

Observations Concerning Various Problems of Hungarian Sociology  
and Political Psychology \*

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Introductory remarks. I have been working on a study of Hungarian ideology and political psychology as it has developed as a result of the end of the Horthy regency in 1944/45 and the experience of Communist Party rule from 1948 on. It does not include the Party itself, and concentrates on those groups of the non-Party population which are sufficiently represented in 106 open-end interviews with Hungarian refugees forming the chief documentary source for the study.

The interviews were made in the United States and several West European countries during the summer of 1957 with persons who left Hungary during the events of October 1956 or afterwards. They are fairly comprehensive in size and coverage, including discussion of various aspects of practical life in Hungary as well as of some of the more theoretical issues of contemporary political ideology. It is chiefly the last-mentioned section of the material that I have so far been able to evaluate.

A systematic checking of the interview texts against the broader hypotheses I have formed about the subject of my study is still in progress, and the observations and theses I should like to contribute to the present discussion should be understood as reflecting my best judgment on the basis of experience and insight I have gained so far. Their systematic verification may well lead to stricter sociological delimitations for some of the ideological trends I have been able to identify, and to substantially modified interpretation for others.

My study forms part of the program of the Columbia University Research Project on Hungary, but I should like to make it clear that other members of the Project have had no opportunity yet to comment upon the views expressed on these pages, and that for the time being I am speaking entirely for myself.

About the problem of social classes in Hungary, I would say that a definite answer would require a specialized study of the distribution of power, privilege and function, both manifest and latent, which exists in Hungary today, of the ways in which it is restructuring social relations among people, and of the ways in which the classes of the former order have entered into the new system, and my own experience in this regard is restricted to an analysis of the sociological composition of my sample and some general thought I have given to the problem.

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A comparison of life and family histories of persons in the sample has shown not quite the degree of occupational and educational discontinuity that I would have expected, and has led me to ask if the name class struggle which the regime has given to a parcel of primarily political liquidation and intimidation measures following the take-over of 1948 has not helped to confuse the issue and make things appear more tangled and topsy-turvy than they really are. Oppression and harassment of people in all strata certainly does not of itself destroy the stratification structure as such, and we have also to consider the fact that even before 1953, when Nagy took over the government, the regime did not strictly prevent persecuted individuals to return to positions in which their skills could be utilized. It is, no matter what the facts are like, clearly in the interest of a totalitarian regime to maintain a sense of ignorance among the oppressed as well as in the outside world, and a mysticism as to empirical sociological fact which is necessary to ensure smooth maneuvering in the field of official doctrines. Perhaps the term class struggle should be seen in context with the arbitrary handling of social statistics and the arbitrary use of such terms as kulak, worker, or bourgeois, and considered a propagandistic manner of speech covering up, with regard to the structure of stratification, a good deal of factual conservatism.

It is a commonly known fact, for instance, that the regime has after all been quite effective in keeping the lower classes of workers and peasants in their place, adding the declassé segment of former members of the upper bureaucracy who became victims of the takeovers of 1945 or 1948, and detracting some individuals for Party-sponsored careers. From the sample histories it would appear that also some other existing or newly forming classes were actually taken over for the new order along with the Hungarian national economy, with part of their function and consequently their relevance as a potential political factor, their relative living standards, educational privileges or lack of privileges preserved.

This goes of course not for the upper bureaucracy and the groups primarily characterized by property ownership and social rank, but it goes, for instance, for the technical intelligentsia and related professions including even part of the legal one, for certain strata of office and clerical workers, in a way for merchants and business managers who frequently re-appear in corresponding functions in state-owned business outfits, and the lower-class segment of artisans, shopkeepers and small officials. The expropriation of most kinds of property and its appropriation by the state has certainly affected all classes in various ways, but it has changed the allocation of power and nature of the system and its functioning rather than the stratification structure as such. As for the latter, I would expect more decisive changes from a dissolution of the old dividing line between educated elite and uneducated masses which the demands of industrialization and technological development will necessarily enforce in the future.

It will certainly be understood that the preservation of certain stratification features of the old order is not entirely a matter of deliberate policy, but the result of an interaction of policy, economic and social automatisms, and the struggle of individuals and families to maintain themselves in positions somehow resembling their old status.

A re-definition of the concept of social classes, in other words, the question what classes we have in addition to that of which classes we have, seems to be necessary in view of the liquidation or impoverishment of social life in satellite countries leading to the unsocial condition described by Kracauer as "unreal world", and in view of the tendency to integrate the traditional dimensions of economy, society and state into the one monolithic structure which we call the totalitarian state. For an illustration, think of the fact that the storekeepers to whom people went to buy groceries have been replaced by, or have become, agents of the state. Expropriation has substituted direct economic dependency of each class on the state for the direct economic relations between the classes which in a system of private enterprise constitutes society in contradistinction to the state, and since also the dimension of social life to which our concept of social classes is related does not exist as before, we have a system in which we simply cannot expect to find social classes but have to look, as it were, for classes of citizens, and which is not, in a strict sense, a society at all.

As a result of this condition, it is one of the ideological problems for our interviewees, in their thinking about the revolt for instance, that they have no organized Hungarian society to set against the regime, and have to substitute more amorphous thinking schemes such as the nation, the public, or just the people, organized, for the moment, by their common antagonism to the regime. For this reason, they also feel that it is difficult under present circumstances to judge which specific inner political problems Hungary would have had to cope with after liberation through a successful revolt.

As for age groups and generations, it is clear that they assume a greater significance as sociological categories in times of abrupt and rapid social change, and for the Hungarian population this is true both objectively and subjectively. As for the first aspect, there is a characteristic tendency for persons of similar occupational description to be concentrated in certain age brackets, as a result, for instance, of the fact that university students of 1944 had a greater chance to complete their studies and realize their career goals than those who attended the gymnasium at that time and were often unable to gain admission for or finance the university training they had envisaged.

For the development of personality and ideological attitude, the degree of maturity and factual independence reached at the time of the collapse of the old order seems to be a significant factor. Three broad age categories or generations with clearly different political moods exist:

- 1) An older generation of persons who became family-emancipated before 1945 and had their own position in occupational life at the time political systems changed.
- 2) A middle generation for whom the historical break coincided with the period of their own breaking away from their families, and for whom the old order is strongly associated with their parents and family environment. Lower classes, without the period of prolonged education and juvenility, are absent from this group, and it consists mainly of gymnasium and university students, and of servicemen drafted during the war years.

- 3) Young people who grew up under parents who went through the change of systems, and are now of around 20 years of age.

The common denominator one could give for the mentality of the first of these generations is that they judge things more or less pragmatically, except when it so happens that principles are discussed. The fact that practical apprehensions concerning preservation of position and career must have conditioned their initial outlook on the new order, the presence of many persons without higher education, and general rules of personality development account for this attitude. The middle generation was more eager to experience the advent of a new order as a liberating event, overthrowing social conventions and family authority alike. In their case, the regime is hated chiefly for having forsaken the liberal and progressive ideas which the new order of things originally promised to realize. They are particularly sensitive to the restriction of liberties, are relatively ~~and have a~~ personal misfortunes, and judge more from an intellectual or poetic point of view. Where a dogmatic Marxism was adopted to provide a sub-structure for liberal principles, disillusionment was a rather shaking experience. The mentality of the young group, around 20, is puzzling and most difficult to describe. It is indeed more pragmatic than that of the older group and characterized by a certain caution, reserve, and a withdrawn and uncommunicative air which I would be inclined to understand as protective and a reaction, as it were, to a world which they find puzzling and difficult to comprehend. The conflict of two standards of judgment, namely the social ethical code asserted by the family and the code of socialist ethics asserted by the state, left them without the experience of anything authentic, and created the relativism and sense of living in a world entirely made up of conventions which I have tried to ~~describe~~ indicate.

About the role of religion. One of the things resented most about the regime and an aspect of totalitarianism to which people seem to be particularly sensitive is the claim laid by the Party on spiritual leadership in unity with its political role. They somehow accept it as inevitable that they are governed by politicians and bureaucrats but definitely refuse that they should need to be taught by them about truth, morality, and the principles of life and society. All statements related to the subject of religion and the relation of church and state are strongly colored and conditioned by this sentiment. On the other hand -- here I can speak only of Catholics because I have not yet been able to study Protestant and Jewish interviewees specifically -- there are only few individuals, either of rural origin or conservative-minded declassés, for whom church doctrines pertaining to or implying political or social matters or questions of practical ethics -- say abortion -- carried much authority. Even for seriously religious ones it is more the sacraments they expect from the church, and not so much teachings. A substantial number have continued to attend church under the regime, some out of habit or just conforming, like many of the young people, some more or less to spite the regime, and some out of conviction or personal need.

Among the last-mentioned group, two types are standing out, one motivated by present conditions to seek religion, either for a certain mental support or, which is particularly frequent among engineers, artists and other privileged groups, to provide a sense of personal integrity and non-identification with the Party. The other, more frequent among the declassified intelligentsia, is motivated by the past and, in attitude, defensive, battling Communism as an anti-dogma and

threat to his own faith. To illustrate the contrast, one might say that the latter type is against the official school program because it tries to spread Communism and threatens the soul, whereas the first would be against it because it wastes school hours on useless subjects, and serves purposes of political control rather than the needs of society.

Generally speaking, a person's religion does not appear as an independent psychological factor and depends for its psychological and ideological meaning on the whole of social situation and personality. A certain brand of irreligiousness for instance, which is typical of families of socially frustrated position and appears as a kind of strained self-assertion, goes with a less than usual degree of common sense and tolerance; whereas freethinkers brought up by liberal-minded parents of the well-to-do middle class are actually those who among all the interviewees I could study were most composed and best equipped for preserving judgment and consistency under the many ideological and practical stresses of life under the regime, owing, perhaps, to a lack of susceptibility for the red cloth of Communist doctrine which seems to save a good measure of distraction and emotional expense. However, the kind of education seems more important in determining these structures than religious views adopted in later life.

Opinion of Hungarians about the economic and social system. In ideas about the economic, social and political forms of life which should be developed in Hungary after a liberation from dictatorship, I found a high degree of congruence among the different groups of my sample of interviewees, and it is therefore possible to give a brief sketch of the substance of common opinion on some of the chief topics. Missing in my picture, however, are the industrial working class which exists in some geographical areas of Hungary, and the peasants, and it might easily be that exactly these groups ~~could~~ not fall in with the rest.

The general formula for what I found is opinion following and widening the liberalization trend of the New Course, and not touching, that is to say, wishing to preserve, the core of the present economic structure. About the hierarchy of social stratification, it tends to be evasive, partly because of the problems of inter-class relations are for the time being superseded by the antagonism between the nation and the regime. The general attitude concerning state-planned economy could be described as: yes, in the sense that investment and production in key industries should be planned and controlled by the state; no, if it means the system of production quotas and similar impositions on work and consumption.

But if this ideology is basically socialist, it must be understood that it is not one of programmatic socialism but one characterized by the fact that it wishes to preserve certain institutional features which are already in existence. It has no quarrel, as it is not of a principled nature, with systems existing in countries other than Hungary. Furthermore, and most important to note, it is rooted in a stability-minded type of middle-class thinking. It would be the role of the state — which should be controlled by democratic processes — to relieve individuals from the stresses and hazards of free economic competition, and to maintain a certain socio-economic status for all by preventing people from either getting too poor or too rich. The American system of progressive income tax is frequently mentioned and seems to enjoy a surprising popularity.

The fact that private ownership in industry appears acceptable only for factories of limited size in the field of light industry is explained by two circumstances. There are virtually no Hungarians who could hope to have the capital that would enable them to go into business for themselves as industrial entrepreneurs, and if they have to be employed, say as an engineer or an office worker, it makes little difference to them if it is private- or state-owned business they work for, if the state, as an impersonal entity, is not actually preferred. It is in fact *industry* impersonality of the state, its control by an identified group of people, which made the regime hated, and the few people who do not want to admit state-ownership find substitutes of an impersonal nature similar to that of the state, and would say, for example, that American capital should take over the Hungarian economy — which for a Hungarian is of course something even more remote and abstract than the state. The second reason to make state-ownership appear as the natural solution is that former owners are no longer felt to be the rightful owners of plants which have become enlarged, developed, and increased in value since they were confiscated, and entitled only to a compensation corresponding to the original value taken over by the state.

While it is common language among the interviewees to blame the Party for not living up to its own Marxist philosophy, I found only one, a Party member and cultural instructor in the army who became an active fighter in the revolt, who attacked the regime on the grounds that it prevented the means of production from becoming the property of the people, and whom the lacking inclination of the state to wither away leads to envisage a system of private ownership in which factories would be held by stock companies controlled by the workers. This is not, by the way, a case where the doctrine of the regime turns against the regime, but represents conflict with an older strain of Communist thinking which this man evidently has inherited from his father, a worker and veteran of the movement. For the sample majority, the participation of workers in the management of factories would be limited to the objects of usual collective bargaining, and sometimes solutions similar to the West German form of co-determination are proposed.

My material suggests, but does not allow to assert, the existence of two areas of social conflict in Hungary. Workers might demand a greater role than that which non-workers would want to give them, and the urban population, from the standpoint of rationality and economy, is generally in favor of collective farming, while peasants, to judge from the persons in my sample who are related to peasant families, are strongly motivated by the wish for individual land possession.

A question which the state-oriented thinking raises in my mind, finally, is how it affects people living in Hungary itself, with a state which they must experience as alien and hostile, and to what extent it characterizes tension between the populace and the regime.