

Wiesław Jamrożek, *Kongresy i zjazdy pedagogiczne w rozwoju polskiej myśli i praktyki edukacyjnej (do 1939 roku)*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2015

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In the year of the 110th anniversary of the Polish Teachers' Union, an important and useful publication concerning the activity of pedagogical congresses in Poland during the period of national captivity and in independent Poland during the interwar period appeared on the book market. The congresses are usually convened by pedagogical societies and teaching organizations and usually constitute an evaluation of the actions taken to date, they are the culmination of the educational ideas and postulates of the broadly understood teaching community, and at the same time, they are a synthesis and an important source of information arising at a given time and appearing in specific social and political conditions, philosophical and pedagogical trends, which constitute a creative inspiration for taking new initiatives in the field of education and didactic work. Hence their high rank and significance in pedagogical life, theory and practice. The aspiration to restore these ideas, to save from oblivion event often covered by the patina of time and the rapid stream of current events, and in fact its very current and necessary purpose most likely led to them being undertaken in a reviewed publication. The author of this book is Wiesław Jamrożek, a well-known and respected Poznań historian of upbringing. The author begins his deliberations with a review of major positions in the literature of the subject, thus providing a solid basis for further analysis of the issues discussed. The whole work is divided into two chapters with six subsections each. The first chapter shows the participation of the Galician congresses in the evolution of Polish pedagogical thought in the last quarter of a century before the Great World War, which erupted in the second decade of the twentieth century, while the second chapter shows the ideological and programmatic achievements of the great pedagogical debates in interwar-period Poland.

In the part of the book devoted to the pedagogical congresses during the partitions, Professor Jamrożek rightly analyses primarily the basic educational problem of the period when the Polish state did not exist and it was necessary not only to maintain but also to develop the essence of the spirit of Polishness – the idea of national upbringing. Therefore, the author rightly emphasizes that the implementation of this educational concept in Galicia was expressed in the aspiration to even greater saturation of the teaching process with national education. He points out that this issue was present at the pedagogical congresses in Lviv in 1894 and 1909, as well as the fact that it appeared with much greater force at the latter.

In the opinion of Wiesław Jamrożek, another important issue discussed during these meetings of Polish teachers and educational people was the issue of women's education – a very important problem at that time. He quotes a number of statements made by participants of the Galician congresses during the discussion on equality of women in access to higher forms of education, especially post-secondary studies. Of particular importance here is the mention of Kazimiera Bujwidowa's speech in 1894.

The author devotes a lot of attention, and rightly so, to the issues of functioning and organization of open and secondary education, as well as school hygiene, discussed during the congresses. The exchange of ideas and concepts which took place then, especially at the second congress, had the hallmarks of a discussion not only regional – Galician – but also prospective, expressing concern for keeping pace with global trends and for reforming secondary schools (Tadeusz Łopuszański). Jamrożek also stresses, for which he deserves special recognition, that the Galician congresses considered the issue of caring for children and young people. This fact, in the reality of the time, when children’s legislation or family legislation was just taking the first steps in Europe, and the care and education system on Polish soil was far removed from the existing needs, should be considered as highly innovative, equal to the concepts of the most advanced Western European countries in this respect. The same can be said of the values of Aniela Szycówna’s paper on modern didactics, presented during the second congress, which was uncovered by the author of the reviewed book. As Jamrożek writes, the content of the paper promoted the idea of “giving contemporary didactics, as well as all of pedagogy, the shape of an empirical and experimental science” (p. 60, 61) – one that was innovative and far ahead of its time.

The second part of the publication is a reflection on the ideas and achievements of congresses and pedagogical conventions in the reborn, free Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. The author represents the political, social and educational contexts of the great pedagogical meetings held in the Second Republic of Poland. This applies in particular to the National Educational Congress in Warsaw on 14-17 April 1919, the informal Teachers’ Sejm, preceded by general educational conventions in Krakow (twice), Piotrków and Warsaw, operating during the period of reconstruction and unification of the Polish state and the establishment of its borders. He lists in detail the basic topics of the debates and outlines the hopes connected with this great event in the Polish educational community. He stresses the importance of the founding of the Association of Primary School Teachers for the teaching movement. He also describes in detail the preparations for subsequent pedagogical congresses in Poznań, Vilnius, Lviv and Warsaw. He accurately defines their goals, tasks and significance for pedagogical theory and practice. At the first three, the influence of the ideology of state education was becoming more and more evident. In turn, the Warsaw Congress in 1939, as Professor Jamrożek rightly points out, referred to the resolutions of the Teacher’s Sejm, and also took up, among other things, the issues of child care. This issue had previously been expressed in its entirety at the First National Children’s Congress. As the author emphasizes, it included such important issues as the fight for the rights of the child and the creation of a modern system of child care.

In the next part of the book the author clearly and transparently analyses the issues of the system and organization of education undertaken at conventions and congresses. He pays particular attention to the debates of the Teacher’s Sejm, in which quite diverse concepts of building the school system and the issue of the school’s religion were discussed. He tries to present different views and positions presented on these issues, which are not easy to solve and arouse many emotions. In turn, the Congress in Poznań highlighted the issue of co-education. The Vilnius congress, on the other hand, returned to the question of the system of schooling and its organization. There was a demand for education and stu-

dent accommodation to be free of charge. The pedagogical congress in Lviv, which took place in 1932, dealt with the most topical issue at the time – school reform and new curricula with state education and the slogan of the “century of the child” in the background. Jamrożek presents the achievements of the Warsaw pedagogical congress in a multifaceted manner, considering the criticism of the current school system and numerous demands for repair and reform. He argues that “the issues of school organization and system were [...] included in the final resolutions of the Fourth Pedagogical Congress, which in many contents were characterized by clear social radicalism” (p. 112).

After these analyses, he also accurately places the basic problem of each school system, the provision of appropriately highly qualified teaching staff. This issue, which is so controversial and causes various positions of authorities in the field of teacher education, has been widely and interestingly constructed and reflected in the reviewed book. Positions of the most competent experts are presented. Among them, in my opinion, the views of Henryk Rowid, Władysław Rowid and Juliusz Kleiner are the most noteworthy. Of course, there is a long way to go from postulates to realisation, especially in the case of Rowid’s concept.

Also noteworthy is the analysis of the issues of educational and civic teleology undertaken at the congresses. By juxtaposing different views on this issue, the author gives an interesting overview, which allows the reader to form an opinion on the main educational assumptions of the interwar period. It also brings out the little-known themes and figures of deserving pedagogues dealing with pre-school education and child care (during the period of the Polish People’s Republic). I have in mind here Sister Barbara Żulińska, modest in her greatness.

At the end of his work, Professor Wiesław Jamrożek writes: “Analysing the content and results of congresses and pedagogical meetings in the Second Republic of Poland, it is worth noting the timeless issues, values and ideas they contain. These certainly include the democratic social content of the school, the role of primary school in the educational system, the conditions for completing compulsory education, the availability of different levels and forms of education, the idea of civic education, education based on recognition of individuality, the needs and activities of children in the process of education and upbringing [...]” (p.182,183). It is difficult not to agree with this accurate and objective assessment.

It is a good thing that the author presented the achievements of these congresses and conventions to the reader. The publication is characterized by clarity of the formulated thoughts and structural cohesion. The language is communicative and precise. The book should become mandatory reading for pedagogical students and teachers, as well as for a wide range of other layers of intelligentsia. The educational issues addressed here go beyond the educational environment and in many respects are still relevant today.

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