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PROFESSOR ZLATKO VAJDA AN EXPERT, A SCIENTIST AND A VISIONARY INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The period after the Second World War was marked by an increased awareness of and keen enthusiasm for the progress of material and social good. Highly educated people of that time advocated the belief that overall progress was closely dependent on scientific development. Following this concept, decisions were made to establish scientific research centers and institutions for different scientific professions. In the beginning, these were so-called Position Groups within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

One of the biggest problems of that time was shortage of trained professional staff. Nevertheless, leaders of position groups were selected among renowned experts.

One such renowned expert, scientist and part time lecturer of Forest Protection at the Agricultural-Forestry Faculty in Zagreb was Zlatko Vajda, a doctor of science and a forestry engineer. He was a person capable of managing and promoting scientific and specialist forestry activities. On 31 December 1945 he was appointed leader of a position group in the Department of Practical Forest Research within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Zagreb. He remained in this position for two years. At that time the Department was a hotbed of research nuclei and eventually evolved into the Forest Institute in Jastrebarsko. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Forest Institute in Jastrebarsko in November 2005, Dr Zlatko Vajda, the first scientific director of the Institute, received special tribute for his expert, scientific and human work.

Biography

Zlatko Vajda was born on 16 November 1901 in Čajkovci near Đakovo. After graduating from Osijek Grammar School in 1920, he joined the Agricultural – Forestry Faculty in Zagreb and obtained his degree in forestry in 1924. The following year (1925) he started working in the Taxation Service of Forest Directorate in Zagreb. He then moved to Ogulin, where he worked in the Ogulin municipality income office from 1926 to 1927. During this period he passed a state

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exam in forest enterprise management. From 1928 to 1940 he worked as a director of Ogulin State Forest Administration. From 1941 to 1945 he worked in the Taxation Service of the Forest Department of Ban Administration. He became a part time lecturer at the Agricultural-Forestry Faculty in Zagreb in 1945. Apart from teaching, between 1946 and 1947 he also worked in the Fifth Position Group in the Department of Practical Forest Research in Zagreb – the forerunner of the present Forest Research Institute, Jastrebarsko.

In 1932, he defended his dissertation "A Study of Natural Distribution and Growth of Spruce in Gorski Kotar", written during his work in Ogulin, and earned the title of Doctor of Forestry Sciences at the University of Zagreb. His scientific rise followed. In 1945, he was appointed to the post of part time lecturer in the course Forest Protection at the Agricultural-Forestry Faculty in Zagreb. He habilitated in 1947 at the same faculty and worked as Assistant Professor from 1948 to 1952, when he became Associate Professor. He was appointed Full Professor in 1955 and worked in this capacity at the Faculty of Forestry of Zagreb University until his retirement in 1972.

Professor Zlatko Vajda died in Zagreb in 1987 and was buried at Mirogoj Cemetery, where he lies in eternal peace.

Teaching Career

Professor Zlatko Vajda began his teaching career in 1945, when he was appointed part time lecturer in the course Forest Protection at the Agricultural-Forestry Faculty in Zagreb. He devoted his working career to developing forest protection. He became a highly renowned specialist in several fields. He soon perceived a connection between silviculture and forest protection and often presented these two fields as an integral whole. He lectured the course in Forest Protection for 56 semesters until he retired in 1972. During this period he gave a great contribution to the development of forest protection and educated a number of experts and scientist in this field. In addition to his prime field, he taught the following courses at the Faculty of Forestry in Zagreb:

Forest Administration from 1945 to 1949

Game Management from 1947 to 1949

Meteorology and Climatology from 1952 to 1953

Silviculture with Forest Protection from 1953 to 1958

Basics of Forestry from 1958 to 1972.

He taught the last two courses to the students of the Department of Wood Industry (Technology). Between 1953 and 1958 Professor Vajda taught a course in Silviculture with Forest Protection.

As seen from the above, Professor Vajda taught a total of 6 courses in the full time graduate study program.

In the 1960s, Professor Vajda was one of a group of professors who organized postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Forestry in Zagreb, where he lectured a

course in Forest Protection. He continued to teach this course even after he retired.

Professional and Teaching Activity

Professor Zlatko Vajda worked in the forest operative in Ogulin for twenty-two years. His work in Ogulin, especially in the field of silviculture, provided him with invaluable insights into the principles of silviculture and the complexity of forest communities. His knowledge and experience were fully utilized in his future specialist and scientific work. During his work of many years in the forest operative he was not only a practicing forester but also a very active scientist. He published a large number of specialist and scientific papers. Along with his activities in the operative, he also did research on the spruce. He presented his research results in the dissertation "A Study on the Natural Distribution and Growth of Spruce in Gorski Kotar", which he defended in 1932. He was one of the very few doctors of science who obtained their degree from working in the operative, a rare achievement also today. One year later the dissertation was published in the magazine Forestry Journal.

Professor Vajda published over 150 articles (Prpić). Much of his written work filled up the pages of Forest Encyclopedia. His most notable work is a book "Science of Forest Protection", published in 1974. Other noteworthy publications include extensive volumes of Silviculture (Forest Handbook I, 1946), Forest Protection (Forest Handbook II, 1946), and the last book Integral Forest Protection (1983). Most of his published works advocate a close connection between silviculture and forest protection, because he viewed these two units as an integral whole. He published his papers in several principal publishing sites. He reviewed a number of scientific and specialist papers as well as books by Croatian and foreign authors.

His work "Mission of the Department of Forest Research", published in 1944 draws particular attention.

With reference to Professor Vajda's published scientific and specialist articles, several facts should be pointed out. He devoted years of work to studying and investigating the causes of mass dieback of some tree species and forests. He explained the causes of beech dieback on Mount Učka. He studied climate changes and the reflection of these changes on forest mortality. He was among the first to realize that climate was becoming warmer and that this had a severe effect on forests. At that time, this was an innovative concept, which was proven true in the decades to come.

As a true visionary, he was fully aware of the danger of forest fires and wrote a number of important articles on the matter. He published several works on the health status of plants in forest nurseries. Towards the end of his creative career, he presented his findings in the book "Integral Forest Protection", published in 1983.

The originality of Professor Vajda's extensive work earned him a reputation both in Croatia and abroad. He introduced new principles in the field of forest

protection. His simple and experience-based practical solutions are still widely used. He is cited in dissertations, master's theses, books, scientific and specialist articles and graduate papers.

As a university professor, Zlatko Vajda was a mentor and member of the examining board responsible for doctoral and master's theses (after all, he was an active participant in the organization of postgraduate studies). We are proud to say that he was a board member when our renowned academicians Dušan Klepac and Mirko Vidaković defended their doctoral dissertations. He was known to ask doctoral candidates as many as 10 questions requiring elaborate answers.

Working duties, memberships and recognitions

After passing his state specialist exam while he was in Ogulin, Dr Zlatko Vajda became the principal of Ogulin State Forest Administration (1928 – 1940).

From 1945 to 1972, he was Head of the Department of Forest Protection at the Faculty of Forestry, from 1954 to 1955 he was Dean and from 1955 to 1956 he was Vice Dean and Council President.

From 1949 he was an external cooperator of JAZU - Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU – Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts). He was a member of the Forestry Association, cooperator in Forestry Journal, external cooperator of the Institute of Atmospheric Physics and Cosmic Physics, and external cooperator of scientific forestry institutions and other organizations.

From 1946 to 1947 he was in charge of the Fifth Position Group in the Department of Practical Forest Research in Zagreb, the present Forest Research Institute Jastrebarsko.

For his exceptional work Professor Zlatko Vajda was awarded the Order of Labour in 1965. In 1975, he received the Republic's Life Achievement Award. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Forestry Journal and the 130th anniversary of the Forestry Association (1976) he was awarded the Charter Gold Medal. On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of forestry education, the Faculty of Forestry in Zagreb awarded him with a diploma.

Professor Vajda was a recipient of numerous other awards and recognitions, but his modesty prevented him from exhibiting them.

CONCLUSION

After spending twenty-two years working in the forest operative, Professor Zlatko Vajda, PhD became an exceptionally capable scientist. In Professor B. Prpić's words, he was a modest and hard working scientist who found great enjoyment in teaching and writing articles. He was an outstanding example of an operative expert who gave a great contribution to the science of forestry and academic education.

Professor Vajda was definitely a forester with a broad outlook on the profession. He pointed to various aspects of home and foreign forestry. His work focused on forest tree species, silviculture and forest management, as well as the effects of forests on the environment and human health. He deserves particular recognition for his contribution to forest protection.

A highly renowned expert, he managed an institution (1946 – 1947) that later evolved into the present Forest Research Institute Jastrebarsko. He had a noble, modest, discreet and exceptionally likeable personality.

On this festive occasion, it gives me great pride and pleasure to re-live the memory of Professor Vajda's warm personality, achievements and exceptional contribution to the profession.

Scientists and personalities like Professor Vajda will always be revered and looked up to by generations to come.

