

Literature

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Krystyna Szafraniec

Dyzma Gałaj (1915–2000)

We paid our last respects to Professor Dyzma Gałaj at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw on 12 December 2000. He lived for most of the twentieth century. Throughout his life he was concerned with rural issues and the peasant movement, working in various professions. He was a teacher, journalist, politician and academic.

At the beginning of 1957 he founded the theoretical monthly “*Wieś Współczesna*” (The Countryside Today), being its editor in chief until 1964. He spent many years doing research at the Agricultural Universities of Łódź, Olsztyn and Warsaw. He headed the Research Institution for Regions undergoing Industrialization for 7 years (1964–1971) and when it was transformed into the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Science, he became its director (1971–1985).

That academic institution was to provide the peasant movement with information about the condition of the Polish countryside as a basis for diagnosis and theoretical reflection. Dyzma Gałaj expressed such a need as early as the beginning of 1957 in the first issue of “*Wieś Współczesna*”, a few months after the Polish October. After the experiences of Stalinism he was convinced that the Polish countryside could not be changed using blind political directives and in order to bring about changes along socialist ideas (whose legitimacy he did not doubt) the needs and living conditions in the countryside had to be known and taken into consideration. The peasant movement which was reformed and enriched by theoretical reflection was to detect and articulate those needs. Dyzma Gałaj was active in that movement throughout his life — he was a Member of Parliament for many years (1965–1980) during which time he was the Speaker of the Polish Sejm (1971) and a member of the People’s State Council (1972–1976).

The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development was not the only research institution in Poland concerned with rural issues but it concentrated more than others on serving social practice. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for results of research carried out by the Institute not to be put to any use by either practitioners or politicians.

Gałaj was a very dynamic, courageous man and was always full of ideas. He was surrounded by various specialists — sociologists, demographers, economists and ethnographers. He was an excellent manager. He acquired funds and succeeded in getting works published. He set up the Institute's quarterly "Wieś i Rolnictwo" (The Countryside and Agriculture). He organized a branch of the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development in Toruń in 1974. Its employees undertook innovative research concerning the state of education in the Polish countryside and the social results of selection in and by means of education. That research is continued till this very day (see the article by Krystyna Szafraniec "The Countryside and the Young Rural Generation", EEC, No. 6/2000).

Professor Gałaj was the prime mover of the IV World Congress of Rural Sociology which took place in Toruń in 1976. This was a large, prestigious, international event which provided direct contact between many scientists from the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe with their counterparts from Western Europe and the United States. This meeting had a beneficial effect on the further academic careers of Polish rural sociologists.

Professor Gałaj played a very significant role in the development of research of the countryside in Poland, both as initiator and organizer. Many scientists working in this field emphasize their close links with him. It was with great grief that we paid our last respects to him.

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