

## S-OBZOR: The Informal Sociological Journal

To write a review of one of the three sociological journals currently appearing in the Czech Republic means at the same time to present basic information about the other two, because only in this way is it possible to clearly show the journal's specific position within the Czech (and Czechoslovak) sociological tradition, its distinct origin, development, its various functions and targets in other sections of the reading public. The "Sociologický časopis" (Czech Sociological Review) is the oldest, and it can be said that it is the official and most prestigious periodical of the professional sociological community. From the time of its origin in the middle of the 1960s, the Czech Sociological Review tried to follow in the tradition of two Czech independent interwar sociological journals -- Brno's "Sociologická revue" (The Sociological Review) and Prague's "Sociální problémy" (Social Problems).

The second journal, the monthly "Sociologické aktuality" (The Sociological News) appeared during the course of the "velvet revolution" as a more or less specialized periodical, offering a precise, theoretically and empirically stable means of sociological understanding to the wider public and especially to the rapidly politicizing groups in the developing civically aware public. In the course of its further development, The Sociological News became the platform for that portion of the sociological community whose members perceived both the need for sociology to have more systematic and above all more constant contact with the life of the society and the need for a constant expansion and intensification of this contact.

The third sociological journal is "S-obzor" (S-horizon), which first appeared in the spring of 1992. In reality, however, it is older and its founders were authors conceptually tied to the -- in many ways unique -- tradition of samizdat publishing, especially of the illegal sociological quarterly "Sociologický ob-

zor" (The Sociological Horizon), whose publishers were Josef Alan and Miloslav Petrušek and whose tenth roughly 100-page volume appeared in the years 1987-1989. It originated during the perestroika-era crisis of real socialism as the organ of the second generation of Czechoslovak sociologists. These scholars had not directly participated in the renewal of sociology in the first half of the 1960s, but had rapidly begun to further themselves professionally until their careers were violently halted in the process of the so-called "consolidation" after 1968 when, as Miloslav Petrušek wrote, "Czechoslovak sociology survived the Prague Spring institutionally, but in no way professionally." ("The Two Renaissances of Czechoslovak Sociology." S-obzor 1.2 (1992) p.7) The appearance of these sociologists' work in samizdat was not so much a protest against the official, ideologically and theoretically bowdlerized analogue to their own field, although this critical motive certainly played an important role in the "dissident" rehabilitation of the sociological community. It was rather an attempt at drafting, under the prevailing conditions in the country at that time, of a new, wealthier and above all more ambitious paradigm of sociology as critical knowledge of society, which could stand beside the more or less tolerated paradigm of empirical sociology (whose attempts at theoretical extension into the theory of social structure, economic sociology, the sociology of culture and of the city, etc. cannot be undervalued), but above all stand against the ruling, empirically sterile, theoretically dead and doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist sociology.

The building of a new paradigm of "critical sociology" went in two directions, characterized by its orientations toward the sphere of the everyday and toward the interpretive understanding of this sphere. In agreement with Tomáš G. Masaryk's recognition that "facts are more dangerous to every government than the most radical ideas," The Sociological Horizon tried to reveal the everyday experience of the average citizen as

the best corrective to the official, ideologically manipulated picture of reality. No less important, however, was that The Sociological Horizon also tried to legitimate its position theoretically. More directly put, it tried to legitimate itself by means of already attained sociological knowledge and its standards. However, given the concrete conditions and general situation of the times, this often acted selectively, especially in the most substantial subjects of the so-called "critical sociology." Sociological knowledge naturally played a somewhat greater role here than sociological understanding, which manifested itself (and continues to do so today) in the very concept of criticism itself, in its theoretically and not entirely unambiguous foundation. It turns partly in the direction of social reality, and as such is truly a "critical theory," and partly in the direction of the scientific analysis of this reality, becoming rather "sociological sociology" or a "critique of ideology." Even if the journal was as a whole oriented toward educated lay people interested in social, political and ideological problems who wanted to understand them more deeply, it is possible to argue that this stress on the theoretical components of sociological scholarship -- on "sociological thinking," or as C. W. Mills once called it, "the sociological imagination" -- was and continues to be one of the greatest advantages of the journal.

It is perhaps necessary to clarify - by means of a short digression - the relevance of this theoretical claim on Czechoslovak sociology of that time (and in many cases on present day Czech sociology as well). The function, position in society, possibilities, goals and above all the bare existence of sociology as an independent scholarly discipline was for the forty-five year period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia basically dependent on two factors. They did not want to emphasize polemics, but rather to complement the attention paid by Miloslav Petrusek in his already cited article to the "three part massacre" of Czechoslovak sociology in this century -- after the years 1939, 1948 and 1968. It is impossible to overlook the fact that these dates also signify negative caesurae for other

disciplines and that sociology was a fellow victim in the massacres -- notwithstanding differences in individual development -- of philosophy, political science and to at least some extent that of economics.

Sociology's possibilities, like those of the other scholarly disciplines, were primarily dependent on the regime's political interference in the sphere of scholarship, the extent of which varied according to the historical period. All the social sciences, but especially sociology, economics and political science, were systematically ravaged by the philosophic and historical conception of "scientific" socialism, which relied on the conviction that Marxism-Leninism revealed and formulated the laws of society and history and the laws of their functioning and development, such that sociology, political science and especially economic theory were rendered superfluous. Their function, simply put, became to cooperate directly with the Communist Party and its Central Committee. The at base Enlightenment-positivistic illusion that it is possible to tie reason and will, knowledge and action together, that it is possible to unite what is with what should be (meaning uniting *Sein* with *Sollen*), that it is possible to move directly from theory to praxis and from utopia to the present, meant not only the absolute politicization of all spheres of society but was above all the pseudohistorical and pseudoscientific legitimization of the purely ideological claims of the regime on every facet of life. Centralization and the control over social subjects, which changed politics into a mere struggle for power, meant the liquidation of the public sphere and led, fatally, to general and decentralization crises that necessarily deepened at a constant rate.

The utopia of the "new beginning" of 1948 and its absolutism -- as with the majority of revolutions -- began to come into conflict with reality and soon began to exhaust itself. The regime looked for other more subtle organizational instruments and namely new sources of information about real social processes which, from around the time of Nikita Krushchev's rise and criticism of the

so-called "cult of personality", led to the clear rehabilitation of the specialized social sciences -- though they were still contingent and dependent on official Marxist-Leninist doctrine. In Czechoslovakia, where sociology had a comparatively long-standing tradition -- it originated at the end of the nineteenth century and served in an entire set of indisputably important theoretical and practical discussions (see, for example, Tomáš Masaryk's sociological evidence of forgery in the "manuscript controversy") -- these events led to its rehabilitation in the middle of the 1960s, admittedly with relative independence but in the final calculation only one of the "auxiliary sciences" of historical materialism and scientific communism. Sociology's dependence was later reconfirmed in the course of the "consolidation" years of the 1970s and 1980s. All of the above had a significant impact on the conception of the Czech Sociological Review, which was founded in the mid-1960s and represented one of the greatest achievements in the attempt to rehabilitate sociology.

Understandably this specific historical situation made a considerable impact on sociology's self-understanding, its scholarly profile as well as on its own claims, as far as its position and function in society were concerned. The tendency of a great number of Czechoslovak sociologists to understand their discipline as a primarily empirical discipline, and to defend it against ideological interference from the official Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the Communist Party led finally to the confusion of ideological speculation and theory and to a general distrust of theory. It is not possible, however, to understand this empirical tendency exclusively as some kind of delayed reaction to general processes in the "scientific" social sciences, in which an explicit continuing change into "mere" research has been taking place since the end of World War II, with the exception of the "revolutionary" years of the 1960s. It seems to me that the importance of the samizdat Sociological Horizon lies in its attempt to overcome this situational "separation" of the field in the ideological-theoretical subordination

and empirical servitude to the government. Partially through its orientation towards theoretical and analytical problems, but also through its orientation toward the description and critical scrutiny of the particular problems of "real existing socialism," The Sociological Horizon brought into the Czech sociological consciousness many tried and tested theoretical concepts (such as the phenomena of social exclusiveness as a defining trait of the totalitarian system, the conception of this system as a "society of retarded time," "nontriadic" -- that is, the analysis of social structure proceeding outside the categories of workers, peasants, intelligentsia, etc.) The strong "non-scientific" bent of the journal can also be seen in the attention devoted to the sociology of culture and especially the interdisciplinary sociological analysis of literary works which gave an account of the reality of "real socialism."

The journal that Josef Alan and Miloslav Petrusek began to publish once again in 1992 under the shortened name S-horizon followed in the footsteps of The Sociological Horizon, with its humanist values, its identification of problems in the general public and civil society, its methodological openness, its stress on the individual person and its orientation toward the wider reading public. As the editors stressed in the first issue: "in the replacement of the word 'sociological' with the abbreviation 'S-' in the title of the journal it is necessary to note a significant shift: the journal wants to be more open to the non-specialized public and to those voices which no sociologist can perceive as a betrayal of his discipline, to the voices of philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists, etc."

This program, as far as one can judge from the already published issues, is at this time fulfilled rather on the level of ideas. Above all, its circle of authors has not yet stabilized, although the fact that "everyone writes everywhere" cannot be seen a drawback only of S-horizon. The attempt to offer a platform and provide information can in some cases lead to the impression of an ambiguity in viewpoints and obscure differences in assumptions or points of departure. Here I

have in mind a definite lack of equilibrium between theoretical and "interested" (even "personal") writing and between popularized sociology and mere critical journalism. A unifying viewpoint is then created as if incidentally by a certainly necessary and sympathetic spirit of critical reflection, which itself is not able to ensure the equal professional level of individual contributions. Their generally wide thematic differentiation and the use of a variety of genres (in the three issues published so far in two volumes it is possible to count seventeen separate headings) can then lead to a feeling of dispersion.

However, the concrete plusses that S-horizon brings with it are more distinct than these somewhat abstract criticisms. At the present time this does not only concern the already mentioned tendency of "theoretizing" the field. The striving to come to terms with the past critically -- for example in Josef Alan's "Stalin's Heritage" (v.1.1), Miloslav Petrusk's "The Two Renaissances of Czech Sociology" (v.1.2) and finally the interview with Václav Bělohradský, "What About Our Past?" (v.1.1) -- can possibly be viewed as a means for the self-identification of Czech "national sociology," separated from the rest of the world not by its methods but by its themes, by the individual causality of problems it treats. Worthy of note is the general struggle for sociological enlightenment, which is aimed not only at the interpretation of the great sociological conceptions of such luminaries as Max Weber, Marcel Mishan, and Florian Znaniecky and at drawing closer to the themes of social reality denied for so long (such as the still living problem of chicanery), but primarily at the public "sociological laboratory" of the social and political changes of the current era. Here it is necessary to mention the analyses of the social circumstances and consequences of the "lustration law" for the vetting of former communist regime officials. Miloslav Petrusk's "The Lustration Law and Its Illu-

mination by Sociological Theory" (v.1.1) at the same time serves as an instructive example of "sociological theory in action." Also devoted to a theme close to this is the unconventional article with the long title of "Golden Silence, or the Culture of Denunciation as a Complementary but Functional Social Mechanism of Totalitarian Society," written by J. Premusová (v.1.2). For reference, there are also Jiří Kabele's "The Eastern European Change of Coats" (v.2.1), which turns to the controversial question of who is really profiting from the defeat of communism and Fedor Gál's detailed study in the same issue which discusses "The Czechoslovak Political Scene After the Elections of 1992." Gál moves on the border between sociology and political science and offers liberal values, stressing his view of the changes in the Czechoslovak political scene between these last elections and the dissolution of the republic. While it would be possible to continue this resumé of interesting contributions, these few should suffice in presenting the major themes addressed in the pages of S-horizon.

In conclusion, it is perhaps possible to claim that the virtues of S-horizon can easily be seen as its weaknesses. Informality, unconventionality, colorfulness, openness, interestingness, the quality of welcoming educated lay people, etc. can not only slide into the lack of critical definition we have already tried to point out, but more importantly can also bypass demands for "control, oversight and criticism." The editors know very well that these demands are dependent on the unambiguity of viewpoints, on the "putting examiners into their places," on possibilities of oversight and a wide "horizon." This really addresses the fact that even in the view from true heights a perspective asserts itself that unites various lines, closes openness and overlooks plurality.

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