

JERZY SZACKI

Jerzy Szacki passed away on October 25, 2016. A modest person of few words, he was a refined analyst and encyclopedist, sensitive to large ideological questions and issues involving people and institutions. The social sciences and humanities in Poland, particularly sociology, owe much to him. He had uncommon erudition and social imagination, and was an unconventional teacher of several generations of Polish sociologists.

He was raised in a family of civil servants in Warsaw. Along with his mother Barbara he experienced the horrors of the occupation, including the hecatomb of the Warsaw Uprising and the succeeding months. He and his mother received the Righteous Among the Nations honor.

Shortly after the war he found employment—first as a locksmith and then in a telecommunications office. In 1948 he began studies in sociology at the University of Warsaw. His class was the last to be able to take the sociology program, which was closed by the authorities in 1952. When sociology studies were reopened in 1956 he returned to the University and in 1959 defended a doctoral thesis entitled *Ojczyzna, naród, rewolucja* [Fatherland, Nation, Revolution], written under the direction of Bronisław Baczko. In 1965 he was awarded his habilitation degree on the basis of the book *Kontrrewolucyjne paradoksy. Wizje świata francuskich antagonistów Wielkiej Rewolucji 1789–1815* [Counter-Revolutionary Paradoxes: The World Views of French Opponents of the Great Revolution 1789–1815], and later received the title of Professor.

From 1968 until his retirement he was the head of chair of the History of Social Thought at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw. In the years 1972–1976 he was the President of the Polish Sociological Association. In 1974–1991, he was editor in chief of the *Polish Sociological Bulletin*. For a long time he edited the Sociological Library of PWN (National Academic Publishers). He was a translator or co-translator of books by Howard Becker, Harry Elmer Barnes, Émile Durkheim, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Mauss, and others.

For many years he served in various positions in University of Warsaw and the Polish Academy of Sciences, including as chairman of the Sociology Committee. He belonged to many academic societies and other associations of significance in Poland's social, political, and cultural scene, engaged into academic and organizational activities. He was also a grant holder and lecturer at many foreign universities, including the Sorbonne, Oxford, and the University of Minnesota. His activities in connection with the Viennese Institute for Human Sciences were of particular importance.

During both the communist era and the transformation period he was engaged as a *citizen critic* not only in academic and cultural pursuits but also in important social and political activities: he published articles in the underground press, lectured in the Society for Academic Courses, and helped to prepare various kinds of program documents for Solidarity. For many years Jerzy Szacki was associated with the “Experience and the Future” seminar, which influenced the program activities of Poland’s democratic opposition. He took part in debates over the mission of Poland’s intelligentsia. In discrediting pathological forms of national megalomania, he fought against anti-Semitism and against oversimplified visions of the nation state, democracy, and European integration. In 1991 he founded Labor Solidarity and from 2007 on he was connected with Liberal Forum.

In 2003 he received the Cultural Foundation Prize for Best Academic Book and the Prize of the Foundation for Polish Science, and in 2007 the PEN Prize. In 2008 he was awarded the Commander’s Cross with Star of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland, and in 2009 he was given an honorary doctorate from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University.

He followed the succeeding articulations of the basic dilemmas of European thought with great care (freedom or necessity, holism or reductionism, individualism or collectivism, voluntarism or determinism) and was one of the creators of the Warsaw School of the History of Ideas. His *History of Sociological Thought*, which was published numerous times in Polish as well as in English, is a fundamental work for sociologists, social philosophers, and historians of ideas. He not only concentrated on reconstructing all the varieties of revolution in social thought but his works themselves were revolutionary due to the way he wrote about sociology and his conceptualization of its nature and tasks. His works counter the excessive theoretical claims of Marxism on the one hand and of scientism on the other.

Joanna Kurczewska