

Reviews. Reports

Recenzje. Sprawozdania

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*Review of: Florian Znaniecki: Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej.
Wybór pism, wyboru dokonała, wstępem opatrzyła i opracowała
Anna Cйтkowska-Kimla, Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, Wydział Studiów
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The publication is part of the series “Polskie Studia nad Totalitaryzmem” (Polish Studies on Totalitarianism), published by the Center for Political Thought and the Faculty of International and Political Studies at the Jagiellonian University, which is devoted to the reflection of Polish political thought on totalitarianism in the 20th and 21st centuries. The volumes contain analyses of the theoretical assumptions and ideological faces of communism, Nazism and fascism, as well as practical aspects of the functioning of authoritarian and totalitarian states.

The publication contains reflections on Bolshevism and totalitarianism by Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958), the founder of the sociological school in Poland, whose works on empirical sociology and sociological theory are well known outside Poland, especially in the USA, where he lived and worked for many years.

The introduction to the publication, as well as the selection and compilation of Florian Znaniecki’s writings, was written by Anna Cйтkowska-Kimla, a renowned

Polish scholar with an established position in the study of political thought, contemporary political doctrines and movements, and the paradigm of romanticism in politics. Professor Citkowska-Kimla is the authoress of numerous publications (authored and edited monographs and scholarly articles), including a series of publications devoted to the thought of Marek Sobolewski (*Marek Sobolewski: faszyzm i komunizm. Wybór pism*, wyboru dokonała, opracowała i wstępem opatrzyła Anna Citkowska-Kimla, Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej – Wydział Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politycznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2020).

The introduction, entitled *Zagrożenia cywilizacji zachodniej – bolszewizm, imperializm rasowy, ochłokracja i nazizm. Florian Znaniecki o społeczno-politycznych problemach swoich czasów* [*Threats to Western Civilisation – Bolshevism, Racial Imperialism, Ochlocracy and Nazism. Florian Znaniecki on the Socio-Political Problems of His Time*], is divided into two main sections: *Biographical Sketch* and *Bolshevism and Nazism*. The division adopted by the authoress is logical and justified, organises the analysis carried out and allows the reader to learn about the premises that influenced the perspective adopted by Znaniecki in the perception of social phenomena, the construction of the assumptions of the political system, the definition of the role of certain social segments or, finally, the formation of views with regard to Bolshevism and Nazism, which is crucial from the point of view of the volume.

The first part of the Introduction, which contains a biographical sketch of the author of *The Polish Peasant*, is characterised by a careful and thoughtful construction of the individual parts of the text, which successively present his childhood, youth and travelling years, the period spent in the USA, his return to Poland and the inter-war period, the post-war years, his views on social issues, his political views and Znaniecki's ideas against the background of European thought. As the authoress points out, we know little about Znaniecki's childhood and early youth. Nevertheless, the views of the future scholar were greatly influenced by his aristocratic background (which he would emphasise in his works) and his emphasis on language learning. Travel, largely a consequence of Znaniecki's expulsion from the University of Warsaw, will also be important. The sociological career of the author of *The Fall of Western Civilisation* began with the beginning of his collaboration with William I. Thomas and an expedition overseas, where in Chicago, then the strongest centre of empirical sociological research, he prepared a work on the life of Polish immigrants in the USA. On his return to independent Poland and throughout the inter-war period, he worked to consolidate his position as a world-class scholar and to develop sociology in Poland. With the outbreak of war, Znaniecki decided to return to the United States. As Citkowska-Kimla points out, "there was no time to wait for Znaniecki in post-war Poland. Suffice it to say that sociology was abolished as a scientific discipline a few years after the end of the war" [p. X]. So, he continued his research outside the country until his death in 1958.

In analysing Znaniecki's social views, the authoress stresses that he feared ochlocracy and therefore saw representatives of the elite as the cultural leaders of the

nation. As a representative of the Polish intelligentsia, he also advocated opening up access for ordinary people to the circles of the “intellectual aristocracy”.

Trying to characterise Znaniecki’s political views is challenging for researchers because, as the authoress points out, “he did not express them verbally” [p. XII]. And further Citkowska-Kimla writes: They are to be sought, firstly, in his works between the lines (as in the case of *Social Forces in the Struggle for Pomerania*); secondly, to be inferred from the types of social contacts he chose; thirdly, to be guessed at, given the places he frequented or – fourthly – to be inferred from the activities he praised. Naturally, this is not a fully objective approach. It is fraught with the possibility of error. After all, Znaniecki could have made a given choice not based on his own judgement, but on a desire to please someone. Nevertheless, this is the only tool we have for reconstructing the views of the world-famous sociologist [p. XII]. Znaniecki advocated democracy with a leading intellectual role for the aristocracy, to which the social masses would voluntarily submit; he also stressed the need for a fair distribution of wealth and spiritual development. He criticised capitalism as well as Marxism and socialism. Instead, he advocated cooperation between the various social classes. As Citkowska-Kimla rightly points out, “in the figure of a world-renowned scholar like Florian Znaniecki, one is looking in vain for a political activist *sui generis*; he was a man with a specific social mission” [p. XIV].

The second part of the Introduction is strictly devoted to Znaniecki’s attitude to Bolshevism and Nazism. The author has chosen two publications to analyse this issue: *Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej. Szkic z pogranicza filozofii kultury i socjologii* [*The Fall of Western Civilisation. A Sketch from the Borderline of the Philosophy of Culture and Sociology*] (Poznań 1921) and *Sily społeczne w walce o Pomorze* [*Social Forces in the Struggle for Pomerania*] (Toruń 1931), because they correspond most closely to the issues addressed in this volume.

The first of these publications expressed the sociologist’s views on Bolshevism. With regard to the broader context of the work’s creation, it should be stressed that the main inspiration for Znaniecki was the experience of the crisis of contemporary culture. This period was marked by the atrocities of the First World War, the revolutions in Russia (of 1905 and 1917), the Polish-Bolshevik war, the process of massification of society and, relevant to the theme of this volume, the experience of authoritarianism. Znaniecki expressed his fear that Western civilisation was threatened with extinction, from which only a conscious and planned effort could save it.

Znaniecki’s reflections on Bolshevism are embedded in a broadly understood crisis of civilisation, in this case a geopolitical crisis. Among the manifestations of the crisis of civilisation identified by Znaniecki, the author lists the following “materialism, the rise of ochlocracy, secularisation, the decline of authority in society due to massification, hedonism, racism, nationalism, chauvinism, the massification of democracy, revolutions and communism” [p. XVIII]. The sociologist presents Bolshevism in a radical way. An analysis of Znaniecki’s work leads Citkowska-Kimla to conclude that “Bolshevism concentrates – in his view – all evil in a single lens”

[p. XVIII]. It includes ochlocracy, racial imperialism and materialism. Moreover, Znaniecki treats Bolshevism not as a doctrine but as a process. Bolshevism unleashes all the evil inherent in human nature. Pointing to the link between Bolshevism and culture, Znaniecki recognises that Bolshevism, by unleashing the “beast” in man, liberates him from the shackles of culture, but also makes humanity civilisational backward. Citkowska-Kimla’s reference to the research later carried out by Sigmund Freud, who shared Znaniecki’s view of the role of culture, makes it possible, on the one hand, to show the attraction of the Polish sociologist’s concept for other thinkers and, on the other, to place his work in the context of world thought. The author’s detailed description of the categories used by Znaniecki in his work deserves special mention. In this part of the introduction we learn how the sociologist understood the philosophy of culture, civilisation or decline. It is also worth noting how Znaniecki perceived the relationship between ochlocracy and democracy, how he defined racial imperialism, and nation and nationalism. Also relevant is the author’s comment that “the broad descriptor of Bolshevism serves in *The Fall* as a reference point for spinning his own vision of the social project” [p. XXIII]. This vision was developed in other publications by Znaniecki, including his book *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* [*People of the Present Versus Civilisation of the Future*] (Warszawa 1974), which resonated in Polish intellectual circles.

The second of the works analysed, *Sily społeczne w walce o Pomorze*, is a kind of warning against Nazism, although, as Citkowska-Kimla notes, Znaniecki does not mention it directly. The thesis was inspired by German claims to Poland’s western border. It examines the antagonism between the Polish and German sides from a historical and sociological perspective. A sociological analysis of the phenomena of state, people and nation is crucial, as is the definition of social forces. In the publication, Znaniecki analyses the thousand-year history of Polish-German relations. He points to the factors that determined the victory of the Germanic peoples, including the superior culture acquired from Rome and Christianity, and the constituted state system with forced unification. He points out that in every social group there are two opposing forces: the expansive and the exclusive, with the former always winning in conflicts. In Germany’s actions, Znaniecki saw a drive to seize the territory of Pomerania. In the inevitable conflict, the exclusive Polish forces will not be able to stand up to the expansionist German forces. As in the Middle Ages, Germany’s aim is the destruction of the Polish nation. It is worth noting that Znaniecki saw hope for a solution to this conflict in the involvement of the USA.

In conclusion, the publication under review is an example of a thoroughly prepared academic work. It is worth noting the clear division into two main parts, as well as the use of a similar arrangement of the content in the analyses of two works by Znaniecki (the circumstances of their creation, the main categories used by the author, the analysis of the content and the summaries). The clear division of the contents and the analyses carried out testify to the author’s great experience in carrying out scientific research and his excellent organisation. It is also noteworthy that it

addresses a largely unexplored issue, allowing us to see Znaniecki's work not only in terms of his contribution to the development of sociology, but also in terms of his valuable insights into political thought.