

Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki

**Ludwik Górski — the Precursor
of Rural Sociology in Poland
(1818–1908)**

When looking for the origins of social reflection in Poland it is worth remembering the landowner and scholar, Ludwik Górski. He was an excellent farmer as well as being good at putting across on paper his agro-economic knowledge for his fellow citizens, particularly large landowners, since he believed in the future modernization of Poland and its agriculture in line with the latest scientific achievements.

Górski and Andrzej Zamoyski together founded the Agricultural Association in Warsaw in 1861, which although soon dissolved by the Russian Partitioning Power,^{*} won over the Polish landed gentry for the agrarian reform, which would do away with the corvée in Polish agriculture.

Górski was the author of several important original academic works in the field of socio-economics, agricultural economics (e.g.: *O obecnym stanie gospodarstwa wiejskiego w Rawskim*, 'About the current state of the rural economy in the Rawa district', 1845, *Uwagi nad obecnym stanem robotników wiejskich w Królestwie Polskim*, 'Comments on the current state of rural workers in the Congress Kingdom of Poland', 1860, *Znaczenie większej własności i obowiązki większych właścicieli ziemskich w Królestwie Polskim*, 'The significance of larger property and responsibilities of larger landowners in the Congress Kingdom of Poland', 1866). He called for the abolition of the corvée and for its gradual replacement by rent which would eventually lead to the enfranchisement of the peasants, thus ensuring capitalist modernization of large farms which were very backward if compared with western countries, particularly Prussia, France, Scotland and even Czechoslovakia (he was highly critical of agriculture in the District of

^{*} Between 1795 and 1918 Poland was partitioned between three Partitioning Powers: Prussia, Austria and Russia; the territory in the Russian Partition was called the Congress Kingdom or Polish Kingdom.

Galicia). He was so much in favour of change in the agricultural system in Poland, that he approved of the tsarist enfranchisement edict of 1864 despite the fact that it caused a severe crisis in agricultural ownership which, of course, had unfavourable consequences.

Górski was a man of exceptional erudition who, by keeping up to date with the latest western literature and applying a comparative method had considerable influence in his conclusions.

He was the first in this part of Europe to publish, in 1860, one of the monographies of working class family budgets by the French sociologist Frédéric Le Play (*Les Ouvriers Européens*), 5 years after its appearance in Paris, thus encouraging in Poland the elaboration along similar lines of labourers' budgets (partially accomplished during the 2nd Republic).

He also ran large-scale charity work. Church and religious institutions, as well as lay social organizations were indebted to him for financial assistance and their actual existence (e.g. The Order of the Felician Sisters, academic periodicals). He even provided money for the renovation of King Sigismund's Column in Warsaw.

Socialism had been totally unheard of in the Congress Kingdom of Poland when Górski spoke up for the rights of farm labourers, their wives and children (country crèches), he was concerned about them, demanding social assistance from the landowners (medical aid and insurance), improvement in housing conditions so that the men would not disappear to the bar, as well as organizing activities for women in their homes and gardens. These ideas came to him while he carefully analysed the living conditions, efficiency and quality of work in various agricultural systems in selected countries. He was also aware of the serious problem of alcoholism in the countryside and was most probably the first in Poland to research the records of proceedings of cases concerning drink-related crime. He associated this problem with the unstable existence of farm labourers and small farmers as well as their reluctance to save money and their poor housing conditions. He pointed out that the farm labourer in Prussia despite being paid lower wages worked more efficiently since the standard of organization of community life and social welfare was higher than in the Congress Kingdom of Poland. He did not hesitate to accuse certain Polish landowners of living a life of egotism, comfort and short-sightedness, not showing any interest in the standard of living or education in the countryside. He criticized them for shirking from holding office in rural local government which precisely because it was restricted by the partitioning power, should have been supported by the Polish national elite. He condemned them for "getting offended" with the authorities and being detached from rural issues (including lawsuits in courts of first instance).

Last of all, Górski was one of Poland's first Positivists, an advocate of 'organic work'. For this reason he was against the 1863 January Rising,

attributing its outbreak (as did many later leaders of the National Democratic movements) to an international conspiracy.

In this organic, evolutionary activity he formulated principles, which can be considered as the beginnings of the Church's 'social doctrine'. First of all, he advocated the limitation of state assistance to the bare minimum; he believed that the state should simply ensure a legislative framework whereas social problems should be solved by social institutions, local government in particular. This is precisely what is stipulated by the Catholic social doctrine 'auxiliary principle'. Górski propagated such a method of action, and referred to the views of the above mentioned sociologist, Le Play. Secondly, as a Positivist who was free of superstition and class prejudice, he wished the blessings of civilization to include the whole of society. As a conservative, although indeed progressive, he was convinced that only such "social reforms are lasting, lead to further progress and are acceptable to the spirit of the nation which is the result of its entire history" (*O konserwatystwie w Polsce*, "About conservatism in Poland" 1853, p. 6).

Thirdly, he devoted much thought, more than any of his contemporaries, to social issues concerning the peasants and women. It can generally be said that he searched for revolutionary solutions in the spirit of Christian solidarity.

Finally, including the whole of society in his thinking, he was realistic since he took into account the facts which may and should be changed gradually and peacefully, making reference to the human conscience and interest, in the right sense of the word. He understood that external conditions should co-exist with the shaping of mankind's morale in the ever-changing reality, where balance between work and capital is a significant factor.