

## OBITUARIES

### ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

On January 9, 2017, Professor Zygmunt Bauman passed away in Leeds at the age of ninety-one. He was born in Poznań on November 19, 1925. After the outbreak of the World War II, together with his parents he left Poland for the Soviet Union in 1939. Upon finishing high-school in 1943, he began studies at the University of Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod). Shortly thereafter he was drafted and sent to serve for a few months as a “road traffic inspector” directing street traffic in a Moscow militia unit. At the age of nineteen, he joined the First Polish Army pushing the German invaders along the Red Army from the Soviet Union through Poland all the way to Berlin. He served as a political instructor in the ranks of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and was wounded in the Battle of Kolberg. In June 1945, he found himself incorporated, along with his entire division, into the Internal Security Corps, a formation designed to defend the communist political system. In March 1953, he was discharged from military service because of “ties to his family of ideologically foreign class enemies and an attitude that did not ensure proper implementation of the tasks entrusted to him.”

In 1954, Zygmunt Bauman graduated from the University of Warsaw with a degree in philosophy as a student of professor Julian Hochfeld. During the Stalinist period, sociology was absent from the university curriculum, but when it was reestablished Bauman began work in the Department of the Sociology of Political Relations (directed by Professor Hochfeld). Bauman wrote both his doctoral and habilitation theses while teaching at the reorganized and renamed Department of General Sociology. Bauman became the head of the department after Hochfeld left to work for the UNESCO.

In 1968, during the anti-Semitic campaign, he was expelled from the Polish United Workers' Party (the ruling communist party) and, accused of revisionism and Zionism, fired from his position at the University of Warsaw. A few months later, with his wife and children, Bauman joined the Jewish immigration to Israel. In the years 1969–1971 he lectured at the University of Haifa. The atmosphere in Israel did not suit him, however, and from 1971 until his retirement in 1990 he was a professor of sociology at the University of Leeds.

He became the most famous of contemporary Polish sociologists, a thinker and an acute observer and interpreter of the post-modern era. He had a unique talent for synthesizing new social phenomena. He coined such widely accepted terms as “liquid modernity,” “late modernity,” the precariat, and the Holocaust, that entered the lexicon of philosophical, sociological thought.

After retiring, he continued his scholarly work and accepted numerous invitations to lecture on cultural and civilizational change. He enjoyed lecturing and was an excellent speaker; his talks and publications were received enthusiastically.

During his career Zygmunt Bauman published about 60 books, of which 22 were he authored by him alone and 14 were co-authored. But the major works, proposing his basic concepts of civilizational changes of modern world appeared within the last decades, while Bauman was already retired, for example: *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006), *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2006).

Bauman received numerous important academic and honorary awards, including the European Amalfi Prize for Sociology and Social Sciences “for the work *Modernity and the Holocaust*” in 1989; the Theodor W. Adorno Award in 1998; and the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation Vise 97 Prize in 2006 (a diploma and crosier). He received honorary doctorates from ten major European universities (West England, Oslo, Copenhagen, London, Leeds, Uppsala, Gothenburg, Lapland, Prague, and Sofia).

After 1989 Bauman and his wife often visited Poland. He was invited to speak at various Polish universities and his books were translated and published in Polish. In 2004 he was appointed rector of the Jan Józef Lipski People’s University in Teremiski near Białowieża, administered by the Jacek Kuroń Educational Foundation. On his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2010, he was awarded the Gloria Artis Medal by Bogdan Zdrojewski, the then Polish minister of culture. In 2012 he received an honorary doctorate from the Artistic University of Poznań.

Nevertheless, in Poland recognition and admiration were only one side of the interest in his person and his works. Many scholars appreciated his ability to observe the changes occurring in society, his ease in labeling them, and his original theoretical and ethical interpretations of cultural phenomena. Others objected that his work was largely in essay form, that he did not show the extent of the phenomena he discussed, and, that the theses he put forward were ambiguous and inadequately proven. The political right also raised its voice, reminding him of his communist past and work for the state organs directly involved in combating the anti-communist underground movement after the war. Groups of right-wing thugs began to appear at his lectures, attempting to disrupt them.

Academic circles as well began to insist that he apologizes for his communist past, (which he declined). The University of Warsaw rejected the recommendation of its sociological institute to award him a renewal of his doctoral degree (a special honor equal to a honorary doctorate, reserved for the University own doctors 50 years after the original awarding). For his critics and opponents, attacking him for his youthful past was more important than that the fact that he was himself a victim of the communist system. One of the reasons he was fired from the University in 1968 was his open criticism of the system. The unforgiving position as to his war-time politics by some of the Polish social scientists remained despite his world class public intellectual achievements and the greatest international recognition. Even the great majority of his opponents agree on the latter point.

For sociologists and other social scientists, philosophers and scholars of ethics and cultural studies, as well as for the average thinking person, Zygmunt Bauman’s work will long remain a source of inspiration and an important tool to decipher and understand the contemporary world.

*Nina Kraško*