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## TEN YEARS OF CZECHOSLOVAK EMPIRICAL SOCIOLOGY

The last ten years have witnessed a restoration of Czechoslovak sociology liquidated by power politics and administrative measures in the years 1948—1950. Thus its development has been marked both by this liquidation and its „re-instatement“.

The newly permitted and reinstated sociology has not developed in an autonomous manner alone, having been shaped by this gradual process of relaxation of political pressure and by the gradual abolition of the administrative measures taken.

This is borne out by the rapidity with which continuity with the European and world level has been restored, by the width and depth of analysis permitted by censorship (including self-censorship), and particularly by the choice of subjects.

As I see it the beginnings of this restoration were marked by the following characteristic features:

1. Situation of official ideology
2. Body of Experts - i. e. those who regard themselves as sociologists
3. Sources and premises from which Czechoslovak sociology proceeds.

### 1. OFFICIAL IDEOLOGY

Understandably enough, sociology like any other sphere of our life did not escape the impact of political conditions. Among the other social sciences it held the peculiar position of being until quite recently, regarded as „bourgeois pseudoscience“. Even after radical condemnations had subsided it had to contend with this odium. Grammatical adjustments such as the adoption of the attribute „Marxist“, on the one hand, and demonstrative assertions of its utilitarian character were made to serve this purpose.

Pressure exerted on research workers for many years resulting in the prevention of all creative work, the farcical conditions in acquiring scientific information, the impossibility of maintaining contacts, whether professional or personal, with departments of sociology in the rest of the world, all this regrettably brought about a state of affairs in which it was sociologists in a socialist country

who were unable to make any positive use of what had been achieved in sociology by Marx.

Political pressure, different residues of vulgarized Marxism, and the merely gradual loosening of censorship had its repercussions in the selection of subjects for empirical research. A great majority of researches were focussed upon cultural problems. However, here the term *cultural* is not used in the sense it is generally used in sociology, but in the narrower meaning of definitive concrete activities concerned with culture and adult education (e. g. studies of readers' interests, interests of film-fans, of theatre-goers, and the like). Problems of this kind seem to have appeared the least dangerous ideologically. Yet this trend has now held ground for rather a long time.

The following structure of investigations carried out by the organizations for culture and further education sponsored by the Ministry of Education in the last two years:

cultural interests	30 %
cultural and educational activities and their problems	20 %
set of cultural institutions and equipment and their utilization	30 %
leisure time	6 %
structure and qualifications of educational workers	4 %
others	10 %

(The data refer to ninety cases of research)

It might appear that this is so because these are institutions whose proper province is to carry on cultural and educational activities and thus this appears to be only natural. However, similar results are obtained if the themes of other, for the most part directly sociological, institutions are examined.

If one surveys the themes of about eighty research projects organized by the large variety of institutes and sociological departments, 38,6 p. c. of the themes are found to be concerned with problems of readers' interests, with characteristics of viewers of, and listeners to, mass communication media, with leisure, etc.

Similarly, from the point of view of interest in social groups, the themes are also rather monotonous. Thus, for instance, from this point of view the above-mentioned eighty cases of research can be classified as follows:

workers	32 p. c.
peasants	23 p. c.
intelligentsia	6,5 p. c.
youth	26 p. c.
old age pensioners	1 p. c.
women	4 p. c.
the army	4 p. c.
others	2,5 p. c.

These to my mind are the most pronounced vestiges of the over-simplified conception of the class structure of society. This conception had to make do with the rigid terminological triad — the working class — the peasants — the „working“ intelligentsia. These terms — for it is hardly possible to speak of analytically defined concepts — were endowed with a definite hierarchized emotive and evaluating content. Moreover, in this conceptual scheme difficulties were encountered with regard to the intelligentsia, which was not regarded as a class. Any other pattern than the class structure of society conceived in this way was open to the suspicion of revisionism. Therefore, this sphere of study of social structure, and particularly of political system remained a taboo for Czechoslovak sociologists for a longer period than any other. It was not until the last two years that some authors (Z. Strmiska, V. Tlustý, J. Klofáč and others) attempted to gain open insight into the analyses of social structure, of the theory of stratification, etc.

To acquire an empirical view of these problems has been the endeavour of a group of sociologists headed by Associate Professor P. Machonin which has been preparing an extensive research project of the social structure of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The sphere that had until recently been most neglected — this from purely political reasons — was that of political system. Yet even this field has lately seen some revival of activity. A group of sociologists headed by Associate Professor Z. Mlynář has been set up to deal with these problems. However, the question is whether their work is not being affected by various kinds of political pressure even now. Empirical work in this sphere has been embarked upon by the Institute of Public Opinion Research, and its first results have been encouraging enough to justify some hopes for the future.

Another matter worth mentioning in this connection is the relationship between empirical and theoretical sociology, a specific result of the country's political conditions. The subconscious idea of sociology contained in the public mind in Czechoslovakia is that of an empirical sociology as a utilitarian science organized for sociotechnical purposes, the reason being that it was in this particular form that sociology was sanctioned in this country. Throughout the past

years the theses asserting the all-embracing scientific character of Marxism had been put forward. The only acknowledged scientific theory of society was the so-called historical Materialism. Any other interpretation of even the simplest and most concrete social phenomena than that afforded by historical materialism, or one that could have been deduced from it, was not tolerated. Thus from the very outset the only room for sociology had been for sociology as sociotechniques. It is only now, and slowly and with great difficulties, and often merely thanks to problems arising from sociotechnical needs and from the findings or hypotheses of empirical investigations, that theoretical sociological analysis begins to be applied. All this and a number of other secondary factors has had a profound bearing on the last ten years of the development of Czechoslovak sociology.

## 2. BODY OF EXPERTS

An absolute majority of those who have begun to work in the field of sociology are in their thirties and forties, i. e. people who had been studying and working in the period of dogmatized Marxism and many of whom had absorbed a great deal from it.

Thus, for instance, in the early years of this decade there had been pseudo-disputes on the relationship between „historical materialism“ and sociology, and the notion was being forcibly put forward that in sociology it was necessary to examine largely and above all material conditions, which are objective and primary in social life while subjective attitudes, opinions, values are supposed to be something less important, dependent and derived. In the immediate sphere of empirical investigations the notion of „complexity“ had been untiringly advocated to the effect that the only research worthy of being considered as scientific and Marxist was the one which encompassed the greatest number of factors, the largest social space etc., while an analytical reduction of social reality was being regarded as something improper, as „flat“ empiricism.

On the other hand, it must of course be admitted that the most capable ones among our sociologists even while paying lip-service to the prevailing terminology, and some of them while formally preserving the „obligatory“ terms did try to make a rational analysis of problems, utilizing their knowledge of sociological theories. Admittedly, these were merely attempts which hardly proved an unqualified success though even so they did provide a certain general basis for future developments.

Only in isolated cases did the knowledge of modern sociology join forces with an undogmatized ability to proceed from Marx's analyses of society into a fertile symbiosis upon which a modern sociological analysis could be founded.

Many of us lacked access to the fundamental theoretical and methodical knowledge of results achieved by sociology in the last twenty years.

A certain proportion of the younger members of these generations organized their studies in defiance of the so-called „theoretical“ historical materialism, seeking salvation solely in empiricism, the exactitude of natural sciences and of mathematics. This „human“ equipment of Czechoslovak sociology has continued to play a significant part in its development to the present day.

### 3. SOURCES

To begin with, for a number of years Polish sociological literature had been the chief source of information. However, Polish literature very often drew upon American literature, and thus as ideological pressure gradually decreased sociologists in Czechoslovakia turned to „first-hand“ sources using original literature, whether German, French, or American.

What may also be of interest is the relation to our own sociological tradition. The School of I. A. Bláha and number of other sociologists (of the empiricists let us mention J. Obrdlík) had reached a fairly high European level before the Second World War. The gap caused by the Second World War and the subsequent one in the fifties, which was even a more complete break with the past, brought about too large a distance between what had been in this country before and what is now in the world at large so that our own traditions remain a thing of the past. Another characteristic feature in the development of our sociology is that practically until 1966 we were deprived of any possibilities of supplementing and refreshing our knowledge by direct studies in departments of sociology abroad while our facilities for keeping in touch with these places were extremely limited. This lack of contact has persisted until today, and it may appear paradoxical to the outside observer to find that this equally applies to sociological departments in socialist countries.

Yet even though labouring under these difficulties Czechoslovak sociology has gone through an overwhelming development.

The system of higher education in Czechoslovakia included the teaching of social sciences, and each higher educational establishment contained the following departments: Department of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, Department of „Principles of Communism“, and the Department of „Political Economy“.

In the course of the last then years various sociological sections were set up within the above departments. A number of universities have restored the traditional Departments of Sociology with a view to training undergraduates and thus producing new graduates in sociology. This applies to the Departments established at the Philosophical Faculties in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava. There

are however, various other independent departments of sociology at various other higher educational establishments and in research institutes. Even in the larger industrial enterprises, at ministries and at the larger institutions of culture and further education posts for sociologists are being established and departments of sociology are being founded. To make my survey complete I will give a list of the principal places quoted in the „Study Concerning the Development of Czechoslovak Sociology until 1980“ written by Assoc. Professor P. Machonin and published in the Sociological Review (Sociologický časopis), 1967, No. 4.

A. *Academic Departments*

Sociological Institute of the ČSAV — Prague  
Sociological Institute of the SAV — Bratislava  
The Institute for Public Opinion Research — Prague  
A Detached Department of this Institute — Bratislava  
The Institute of Science-Planning — Prague

B. *Departments at Institutions of Higher Education*

The Institute of Marxism-Leninism — Prague  
Philosophical Faculties (Departments of Sociology)  
    Charles University — Prague  
    Comenius University — Bratislava  
    J. E. Purkyně University — Brno  
Prague School of Politics — Prague  
Prague School of Economics — Prague  
School of Economics — Bratislava  
The Faculty of Adult Education and Journalism — Prague  
Pedagogical Faculty (Laboratory of Social Research) — Prague  
Pedagogical Faculty — Olomouc  
Faculty of Law, Charles University — Prague  
The Department of Mechanical Engineering  
    Czech Technical University (ČVUT) — Prague  
The College of Agriculture — Prague  
The Faculty of General Medicine - Charles University — Prague

C. *Departments of Various Ministries*

Czechoslovak Research Institute of Labour — Bratislava  
Research Institute of the Economics of Mining — Ostrava  
Research Institute of Construction and Architecture — Prague  
Institute of Construction and Architecture — Bratislava  
Institute of Rural Sociology and of History of Agriculture — Prague

Institute of Rural Sociology and of History of Agriculture — Bratislava  
State Statistical Office — Prague

The Secretariat of the State Population Commission — Prague

Institute of the Revolutionary Trade Unions (ROH) — Prague

The Scientific and Research Department

of the Slovak Trade Unions — Bratislava

Institute of Adult Education — Bratislava

The Military and Political Academy — Prague

A survey of the numbers of staff employed in these departments:

	1966	1980
1. Academies	53,5	241
2. Universities and Colleges	116,5	338
3. Ministries	99	254
	269	833

Naturally enough, each of the above departments is anxious to work in the sphere of empirical sociology, or at least give signs of such activities, the result being an enormous inflation of various research projects. Even Party organs have been ordering sociological investigations on various problems. It is estimated that in recent years about 2000 sociological research projects have been carried out, or are still in progress. As to membership Czechoslovak Sociological Society ranks second or third in the world.

These developments have contained a number of positive aspects: interest in sociology has been aroused, a number of investigations and researches are in progress which are bringing interesting findings, it has been shown what empirical sociology can and cannot do, practical experience being acquired in organizing, carrying out and evaluating empirical investigations, etc.

Nevertheless, it is the negative aspects that seem to predominate. Most of the researches are being organized without adequate theoretic and practical background, their effectiveness is limited, since they are undertaken for their own sake, and frequently debase and „infest“ the social field. In my estimate when considered from the purely utilitarian point of view about 90 per cent of these researches remain unutilized for practical sociotechnical purposes.

Even so there is no need for pessimism in looking back at the past ten years.

The best way to exemplify the development of Czechoslovak empirical sociology may be to quote the case of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Originally, this body had been designed to give tuition to, and to improve the scientific standards of, lecturers in Marxist philosophy at higher educational establishments. In the course of time, however, it developed into an independent scientific department, a scientific institute which now serves the needs of sociology. The first sociological research carried out by the Institute was organized by its

Director, Associate Professor P. Machonin, and was concerned with teams of „the Brigades of Socialist Labour“ in one of the large Prague enterprises. The goals pursued (the project was undertaken in the early sixties) were characteristic of the day. What was singled out for investigation were elements of „Communist relationships“ among the working people, and the study was to apply an entirely special „Marxist“ method of personally involved research. This was to have represented a higher stage of research compared with the „falsely objective“ sociological methods undertaken by unconcerned, „objective“ observers, whereas Marxist sociologists were supposed to engage in the discussions and to propose measures to be taken for solving any difficulties that might be discovered. Any comment on the results of this is more than superfluous. Yet even in the study based on such a conception certain interesting hypotheses were arrived at yielding certain results. However, — and this is more important — after less than six years this very Institute headed by the same expert has managed to organize and carry out a thoroughly prepared research into social structure in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with all the necessary prerequisites currently demanded in countries with rich sociological traditions. There is a very detailed project which has been opened to international discussion, preliminary research has been carried out and evaluated, and in the course of the evaluation original processes have been proposed. This research has world priority in covering 20000 households and has been well prepared, so there is every reason to hope that it will be equally well interpreted and evaluated. The interpretation programme includes the use of various mathematical patterns (Markov's chains, taxonomic tasks, etc.) so that the findings are sure to be of interest and value not for Czechoslovak sociologists alone.

The adduced example can, of course, serve only as an illustration though I am convinced that even a more detailed analysis would yield similar results. Czechoslovak empirical sociology has overcome the handicaps which had impeded its progress at the beginning of the present decade with admirable rapidity and though certain elements of haste and megalomania do occasionally appear, it has gradually managed to re-establish the links with world developments interrupted by power-politic methods. The pace of this progress is bound to increase provided that political conditions in Czechoslovakia are normalized, and sociology is given the necessary facilities for its own autonomous growth.