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Obituary: Jerzy Osiatyński (1941–2022)*

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Although, as he recalled years later, his mother: the poet Zinaida, wanted him to become a doctor, the young Jerzy Osiatyński (or rather Epaminondas Jerzy¹) was much more interested in social issues, especially those related to economics. Perhaps he was influenced by the fact that his father Leonidas ‘was an economist and was engaged in the theory of management and economics of foreign trade. For many years he not only taught but also actively worked in foreign trade’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 367).

Thus Jerzy Osiatyński – born on 2 November 1941 in Riga, Latvia,² where his parents had fled after the German invasion of Poland, but raised in Warsaw (graduated from Juliusz Słowacki Secondary School in Warsaw) – began studying at the Faculty of Foreign Trade at the Main School of Planning and Statistics (Szkoła Główna Planowania i Statystyki, SGPiS). He earned his post-graduate degree in 1964 with the defence of his master’s thesis entitled *Porównanie roli ekspansji eksportowej w wysoko rozwiniętej gospodarce kapitalistycznej i w gospodarce socjalistycznej* (Comparison of the role of export expansion in a highly developed capitalist economy and in a socialist economy) (Osiatyński 1964), written under the supervision of Professor Kazimierz Łaski, the head of the Department of Political Economy at this faculty.³ Interestingly, during and shortly after Jerzy Osiatyński’s studies, his father also obtained his doctorate (Osiatyński 1962) and post-doctoral degree (*habilitacja*) (Osiatyński 1965) at the same institution.

Earlier, in 1963, when Osiatyński was in his fourth year of studies, Łaski offered him the position of assistant at his department. As an assistant, and soon as a doctoral student, he also began to teach. As Toporowski (2022: 4) notes, Osiatyński ‘is remembered as a charismatic teacher who made himself available to students and was willing to explain, instead of just repeating dogmas’. That same year, 1963, Jerzy Osiatyński also joined the Polish United Workers’ Party, from which he was expelled in 1967 for criticizing the antisemitic campaign that was just beginning in the country.

* This text is an expanded and amended version of an obituary published (in Polish) in the *Bulletin of the Polish Economic Society* (Konat 2022). Most of the information comes from the interview given to me by Jerzy Osiatyński in September 2015 (Konat/Smuga 2016), which also appeared – in an abridged and amended version – in *EJEEP* in 2021 (Konat 2021). In writing the obituary, in addition to the works referenced therein, I used numerous internet sources, including Osiatyński’s resume on the PKO BP bank’s website and his biography on the website of the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences. I also used the information provided by Professor Jan Toporowski and what I remember from my own conversations with Jerzy Osiatyński.

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1. As Toporowski (2022: 3) explains, ‘The family were classicists and named their son Epaminondas Jerzy, after the ancient Greek general and statesman of Thebes’.
2. Annexed by the USSR in August 1940 and occupied by the Third Reich from July 1941.
3. For more on Łaski, see the special issue of *European Journal of Economics and Economic Policies: Intervention* devoted to his economics (3(16)/2019), including Osiatyński’s extensive article on Łaski’s take on relevance of Kaleckian treatment of money under financial capitalism (Osiatyński 2019), as well as my interview with Łaski (Konat 2019).

In 1965, also on Łaski's recommendation, Osiatyński became the scientific secretary of a seminar led by Michał Kalecki on issues of planning and growth in a centrally planned economy.⁴ In addition to Kalecki and Łaski, active participants in the seminar included such leading Polish economists of the time as Włodzimierz Brus, Tadeusz Kowalik, Cezary Józefiak, Władysław Sadowski, Wiktor Herer, Leszek Zienkowski, Stanisław Gomułka, Edward Łukawer, Mieczysław Nasiłowski and Henryk Flakierski. Participation in it was for Jerzy Osiatyński, as he recalled years later, an entry into 'a real "big leagues" in economics' (*prawdziwa 'wyższa szkoła jazdy' w uprawianiu ekonomii*) (Konat/Smuga 2016: 368). Indeed, in this way Osiatyński became 'a member of an elite institution where there was a climate of open scientific and didactic discussion that was unparalleled throughout the country; an institution that enjoyed a high international reputation and was referred to as "the Polish Cambridge"' (Sulejewicz 2022: 142).

Above all, however, this was the beginning of Osiatyński's intellectual adventure – which was to last until the end of his life – with the thoughts of Michał Kalecki, 'the master and mentor', as he called him (Konat/Smuga 2016: 370). Years later, Osiatyński recalled:

Clearly, my intellectual mentor was Kalecki whom I was lucky to meet and work with. Prior to Kalecki there had been Łaski, who taught me first political economy, and next how to read and understand Kalecki. I had been friends with Łaski since the late 1960s and we worked closely together until the last days of his life.⁵ For both of us Kalecki was the most important reference point in our work and we both thought he was one of the world's most original economists of the twentieth century and beyond it ... (Konat 2021: 3).

Łaski also supervised Jerzy Osiatyński's doctoral dissertation titled *Korzyści komparatywne w analizie czynników wzrostu gospodarki socjalistycznej* (Comparative advantages in the analysis of growth factors of the socialist economy) (Osiatyński 1968). The work, already completed in 1967, was positively evaluated at the end of the same year. Unfortunately, before Osiatyński could defend his dissertation, the shameful events of March 1968 occurred (at SGPiS, they culminated in May and June). As explained by Jan Toporowski:

In the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967, the government tried to redirect criticism towards internal enemies who sympathised with the Israeli defeat of Poland's Arab allies. ... Public institutions started drawing up lists of Jewish staff who were to be sacked and expelled from the country. ... A particular target after March 1968 were student and academic protestors who were accused of abusing their privileges in a workers' state by criticising that state while living off the labour of 'ordinary working people'. Kalecki's circle at SGPiS were a particular target not only because some of them, like Osiatyński, Łaski and Kalecki himself, were of Jewish origin, but also because they associated themselves with Kalecki's criticisms of economic planning in which excessive investment resulted in shortages of food and basic consumer goods (Toporowski 2022: 4).

Consequently, Kazimierz Łaski had to leave the country, Michał Kalecki resigned from SGPiS and the dissertation of their assistant Osiatyński was officially rejected. As a result,

4. Its official name was the Intercollegiate Seminar for Economic Development Planning of Backward Countries. Sulejewicz (2022: 141–142) explains that, 'It was organizationally linked to the Intercollegiate Problem Department for the Economy of the Underdeveloped Countries and became a university unit of SGPiS. The third research and teaching unit [under Kalecki's leadership] was the Higher Course in Economic Planning, established in 1962 and aimed at economists, planners, and economic activists from developing countries. The seminar, department, and course were informally a single institute'.

5. In what was probably the last interview he gave, Łaski refers to Osiatyński as 'my great friend' (Konat 2019: 300).

Osiatyński was unemployed for several months and then worked briefly at the Central Statistical Office in 1969. However, the young Polish economist was given the opportunity to continue his academic work as a visiting fellow at Clare Hall, one of the colleges of Cambridge University. He spent two years there (1970–1972), largely thanks to the recommendation of Michał Kalecki, who had introduced his assistant to Joan Robinson in 1966. As many years later – with a little bitterness, but also with humour – Jerzy Osiatyński recalled in a private conversation: ‘It turned out that I wasn’t good enough for SGPiS, but quite good enough for Cambridge’.

He returned from the United Kingdom at the end of 1972 and was soon employed at the Institute for the History of Science, Education, and Technology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in the research group, under the direction of Tadeusz Kowalik,⁶ tasked with editing the works of Oskar Lange and Michał Kalecki, and was entrusted with the task of preparing an edition of Kalecki’s collected works.

In this way, Jerzy Osiatyński began to work on what was undoubtedly his most important scientific achievement: a work that took him almost a quarter of a century, the edition of Michał Kalecki’s *Dziela* (*Works*) in Polish (planned for five volumes, but eventually published as six volumes) (Osiatyński 1979–1988) and of his *Collected Works* (eventually in seven volumes) in English (Osiatyński 1990–1997).⁷ Their editor proudly recalled that, thanks to the fact that he had persuaded Oxford University Press to undertake this venture, ‘Kalecki is one of only two Polish scholars—along with the mathematician Stefan Banach—whose entire works (apart from a handful of contributions) have been published in English’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 369). He also admitted that Kowalik helped him a lot in this work (‘I owe him a lot, both in terms of the research workshop and the final text of my editorial notes to the *Works*’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 371)). Moreover, as their readers attest, these editorial notes⁸ are an outstanding and massive scientific work in themselves (of the approximately 3,500 pages of the Polish edition of *Works*, Osiatyński’s contribution alone was about 1,050 pages).

However, before working on Kalecki’s achievements took shape in the form of publications, Jerzy Osiatyński had completed his doctorate in 1973 (‘I thoroughly revised and supplemented my old dissertation, and Professor Henryk Fiszel agreed to take over the supervision of this new thesis’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 371)) at the Institute of Economics of the University of Warsaw. In 1979 he obtained his post-doctoral degree at the same institution (which had already regained the status of Faculty of Economics in 1977) with the book *Kapitał, podział, wartość: kryzys ekonomii neomarginalistycznej* (*Capital, Income Distribution, and Value: The Crisis of Neomarginalist Economics*) (Osiatyński 1978), most of which he had written while still at Cambridge. As Sulejewicz (2022: 143) rightly notes, this ‘... skillful critical combination of the Neo-Ricardian critique of neoclassical theory ... with the deeper methodological and social thought of M. Kalecki and K. Marx ... is still an outstanding contribution of the Polish economist to the worldwide theoretical debate in economics’.

In the same period, the 1970s, Jerzy Osiatyński was also very active in another field: as a translator. At that time, thanks to his work, Polish readers could get acquainted with,

6. With whom Osiatyński got along particularly well when they were together at Cambridge, where Kowalik – like Osiatyński, thanks to the recommendation of Joan Robinson – spent a year.

7. As explained by Toporowski (2022: 6), ‘This edition [in English] was now in seven volumes, as the previous final volume of assorted Studies in Applied Economics was split into two volumes, placing Kalecki’s pre-War commentaries and articles into a separate volume’.

8. Based on Osiatyński’s ‘extensive researches in archives in Poland and at the United Nations’ (Toporowski 2022: 5).

among others, W.E.G. Salter's *Productivity and Technical Change* (1960 [1971]), Joan Robinson's *Economic Heresies* (1971 [1973]) as well as two books by J.R. Hicks: *Value and Capital* (1946 [1975]) and *Capital and Growth* (1965 [1978]).

Employment in the research group (later elevated to a department) charged with editing the works of Lange and Kalecki had yet another far-reaching consequence for Jerzy Osiatyński's life: it was the atmosphere of this institution that, as he recalled, 'in a sense became an organizational foundation of the Workers' Defense Committee⁹ after its establishment in September 1976' (Konat/Smuga 2016: 368–369). For the first time, Osiatyński became involved in the activities of the anti-communist opposition, with which he fully united in 1980, after the outbreak of the Solidarność revolution. Interestingly, for most of the decade of the 1980s, Osiatyński linked this activity with attempts to reform the centrally planned economy in the sense of expanding the scope and powers of workers' self-management (see, for example, Osiatyński et al. 1985). Thus, from 1981–1989, he was a member of the Government Commission for Economic Reform and from 1981–1988 a member of the Scientific Council under the President of the National Bank of Poland.

However, it was his opposition work that led Jerzy Osiatyński to the highest offices of state, though of course only after 1989. After the 4 June 1989 elections, he became a deputy through the Solidarność Civic Committee¹⁰ and minister-head of the Central Planning Office in the first non-communist government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1989–1991). In 1992–1993, Osiatyński became Minister of Finance in the government of Hanna Suchocka. In 1993, he was awarded the prize for the best finance minister in Central and Eastern Europe for this activity, and the prime minister herself wrote to him in a congratulatory letter in April 1993: 'It is with great pleasure that I would like to emphasize that your consistency in action and the ability to argue your case effectively – even in the most difficult situations – is the strength of our government' (quoted in: Konat/Smuga 2016: 386).

Although this period was rich in political events and undoubtedly important personally for Jerzy Osiatyński ('[It] offered me a unique opportunity to work closely and make friends with many outstanding Polish politicians ... Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik among them' (Konat 2021: 2)), the late 1980s proved fruitful for him academically as well. In 1988, the last volume of the Polish edition of Kalecki's *Works* appeared, as well as an important book by Osiatyński: *Michał Kalecki o gospodarce socjalistycznej (Michał Kalecki on a Socialist Economy)* (Osiatyński 1988a), which was translated into English (Osiatyński 1988b)¹¹ and Japanese (Osiatyński 1990).¹² Furthermore, in 1990, not only was the first volume of Kalecki's *Collected Works* published, but Osiatyński also received the title of Professor of Economics in Poland and an honorary degree (Doctor of Laws) from Baruch College of the City University of New York.¹³ Also in 1990, Jerzy

9. The Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR) was a Polish democratic opposition group formed after the June 1976 protests to help political prisoners and their families.

10. He held his mandate until 2001 in the Sejm of the 10th, 1st, 2nd and 3rd term, belonging to the Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union) and Unia Wolności (Freedom Union) clubs.

11. With a preface by Włodzimierz Brus, another famous revisionist Polish economist from Łaski's generation who eventually ended up at the University of Oxford.

12. Under a slightly different title, which can be translated into English as 'Economic Theory of Polish Reform: Kalecki's Model of Socialism'.

13. Among his subsequent numerous international scientific contacts, research stays at the University of Oxford and at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex are particularly noteworthy.

Osiatyński became a member of the newly created Program Committee of the scientific journal *Gospodarka Narodowa*.¹⁴

The second half of the 1990s and the first of 2000s were a period of intensive advisory activity of Osiatyński. During this period, at the invitation of the World Bank, UNIDO, USAID and private foundations, he advised the authorities of Moldova, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on issues of fiscal policy, tax system and structural transformation. In 2003–2005, he was an advisor to UNDP on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Earlier, in 2001, he decided not to run in the next parliamentary elections and to end what he called his ‘involvement in “big politics”’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 369) in order to devote himself intensively to science again.

However, Jerzy Osiatyński did not completely succeed in detaching himself from extra-scientific activities. Over the next two decades, he became, among other things, a member of the Council for Social and Economic Strategy under the Prime Minister (2001–2006), Economic Advisor to the President of the Republic of Poland (2010–2013) and a member of the Monetary Policy Council (2013–2019). In 2002–2007, Osiatyński was also a member of the Supervisory Board of the largest Polish bank: PKO BP.

Nevertheless, during this period, he significantly expanded his scientific activities, not only in formal terms (for example, he was a member of the Committee on Economic Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2007–2010 and then again from 2020), but mainly in terms of content: publishing, editing and participating in numerous initiatives, including international ones. In September 2019, he was involved in the organization of a conference titled *Michał Kalecki and the problem of international equilibrium* held at the OECD in Paris, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Bretton Woods Conference.

In all this, he was very consistent in the choice of the subject of his research and in the way he carried it out. As he stated in 2015, his publications always

... relate to Kalecki and are embedded in a current called post-Keynesian economics or structural Keynesianism. They concern the interpretation of the fundamental problems related to the dynamics of the capitalist economy and its long-term, rather stagnant tendencies, and the relationship between these stagnant trends and changes in the structure of income distribution. They also concern macroeconomic relationships, which, in the tradition of Kalecki’s economics, are related to the question of the basis on which private entrepreneurs make decisions about investment and households make decisions about saving (Konat/Smuga 2016: 371).

As a representative of ‘post-Kaleckian and post-Keynesian thought’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 373), as he described himself, Jerzy Osiatyński was a critic of mainstream economics (including neo-Keynesianism and New Keynesianism, which in his view have ‘little in common with Keynes’ (Konat 2021: 5). He pointed to the ‘absurdly unrealistic assumptions on which this [mainstream] analysis is based’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 380) and argued that ‘the more superficially it is understood, the more fervently it is advocated’ (Konat/Smuga 2016: 379). As an advocate of pluralism in economics, he stressed the fundamental importance of teaching ‘the body of alternative theories, their assumptions and conclusions’ (Konat 2021: 6). He also sought to promote this pluralism through his active participation in numerous conferences and seminars, whether at the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences (where he was hired in 2004 and chaired the Scientific

14. He remained so until 2020, when the reform of the journal (under the new name: *Gospodarka Narodowa. The Polish Journal of Economics*) made him a member of the Editorial Board after the dissolution of the Program Committee. For more on this, see Konat/Jarosz-Nojszewska (2021).

Council for many years) or at the Polish Economic Society, of which he was a member and has been a member of the Scientific Council since 2005.

In addition to his own original macroeconomic research in the post-Kaleckian tradition (see, for example, Osiatyński 2015b, 2020, 2021, 2022), Jerzy Osiatyński also worked tirelessly to preserve and promote the legacy of Michał Kalecki and, especially after his death in 2015, of Kazimierz Łaski. Thus, among other things, he wrote the scholarly biography of Kalecki (Osiatyński 2015a) for the new edition of the selection of Kalecki's most important works on capitalist economy, prepared jointly with Łaski: *Michał Kalecki: Kapitalizm: dynamika gospodarcza i pełne zatrudnienie. Wybór tekstów [Michał Kalecki's Selected Essays On Economic Dynamics and Full Employment]* (Łaski/Osiatyński 2015a); he scientifically edited and wrote a preface to Łaski's textbook: *Wykłady z makroekonomii. Gospodarka kapitalistyczna bez bezrobocia [Lectures in Macroeconomics: A Capitalist Economy Without Unemployment]* (Łaski/Osiatyński 2015b)¹⁵ and reconstructed the development of Kalecki's stagnation hypothesis from 1954–1980 in the chapter of the monograph on the current state of the theory of monopoly capital (Osiatyński 2018).

Jerzy Osiatyński tried to spread the ideas of his masters among students as well. For many years he lectured at the Bielsko-Biała School of Banking and Finance (now: Bielsko-Biała School of Finance and Law), and in 2013, together with Kazimierz Łaski, he led a semester seminar on Kalecki's economics at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Warsaw. He was also a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Edward Lipiński Foundation, which has worked hard in Poland to promote the ideas of Kalecki and Keynes. Earlier, in the mid-2000s, he wrote an academic textbook on public finance (Osiatyński 2005).

One of the last projects, as it turned out, Jerzy Osiatyński devoted to was editing the OECD conference volume with Jan Toporowski and preparing for publication the conversation between two of his close friends: an interview Tadeusz Kowalik conducted with Kazimierz Łaski in 2007. Together with the author of this obituary, Osiatyński had been working intensively on this text since March 2021. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the final round of corrections: he died after a serious illness on 4 February 2022.

In one of the numerous memoirs and obituaries that appeared after Jerzy Osiatyński's death, his scientific and intellectual biography was summarized in the following, extremely apt way:

A young member of the Polish United Workers' Party, expelled from it after a few years for "revisionism;" merely tolerated [by the authorities] in the years of declining real socialism; an ambitious scientist who propagated the "bourgeois" economics of Hicks and Keynes, but felt most comfortable in the "post-Keynesianism" of Kalecki and Robinson; open to workers' self-management in the decaying centrally planned economy, but warned against it after the electoral success of the "Solidarity" trade union [1989]; maintaining social sensitivity while respecting the realities of world capitalism in the "roaring 1990s," he kept rare theoretical coherence and political honesty in his views on the fundamentals of economic policy at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. He combined positive and normative economics with art against the positivist canon of their practice. The incredibly active scientific life of Jerzy Osiatyński in a field for which we sometimes accept the term "dismal science" gives rise to the statement that in a difficult social environment he earned the position of a sovereign political economist (Sulejewicz 2022: 149).

Both Polish and world economics have lost one of their most outstanding representatives.

15. Also – with Jan Toporowski – in the 2019 English edition (Osiatyński/Toporowski 2019). Sulejewicz (2022: 147) rightly calls this book 'the first Polish textbook to post-Keynesian macroeconomics'.

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