

SOME TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL THOUGHT IN HUNGARY
BEFORE 1945(1)

FERENC ERŐS

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In an earlier paper, presented last year in Bologna at the East-West Conference of the European Association (EROS, 1980a; see also EROS, 1980b, 1980c). I attempted to outline a hypothetical model for explaining some differences between the developmental lines of Social Psychology in North America and in Europe (particularly in Eastern and Central Europe). I have suggested a distinction between two characteristic ways of development, the "American" and the "Prussian" way. The former would mean that Social Psychology as a science grows up from practical social organizational problems, and it functions as an empirical collection of techniques and rules for selecting and influencing people, without, however, aspiring to be a large-scale social technology aiming at radically changing people and (or their group or communal life). The latter indicates that Social Psychology, on the one hand, remains an academic, highly "philosophical", pre-scientific discipline, far from practical, social problems; on the other hand, time and again, it tends to be included into the managerial functions of a central state bureaucracy which tries to use it as a scientific ideology and at the same time as a social technological device for transforming

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-wholly or partially- individual and society.

This model, drawn analogously from LENIN's distinction between the "American and Prussian way of agricultural development", has been subjected to much criticism, especially concerning the ill-fate word "Prussian". In this context, however, "Prussian" would have meant simply "centralized" and "bureaucratic", without any direct political or national implications. Nevertheless, the criticism is justified inasmuch this model mixes various types of phenomena under the single adjective "Prussian", i.e. bureaucratic.

At the present, I think it is necessary to make further distinctions concerning the development of Social Psychology in Central and Eastern Europe. *Social Psychology as History* (GERGEN, 1973) raises particularly interesting problems if one regards the History of this region, but one meets here vast conceptual difficulties. One of the most serious difficulties concerning the term "Social Psychology" itself. Despite the variety of theoretical standpoints, it is relatively easy to give pragmatic, operational "handbook" definitions of Social Psychology as distinct from other branches of Psychology or, of other social sciences, by pointing out its specific subject matter, methods and basic principles.

Taken for granted, however, that social psychological knowledge is not transhistorical and transcultural -that the main body of this knowledge roots in the phenomenology of American interindividual and intergroup relations, shaped by the specific historical and structural characteristics of this society (GERGEN, 1973; MOSCOVICI, 1972) the standard definitions of Social Psychology cannot help too much to situate and evaluate various European intellectual enterprises that have been vaguely provided with the label "Social Psychology". What "deserves" to be called a genuine "Social Psychology" in European context?. Social Philosophy in the sense of Auguste COMTE, John Stuart MILL or Herbert SPENCER?. Mass Psychology in the sense of LE BON or folk Psychology in the sense of WUNDT?. Or, Social Psychology would be the political application of mass Psychology (an extreme example of this can be found in HITLER's *Mein Kampf*?). Can we say that European Social Psychology is psychoanalysis, because of its original social, social-psychological and socio-critical core (DAHMER, 1975)?. Psychoanalysis is, however, at least in its classical form, a Psychology of the isolated individual, even if it has been developed and practised in an intersubjective, communicative context. Or, perhaps, Social Psychology is the extension and application of any psychological knowledge to the social sphere, irrespective of the specific, often contradicting concepts of man behind various psychologies?. For example, the principles of Pavlovian conditioning gave rise to ideas of how

to train, teach or re-educate people, or the principles of Gestalt Psychology were successfully projected to social phenomena by Kurt LEWIN -can be therefore conceived reflex theory or Gestalt Psychology as Social Psychology?. Or can we simply say that Social Psychology is the Psychology of the *society*, as opposed to the Psychology of the *individual*?. The English language cannot convey the ambivalent meaning of the term "Social Psychology" signifying the Psychology of the individual in a social (e.g. role or group) context as well as the Psychology of the society conceived as a supraindividual entity (In the Hungarian language there are two words for these two meanings: the borrowed word "szociálpszichológia" to the former, and the Hungarian word "társadalomlélektan" to the latter: the literal German equivalents would be "Sozialpsychologie" and "Gesellschaftssozialkunde").

Taking into account these difficulties, it wouldn't be possible to identify any of these trends or schools as *the* European counterpart of American Social Psychology, even if some of them had exerted considerable impact to the latter (ALLPORT, 1967). Instead, I would speak about *social psychological thought* which is not altogether bound to any specific discipline: it has its appearances in Psychology and Sociology as well as in Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Ethnology, Literature, Education, Legal Theory and Criminology, Eugenics and Biology, etc. Social psychological thought subsumes the widest variety of intellectual enterprises with one common focal point: interpreting the relation between individual and society in psychological or psychologicistic terms and categories, irrespective of their specific content.

By nature, social psychological thought is closely related to *ideology*: it may function as a *legitimation* ideology for justifying given power structure, hierarchies, class or ethnic relations; or it may function as a *programmatic* ideology of social changes desirable from the point of view of different interests and aspirations (reforms; revolution; mobilization or militarization of the masses, elimination of certain non-desirable elements "deviants", "alien races", etc.). As ideology, however, it doesn't stop at the pure intellectual level: it becomes part of the social techniques of certain social and political movements (for example, in mass propaganda from "enlightenment" to "indoctrination" and "brainwashing"). In our century, one can meet in Central and Eastern Europe three characteristic types of social techniques exploiting some elements of social psychological thought:

1.- *Messianistic*: it aims at a radical transformation of all relationships between individual and society, it envisages a total change in the personality

structure. It has a positive picture of the future, it is strongly bound to enlightenment and education, its ideology is rationalistic. This messianistic trend is associated primarily with the leftist, revolutionary illusions and hopes toward psychoanalysis ("Freudo-Marxism"); after the dissolution of "Freudo-Marxism", some elements of this messianism were transferred to the Pavlovian reflex-theory and to the VIGOTSKY school of Soviet Psychology.

2.- *Totalitarian*: it is, first of all, the social technology of fascism, which has, as a rule, no positive picture of the future; it aims at immediate mobilization of the masses through appealing to unconscious, irrational forces ("inverse psychoanalysis", as ADORNO put it (1978)); operates and manipulates with the concepts of character, nation and race.

3.- *Paternalistic and bureaucratic*: it is the "Prussian" in the proper sense; it is part of the technical apparatus or the centrally directed social mobility, i.e. *selection*. This type of social technology may get use of the most advanced techniques borrowed, for example, from American Social Psychology; in a bureaucratic system, however, there is no societal or community control over the use of these methods, thus, the fate of people depends almost entirely upon whether they are selected or not to higher education, higher position and/or salary, etc.

These types are, of course, on the very different level of social psychological conceptualization. They differ in their sources, scope, methods, purposes -even if, in some cases, they can be applied simultaneously. There is, however, an essential common element in each of them: they are radically opposed to the social techniques based on the principles of coordination, consensus, and individual freedom ("planning for democracy" (MANNHEIM, 1943). In the lack of a civil society able to control social techniques and to foster "piecemeal reforms", "social prophecy" becomes "social technology" (POPPER, 1964). This kind of social technology remains, essentially, however, on the level of "ideology and utopy" (MANNHEIM, 1960), because: 1.-Social Psychology cannot be effectively applied on the mass level; 2.- The factual control over people is more likely to be exerted through more direct and effective techniques than through psychological techniques.

Social psychological thought is not, however, fatefully bound to "Orwellian" visions. The History of Hungarian social psychological thought shows that there have been a continuous tension and conflict between the technological use and the humanistic content of the ideas associated with

this discipline.

In Hungary, from the beginning of the 20th century on, the emerging social psychological thought modelled on the contemporary positivism and evolutionary Biology was part and parcel of the progressivist and radical intellectual movements represented by the social science journal *Huszadik Század* ("Twentieth Century", started in 1900), and the Social Science Society, founded in 1901. The group of young social scientists gathered around the journal and the Society brought new and fresh ideas from the West and in their struggle for a modern Hungary, they turned these ideas against the century-old backwardness and provincialism of Hungarian intellectual and social life. In opposition to the traditionalism and conservatism of the official social and political thinking, they wanted to establish a *science of society*, a scientific -i.e. natural-scientific- Sociology. Following this aim, they reasonably picked up -among other disciplines- contemporary empirical Psychology which -as the rising natural science of the age- tried to find in the data of Neuropsychology and evolutionary Biology an objective explanation of individual and collective psychic phenomena. In the discussions around the place of psychological laws in the determination of sociological phenomena, the psycho-psychological reductionism had been soon replaced by an other kind of reductionism, i.e. the economism of the contemporary historical materialism. These two kinds of reductionism predominant at the majority of contemporary social scientists, set serious limits to the reflective articulation of social psychological problems. The opposition of psychophysiological versus economic reductionism had already contained the elements of messianism and technological utopism (see the republication of the original texts in LITVANSZUCS (Eds. 1973).

There was, however, a notable exception from these trend: the elaboration of a sociographic approach based on survey methods. As early as in 1913, joining to the call of Chicago Professor William I. THOMAS for studying the Psychology of European peasantry, a Hungarian social scientist. Robert BRAUN had published a long report "On the Psychology of a village" in the journal *Huszadik Század* (BRAUN, 1913).

This type of sociography, aimed at describing and analysing the miserable situation of the peasantry and the urban working class (and which has its parallels in the sociographic study of Marie JAHODA and Paul LAZARSELD on the social psychological consequences of unemployment in an Austrian small town -see JAHODA et al., 1980) remained isolated and its scope was relatively small; the sociographic approach was revived by the Hungarian populist writers of the thirties, applying more literary

than scientific criteria. Besides sociology, it was psychoanalysis which shed new light on the problems concerning the relationship between Sociology and Psychology. It is psychoanalysis which from the beginning had consisted of a social-psychological core (the treatment and the symptoms themselves are conceived as a function of *intersubjectivity*) -even if FREUD himself had based his system on the terms of individual Psychology, partly in order to defend his teaching from the tempting danger of being transformed into a social technology and at the same time into a legitimization ideology.

FREUD and his early collaborators had articulated in their Social Philosophy an "American ideal" of a rational society and they had acquired important insights into the social-psychological functioning of the semi-feudal social system of the contemporary Austria-Hungary. These social-critical core of psychoanalysis had been very explicitly realized and expressed in the writings of Sándor FERENCZI, the most distinguished Hungarian friend and pupil of FREUD's. In his essays published in the first decades of the century he had been actively interested in a number of social problems (alcoholism, crime, education, "war neuroses", etc.), and, as a solution, instead of surface treatments, he suggested a *social prevention* of social troubles (FERENCZI, 1913; DAHMER, 1976). As his social ideal, he formulated an "individual-socialistic" organization which takes into account the individual differences, the human needs for independence as well as the indispensable social and cultural restrictions necessary for living together.

Regarding the work of FERENCZI's, one of the most frequent argument against psychoanalysis, i.e. "psychologism" ("Sociology" is nothing else than Applied Psychology, as FREUD expressed it) seems to be rather inadequate. This "psychologism" should be conceived as a *methodological* psychologism, which -though acknowledging the empirical fact of, even the necessity of the existence of various collectives, rejects all kinds of *collectivity myths* as justifications for despotism and authoritarianism. Paradoxically, it is only this kind of "individualism", "atomism", "psychologism" which rendered possible to recognize the manifold social-critical implications of psychoanalysis (ADORNO, 1967). It is another question, that psychoanalysis -at least in its classical form could not become *Social Psychology*. Early freudians had quickly realised, that a large scale social implementation of their findings is not only impossible, but also, not desirable, because it may provide an enormous power instrument for depriving people from their inner freedom. The freudian "mythology" was in this aspect an effort to prevent psychoanalysis from *political actualizations* by presenting

actual antagonisms as *anthropological relationships*.

Nevertheless these political actualisations had become unavoidable after the first World War, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire had collapsed and large-scale social crises, revolutions and counterrevolutions had occurred throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

"Partly owing to post-war developments, Sociology turned to psychoanalysis" -as Géza ROHEIM wrote (ROHEIM, 1947, p. 15). The growing demand and pressure of social sciences (including political sciences) on psychoanalysis gave birth to the formulation of a psychoanalytic Sociology as a base of reform policy ("piecemeal social technology" in Popperian sense). It was an émigré Hungarian social scientist, Aurél KOLNAI, who in his book *Psychoanalysis and Sociology* (KOLNAI, 1922), developed these ideas into a coherent political theory intended to challenge the tendencies of "regression" and "realization" inherent in Bolshevism.

On the other hand, this situation gave birth to the various attempts at synthesizing FREUD and MARX; many freudians believed that psychoanalysis might be a base for revolutionary politics.

FREUD was, of course, too skeptical toward all "positive" solutions for the "discontents" of our civilization. But psychoanalysts like Wilhelm REICH or Erich FROMM had dreamed of an "analytic Social Psychology" which could contribute to abolishing the contrasts between "Eros" and "Culture", between individual strivings and common interest. This messianistic vision was fairly popular among marxist as well as freudian thinkers of the twenties and thirties: it was the time of the "Freudo-Marxists" who saw in psychoanalysis a *social technology* for the revolution and even for building a socialist society.

These ideas, especially Wilhelm REICH's name, his doctrines and activities were fairly popular in Hungarian leftist intellectual circles. The most authoritative journal of the Hungarian left, *Korunk* (Our Age) -edited and published in Rumania, in the Transylvanian city Kolozsvár (Cluj)- from 1928-29 on, reviewed all important writings of REICH and informed about the developments in the SEXPOL-movement. *Korunk* had published also a great number of articles sympathetic as well as hostile to Reichian ideas and SEXPOL. Beside *Korunk*, there was another forum which had been more explicitly influenced by Reichian ideas. It was *Emberismeret* (*Knowledge of Man*), a short lived series of five special numbers (1935-1936) dealing with the problems of psychoanalysis and human sciences.

The most outstanding figure of the Hungarian Freudo-Marxism was Attila JOZSEF, one of the greatest poet of the age and at the same time a considerable marxist theoretician (on his figure see KÖESTLER, 1955; cfr.

EROS, 1981). There are some parallels between the ideas of his and REICH's -at least until 1933, and on two essential points: on judging the significance of psychoanalysis for marxism and on the emphasis on sexual repression and its abolition. As Attila JOZSEF put it in his article "The sexual problems of youth", "Marxism is a science of liberating the oppressed proletariat, psychoanalysis is the science of healing the soul full of repressions". The Reichian formula manifests itself in his other theoretical essay entitled "Individuality and reality": psychoanalysis is a natural science complementary to marxism (a "*Hilfswissenschaft*", as REICH put it in his "Dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis" (REICH, 1966), inasmuch it can show what processes are taking place in the minds of class individuals and, consequently, it can contribute to enhancing class consciousness (see his theoretical writings in JOZSEF, 1958).

In "Individuality and reality" Attila JOZSEF introduces the dichotomy of "neurotics" and "revolutionaries" which is equivalent to the Reichian characterology of "neurotic" and "genital" types.

The conception of psychoanalysis in a marxist framework is a typical product of the Messianism of the twenties which envisages that "bringing into consciousness" automatically leads to social revolution which, in turn, immediately re-establish the harmony between individual and society. The messianistic role given to psychoanalysis roots in the hopes and illusions of psychoanalysts toward the Russian revolution which seemed to change radically not only "economic base" and "political-ideological superstructure" but everyday life as well (including morality in general and sexual morality in particular). The early favourable attitude of Soviet marxism toward psychoanalysis seemed also to justify a "natural alliance" between marxism and psychoanalysis: in a society where no antagonistic class contradictions exist any more, psychoanalysis can freely advance and it can assume its genuine mission in the social prevention of neuroses.

The "honeymoon" of psychoanalysis and marxism had ended, however, in a quick and drastic way. In the second half of the twenties, Soviet ideology had started to identify "Freudianism" with bourgeois reaction and "social fascism" (i.e. social democracy).

The paranoid logique of the attacks against freudianism had been projected onto Freudo-marxism which became even more dangerous than "pure" freudianism: it was accused of "stealing back" bourgeois ideology under the mask of "pseudo-marxism" terminology. The theoreticians of these attacks had contrasted a "genuine" marxist Social Psychology to the analytic Social Psychology represented by REICH and his followers. This Social Psychology

of rigid economism and environmentalism (based on PLEHANOV's analysis of the various forms of ideological superstructure) was formulated by the Soviet critics of psychoanalysis (see BERNFELD, REICH, JURINETZ, SAPIR, STOLJAROV, 1970) and it was echoed by an influential Hungarian marxist thinker of the age, Erik MOLNAR (see his essay on psychoanalysis: MOLNAR, 1969).

In this situation, the more the freudo-marxists were apt to put psychoanalysis into the framework of a dogmatic marxism, the more they were stigmatized as "deviants" and "renegades". It is the context which explains the personal tragedy of Attila JOZSEF's (he committed suicide in 1937, at the age of 32, and also the main characteristics of his freudo-marxian writings: and attempt to place the problem of individuality into the framework of a rigid and deterministic marxist orthodoxy on the one hand; a real understanding of the emancipatory function of psychoanalysis, a real faith in the liberation of individual on the other. This contradiction between the technological exploitation and emancipatory mission of psychoanalysis could find only a poetic solution, the idea of a utopic order, by which, as he wrote in one of his poems, "...the mind understands (the finite infinite, the forces of production outside) and the instincts inside".

Though, as I attempted to demonstrate, social psychological thought in Hungary was bound primarily to the progressive and radical-leftist movements, a new trend started to appear in the late thirties. It was the idea of applying the principles and methods of a psycho and socio-technical effectivity for preserving the existing (semi-feudal) power relationships. This trend has been initiated by the Government circles and, by introducing the characterological, national and racial criteria for the *selection* of people, it was permeated by nationalist, racist, profascist ideology and it had betrayed a strong impact of the German Psychology of the Nazi period (on fascism and Psychology, see BILLIG, 1978).

This new, totalitarian collectivity myth had been challenged by the sociologist and political scientist István BIBO, who -in his critical essay on the book of the Nazi psychologist Fritz KUNKEL (BIBO, 1941)- refused metaphysical constructions concerning collectivity and suggested that concrete human collectives should be evaluated and analyzed according to the norms of individual dignity and freedom. BIBO revived and extended the best traditions of Hungarian social psychological thinking (see also his review on Karl MANNHEIM's book *Diagnosis of Our Time* (BIBO, 1943); his activity leads us to the developments of Hungarian social psychological thinking after 1945. This chapter, however, goes beyond the scope of the present paper; let me

finish it by indicating that the History of Hungarian Social Psychology after 1945 started with the model experiments of Ferenc MEREI's planned to answer to the question: how fascism was possible? (MEREI, 1949).

RESUMEN

Este trabajo presenta las principales tendencias en el desarrollo del pensamiento psico-social en Hungría durante la primera mitad del siglo XX.

En él se plantean las aproximaciones sociográfica (THOMAS), psicoanalítica (FERENCZI), marxista (MOLNAR) y freudomarxista (JOZSEF). Se considera también el fenómeno de la Sociología Nazi y sus críticas (BIBO). Este análisis se realiza en un marco teórico en el que se plantea el tema de las relaciones entre Psicología Social e ideología así como las existentes entre la investigación social y el ámbito geográfico-político-cultural en que se desarrollan.

SUMMARY

This paper offers the main trends in the development of socio-psychological thought in Hungary during the first half of XX Century.

The sociographic approach (THOMAS) as well as psychoanalytic (FERENCZI), marxist (MOLNAR) and freudo-marxist (JOZSEF), ones have been presented.

It studies too, the reactions in Hungary against the German Social Psychology in the Nazi period (BIBO). The cultural and historical roots of Social Psychology and the relationship between Social Psychology and ideology are considered as a general framework.

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