

Józef Weysenhoff – politician, lawyer, legislator of the Enlightenment times

Summary

Józef Weysenhoff (1760-1798) – one of the youngest members of the Four-Year Sejm, considered a great Sejm speaker, and at the same time sitting and actively working in many important Sejm committees (including the committees for a new form of government, assemblies, codification and constitutional committees). He was a sort of an expert appointed *ad hoc* to review Sejm projects, to correct them and to resolve doubts of the Sejm Members at plenary sessions. As a co-decision maker of the Reformist camp and later one of the emigration leaders after the fall of the Great Sejm, he was trusted not only by the enlightened elites of the nobility, but also by the townsmen. He acted as a person actually linking different classes due to his involvement in the Sejm in urban affairs, but also as a candidate for the post of the first president of Warsaw. He was an educated lawyer and at the same time a practicing lawyer who gained legislative experience during work for the Sejm committees. Combining the function of a politician and an actual legislator was quite difficult as it very often required compromises. Weysenhoff's life is an example of social advancement owing to qualities of mind and comprehensive education, to the elite of the then-Republic of Poland, possible in the Age of Enlightenment. Due to a limited choice of Sejm Members with high intellectual skills and new ideas from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in order to balance the “advantage” of the better educated Members representing the Crown, Józef Weysenhoff was insisted on by the Lithuanian side as the most useful person in the public sphere. From a Member of Sejm representing a small area of the Republic of Poland, which Livonia was at that time, he became a significant figure in the public life. Considered a prominent representative of the Polish Enlightenment, Weysenhoff was presented against the background of the epoch, company, systemic and legal reforms, legislative processes, and the situation of the Republic of Poland after the fall of the Great Sejm work. From this point of view, this paper also provides answers to questions about the grouping movement, forms of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary assemblies, formation of parties and other bodies of often over-class nature, and related questions about the nature of evolution of the elites and today's views on the so-called people of the Enlightenment. It also addresses the

issue of freedom of speech and printing in the theory and practice of action, thereby reviving the publishing movement as an element of political actions or building the independence of thinking and new opinion-making power, and also developing press activity as a profitable venture. The book also provides a new insight into the functioning of the Sejm's bodies and the stages of the legislative process of the Great Sejm, however shown not only through the prism of acts regulating it, but above all through the practice of action. Thus, it answers the question of how the practice of lawmaking - which is after all a result of work of specific individuals in the community such as the parliamentary committees or a parliamentary chamber - influenced its subsequent regulations. Research on Józef Weysenhoff's legal projects and other works allows us to assess not only the diligence, but above all, to show originality or inspiration, and hence the freedom of transmitting thoughts in the humanitarian, chamber or broader sense – in the Enlightenment sense.