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KAZIMIERAS PALTAROKAS
– THE PRECURSOR OF LITHUANIAN
RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Lithuanian rural sociological research, particularly its empirical aspect started developing rather late. There were several reasons for this, one of them being that from 1795 to 1918 Lithuania was non-existent on the map of Europe.¹ The difficulty of maintaining its own identity was aggravated by processes of Russification and Polonisation of Lithuanian society. This does not mean that sociological research was not conducted in the rural areas of the old Lithuanian territory. Rural historical and sociological research was carried out at the time. Bishop Kazimieras Paltarokas of Christian Democrat leaning, may be considered a precursor of that research. At the beginning of the 20th century the Lithuanian intelligentsia generally came from the clergy. In his book *Socialis klausimas* (The social question) (1913), Paltarokas referred to Pope Leo XIII's social teachings and his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). He attempted to find an answer to the economic and social problems facing Lithuanian society at the time. He analysed the changes taking place in the countryside and was particularly interested in agrarian relations and land ownership. His handbook was an answer to the controversy about the shape of agrarian reform taking place in the reborn Lithuanian state.² He tried to construct an ideal, healthy society following the economic model.

Kazimieras Paltarokas was born on 22 October 1875 to a peasant family in the village of Gailioniai (the former district of Šauliai). He went to primary school in Joniškėlis and then secondary school in Mintauja. He prepared for the priesthood at the Seminary in Kaunas and the Academy in St. Petersburg. He was ordained on 22 March 1902, the subject of his master's thesis in Theology being *De*

¹ From 1569 to 1791 the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was united with Poland forming the United Republic of Poland-Lithuania, becoming one state during the Constitution of 3 May 1791. The process of the partitions of Poland, carried out by Prussia, Russia and Austria therefore also included Lithuania.

² The act of Lithuanian independence was signed on 16 March 1918.

origine animae humanae (On the origins of the human soul). After ordination he was a vicar and chaplain in Liepoja and after falling ill in December 1906 he was moved to Surviliškės.

It is worth mentioning his social work: he took an active part in the Lithuanian Self-help Association, distributed banned Lithuanian papers, opened parish libraries, supported the activity of the Society of Abstinence. Towards the end of 1911 he started his academic career as a lecturer at the Seminary in Kaunas. Between 1911 and 1922 he lectured in Latin, The Introduction to Theology, Philosophy and Sociology. Insufficient literature on the subject inspired him to write his own sociological handbook *Socialis klausimas* (mentioned above), two editions of which came out, in 1913 and 1921. Due to his initiative Sociology became a two-year course, two hours a week of theory and practice. After the outbreak of the 1st World War the seminary was evacuated to the manor in Vašakėnai (Troškūnai parish) and later to Smolensk. When in 1917 the possibility of re-opening a Seminary in Kaunas arose, Paltarokas returned to his earlier responsibilities as deputy director and lecturer at the Seminary. In 1922–1926 he was assistant professor and director of the Department of Pastoral Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology at the Lithuanian University. Until 1926 he lectured in General Theology and Church Law. On 30 May 1926 he became bishop of Panevėžys and from 1949 was also bishop of Vilnius. He died in Vilnius on 3 January 1958.³

Paltarokas defined sociology as the philosophy of the social sciences, which searched for the causes of social phenomena and indicated ways of man reaching selected goals. He applied a particularly important role to the practical goal of sociology – the reparation of society. In his opinion, the “question” in the title of his handbook *The Social question* meant the problem, something bad and undesired, an illness emerging in society, which will have to be identified, its cause found and an appropriate cure applied.⁴ That is why the title of his work can be translated as “Social shortcomings” or “Social evil”. The precursor of rural sociology described the countryside in the spirit of the times, underlining the value of agriculture and thereby searching for ways of repairing the difficult position of peasants in the countryside. From his analysis it appeared that after the 1st World War, ¾ of the inhabitants of the Lithuanian state, 85% of whom were Lithuanian, made a living from agriculture. Paltarokas advocated getting rid of everything which threatened agriculture: *Solving the agrarian issue is a way of organising the management of the land and running farms so that farming may become maximally productive.*⁵ In his opinion the solution to rural problems can come about by economic and agrarian reform, since the solution of a society’s

³ Vilnius: Lietuvių enciklopedijos leidykla, *Lietuvių enciklopedija*, Vol. 21, 1960, pp. 433–436.

⁴ Kazimieras Paltarokas, *Socialis klausimas, Antroji padidinta laida*, Petronio knygnas, Kaunas 1921, pp. 6–7.

⁵ Idem, p. 164.

economic problems can contribute to satisfying the needs of the peasants, that most wronged layer of society.

Paltarokas analysed the historical course of the change of land ownership, from the time of villeinage to the beginning of the 20th century. He was concerned about certain phenomena emanating from social inequality, the unequal division of land. Towards the end of the 18th century the peasant became a “slave of the land”, having to work in the manor for about 320 days of the year.⁶ Even abolition of villeinage⁷ did not improve the peasants’ position as they were forced to buy land they wanted to cultivate. In his opinion the poor condition of agriculture was owed to the division of farms into pieces of land dispersed in different parts of the countryside. At the beginning of the 20th century Lithuanian peasants owned very little land, if at all. Half a million people who were at that time considered as smallholders owned only 5% of the land in the countryside, “petty farmers” representing 60% of society owned 40% of rural land.⁸

Such a division of land, according to Paltarokas, was unacceptable in an agricultural country, that is why the agrarian reform proposed by him, took into consideration the needs of the peasants who were dispossessed or smallholders. He was in favour of giving land to the peasants, mainly acquired due to the division of land belonging to the manors and some forest areas.⁹ The reform assumed an adequate amount of money for the former owners and low payment in exchange for acquired land. *Social property must have a higher standing than the property of specific individuals. The country will benefit if instead of one excessively large manor there will be (...) a few hundred small owners (...). For the benefit of society the authorities have the right to buy private property.*¹⁰ In his opinion the amount of land should be sufficient for keeping a family, i.e. approximately 11 to 22 ha for dispossessed peasants¹¹ (depending on the quality and location of the land). For those living nearer to towns, forests or water, less land would be sufficient, since an additional form of income could come from working outside agriculture.

⁶ Idem, pp. 165–166.

⁷ In 1807 villeinage was abolished in so-called “Small Lithuania” – The Prussian partition, in 1861 in the remaining Lithuanian lands in the Russian partition.

⁸ Vida Kazlauskienė, Kazimiero Paltarokopo požiūris į socialines kaimo problemas, [in:] *Iš Lietuvos sociologijos istorijos*. t. II, Vosyliūtė, A., Leonavičius, J., Pruskus, V., Čiužas, A. (ed.), Lietuvos filozofijos ir sociologijos institutas, Vilnius 1999, pp. 89–91.

⁹ According to the law passed on 14 October 1920, a forest can be taken away from a private person if its area exceeds 27.17 ha. This principle does not apply if the forest is owned by a town, village, settlement or owner, if its area does not in all exceed 76.47 ha.

¹⁰ Kazimieras Paltarokas, *Socialis klausimas. Antroji padidinta laida*, op.cit, p. 178.

¹¹ Idem, pp. 182–184.

Paltarokas also analysed the level of land debt, distinguishing three categories of debt: inherited, acquired (due to lack of money), drainage. There were many irregularities connected with the fact that the practical value of land was lower than the market price. The sociologist therefore made suggestions which were to improve land productivity. He advised continuity in managing the land, a change in the inheritance law, access to credit for peasants, defining debt limits, solving the issues of state tax., creation of agricultural companies (grain purchasing centres), introducing protective duty (for imported grain). Paltarokas encouraged peasants to organise small agricultural associations which would run re-training. He believed that the reparation of Lithuanian society had to be based on morality and religion which encourage hard work and savings.

Rural research carried out by the bishop provided the perception of a new area of sociological research. According to Paltarokas sociology should be utilised for practical goals in order to satisfy 20th century demands. His proposals of repairing Lithuanian society, agrarian reform were supported by Jonas Aleks among others, who was minister of Agriculture from 1927. The authorities of the Lithuanian state restored after 1918 also utilised the concepts of the rural researcher when implementing the agrarian reform.¹²

¹² On 3 August 1920, an interim agrarian reform was passed, whereas on 3 April 1922 the project of the agrarian reform was announced officially (it did not include Vilnius and Klaipeda).