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# Daszyński, Ignacy

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Daszyński, *Ignacy*

A leader of the Polish socialist movement, parliamentarian, and orator

Born 26 October 1866 in Zbarazh, Austria-Hungary (today: Ukraine)

Died 31 October 1936 in Bystra Śląska, Poland

**Ignacy Daszyński was one of the foremost figures on the Polish political scene in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He personified a subset of elites who merged the struggle for social justice with respect for the principles of the democratic order and understanding of other nations' aspirations toward freedom.**

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## Early Political Career

Ignacy Daszyński (1866-1936) came from an impoverished civil servant family in eastern Galicia who observed national traditions. At the early age of fourteen, he appeared in court for distributing anti-Habsburg leaflets. As a schoolboy he frequently changed his place of residence and consequently observed widespread poverty, from which he also suffered. These experiences led to his interest in socialism. Daszyński did not possess the talent of an ideologue-theoretician. His biographers claimed sarcastically that he was acquainted with the writings of [Karl Marx \(1818-1883\)](#)

only from his own speeches <sup>[1]</sup> but he was drawn to practical political activity.

In view of the absence of large-scale industry in the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Daszyński initially doubted the possibility of creating a socialist movement in this region and thus felt inclined to emigrate to the United States. He changed his mind after witnessing thousands of workers marching in Lwów (Lviv) on May Day in 1890. In the following years Daszyński edited Polish-language socialist newspapers in Galicia, became a member of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* (Social Democratic Party of Austria), and helped found the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia (1892).

In 1897 Daszyński was elected for the first time to the Parliament in Vienna, where he headed a group of more than ten socialists representing assorted nationalities. He demanded the universal right to vote and initiated mass meetings and strikes in defence of the interests of the poorest social strata.

Daszyński gradually began to combine social slogans with the idea of the independence of Poland. Thanks to Daszyński, the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia established contact with the Polish Socialist Party-Revolutionary Faction active in Russia and headed by Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935). Piłsudski sought refuge in the Habsburg monarchy following Russian repression; in 1912 Daszyński supported his plan for a confederation of all pro-independence Polish organisations in Galicia and to prepare for a struggle against Russia in view of the looming armed conflict in Europe.

## The First World War

After the outbreak of the First World War, Daszyński sided with Piłsudski, who urged Poles to take an independent stand vis-à-vis Russia. On 3 August 1914, Piłsudski dispatched the First Cadre Company from Krakow towards Warsaw, which was supposed to become the core of the army of a sovereign Polish state. Daszyński joined this formation. As a military commissar in Miechów (a small town in the gubernia of Radom) Daszyński did not succeed in encouraging the local population to take part in an anti-Russian uprising. When the whole venture conceived by Piłsudski also failed, Polish conservative politicians from Krakow took over the initiative. On 16 August 1914 these politicians established the Supreme National Committee (NKN) as well as Polish Legions alongside the Austrian army.

Daszyński joined the NKN as a representative of the pro-Piłsudski wing. To a greater degree than Piłsudski, though, he foresaw the possibility of solving the Polish question with Habsburg assistance, by transforming the monarchy into an Austrian-Hungarian-Polish union. Although the Act of 5<sup>th</sup> November shattered these hopes, Daszyński persistently adhered to this conviction. At the same time, from the beginning of 1918 onward, he grew increasingly critical of the attitude of the Central Powers and publicly voiced the opinion that the future Polish state should include Upper Silesia.

Daszyński's stance changed radically following the resolutions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (9

February 1918), in which the Central Powers granted the Ukrainian People's Republic the Chełm Land (Chełmszczyzna) and part of the Podlasia (Podlachia) region. On 7 March 1918 Daszyński and other deputies of the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia left the Polish Circle in the Parliament in Vienna and joined the anti-government opposition, voting against the budget.

In October 1918 Daszyński joined the Polish Liquidation Committee, which intended to seize control of the Polish-speaking parts of the Habsburg monarchy. The Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland caused Daszyński great anxiety, however, because it sought to extend its authority over all Polish lands in the three former partition areas. Hence, at the beginning of October 1918 Daszyński joined a secret conspiracy composed of a small group of Piłsudskiites, socialists, and left-wing peasant politicians from the Russian and Austrian partition areas. On 7 November 1918 in Lublin, this group proclaimed the establishment of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland.

This government, with Daszyński as prime minister, claimed to act as an all-Polish institution but did not possess real power. Its greatest accomplishment was a manifesto announcing a parliamentary democracy, equal rights for all citizens, and a number of economic-social reforms.

## Independent Poland

Upon the return of Józef Piłsudski, imprisoned in Magdeburg, Daszyński presented his resignation (12 November 1918). Piłsudski, however, entrusted Daszyński with the task of forming a new cabinet. In view of the resistance of centrist and right-wing parties, which accused Daszyński of leftist radicalism, on 18 November 1918 this task ended in a fiasco, (In January 1919 Daszyński was voted deputy in elections to the Legislative Sejm and held his parliamentary chair in successive terms until 1935. He was vice-marshal (deputy speaker of the House, 1922–1928) and marshal (speaker of the House, 1928–1930) of the Sejm, and one of the leaders of the Polish Socialist Party.

Daszyński regarded the nationalistic right wing as the greatest danger for Polish democracy. He remained a supporter of Józef Piłsudski, believing that this former socialist would guide Poland towards social reforms. In May 1926 he actively supported Piłsudski's coup d'état and organised anti-government strikes. Soon, however, Daszyński became disillusioned with the authoritarian policy pursued by Piłsudski and joined the opposition. In his capacity as marshal of the Sejm (elected on 27 March 1928) Daszyński energetically defended the principles of democracy.

After 1930 deteriorating health forced Daszyński to abandon political life. His funeral, held in Krakow on 3 November 1936, turned into a great demonstration in honour of the consistently principled and dynamic spokesman for democracy and social justice.

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Section Editor: [Piotr Szlanta](#)

## Notes

1. [↑](#) Mackiewicz, Stanisław: Europa in flagranti, Warsaw 1965, p. 57.

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