his work with a discussion of the working terminology to be used;
instead of hiding behind a smokescreen of jargon, Drozdowski boldly and
convincingly lays before us the functional definitions of such concepts as
“class”, both social and working, “mobility”, “stratification” and “structure.”
In so doing, the characteristic attributes of the concept of “social class” in
Marxist thought are concisely and intelligently presented in the course of the
discussion, which also evenly presents the views of those sociologists who
polemicize with and those who synthesize from this concept. There is a lengthy
(33-page) consideration of both the historical and analytical idea of the “work-
ing class” which, after differentiating between that term and “proletariat”, and
reviewing the legal and statistical definitions of this group in Poland, concludes
that, of all the many historical connotations, “the most useful for the historian
are definitions of a sociological type, treating the working class as ‘a collective
having a characteristic internal bond, guaranteeing it internal unity, possessing
its own formal and informal institutions, its own system of values, which are
not only similar but common throughout the entire class.’ ”

The brilliance of its opening burst should in no way detract from the merits
of the book’s remaining salvos, however. The reader is given a view of “the
place of the working class in the social composition of interwar Warsaw’s
population,” in which the entire community is minutely dissected. Unfortunately,
because research in this area is not sufficiently advanced to present a structural
analysis, “structure broadly understood as the arrangement of interclass and
interstrata relations in functional horizontal and vertical columns,” the reader
finds a view of “the quantitative proportions interacting between classes and
strata in different social sectors.” Subtopics include the population distribution
of Warsaw, its composition according to social position, vocation, religious/
nationality affiliations, and an examination of social mobility. Next the horizon-
tal structure of the working class is treated, embracing its numerical growth,
distribution regarding place of work, place of residence, demographic con-
siderations, and its nationality religious composition, with special attention to
the Jewish segment. The final substantive portion of the book is devoted to a
study of the class’s stratification “according to objective and subjective hier-
archical criteria,” among which are income and expenditure, education and voca-
tional training, family background, standards of foodstuff consumption, and
participation in religious, cultural/educational and political life. The author
then succinctly summarizes the results of his work. Regarding the question of
sources in a book of this nature, Drozdowski states that its bases are “statistical
materials, sociological questionnaires conducted in the interwar period and
sociological-historical works;” documents and the press are considered “a helpful
source, particularly useful for an analysis of the political stratification of the
working class,” although many archival materials were rejected as being too
hypothetical and hence superficial. Each valid methodological premise is
repeated and briefly proved out, and the author concludes that “an analysis of
both the horizontal and vertical structure of the capital’s workers reveals that
the working class of Warsaw was a class of a society with powerful feudal
anachronisms, a society which had not gone through industrialization, which in
turn would bring revolutionary changes in the structure of global society and
make all directions of social mobility dynamic.”

If only for the wealth of factual material contained therein, the book is a true
*magnum opus*. The source basis is truly international, tables, charts and graphs
abound, and the scholarship is impeccable. Undoubtedly, the casual reader of