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## SOVIET SOCIOLOGY IN THE BALTIC AREA

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### I. The Fourth Dimension

To discuss any scientific discipline cultivated in the Soviet Union is to encounter perplexity for many reasons. In general, to acquire knowledge of any alien society or culture is not easy; even more so when the society is intentionally closed and takes special measures to hide reality or to misrepresent it. Any deeper or fundamental research under those circumstances requires a special approach or measurement which I, having no pretenses at originality, call the fourth dimension.

There are three measurements used by all nationalities or tribes with more or less generally accepted goals and means when they define their situations. All earthly inhabitants take for granted that any object (a geometric figure, a house, an animal, etc.) can be measured according to its height, width and depth. (Martians, if they exist, may have other kinds of measurements.) It is true that to fully understand human beings the above-mentioned physical measurements may not be sufficient, even though useful. Then, for instance, the professional may be defined according to four other elements: special education, experience (by practice in the field), and the code of ethics. These elements may increase or decrease according to need, but in any case these or similar elements are elementary, i.e., self-evident, customary, more or less stable, and even when changing do not deviate too much from traditional habits, and do not require much effort in recognizing and using them. In order to be able to communicate meaningfully and to exist, these dimensions are usually sufficient in our daily interpersonal and often in international relationships. But nationalities have also other specific culture patterns which one cannot see with the "naked eye". Therefore they could be detected and measured only by the fourth dimension.

Let us imagine an educational auditorium where an instructor is teaching his or her class. It is easy to notice and check three measurements: the instructor obviously has a higher education degree, is dexterous in transmitting knowledge or clarifying problems in the situation, and does not misuse his or her position, rights or privileges. But these measurements may mislead an outsider who, for instance, accidentally landed as an observer in the auditorium during the period of the Nazi rule in Germany. The above-mentioned qualifications of the instructor may be of only subsidiary help. The most important element, which could not be measured by our popular dimensions, is the "blood" of the instructor. That "blood" may be considered good or bad according to the race of the instructor. This subtle differentiation between the "types of blood" can be understood only by the fourth dimension.

Similarly, in the Soviet situation, the usual qualifications of the instructor are of second rank, if not tenth rank importance. Here, too, the "type of blood" of the instructor finally defines the situation. Though paradox, the "type of blood" appears to be inherited from one generation to the other. If the father had "bad blood", i.e., was denounced as "an enemy of the people", for no matter what reason ("the party that assigned the label is infallible!"), then his son is also considered "an enemy of the people." The authorities suddenly forget that the son in question has lived all his life in "proper" Soviet society (according to "production modes and relationships"). While officially rejecting Nazi social-racial theory, Soviet Marxism resurrects the same theory in the name of the "enemies of the people." And the fate of the son is sealed. As we see, the deeper meaning of the Soviet society is revealed only through the fourth dimension.

An outsider, alien or tourist often does not even know there is such a thing as the fourth dimension because he does not have any experience in an exclusively new, drastic, or exotic situation. Therefore, often even a very neutral and supposedly objective researcher with the best intentions may give in to the so-called fifty-fifty fallacy and be misled in the

name of science. Such a researcher scrupulously adheres to the balanced use of the material taking on half of the data from communist sources and the other half from non-communist writings. And if the former sources hide the truth and the latter do not use the fourth dimension the results of the study may be disastrous.

The acquisition of the fourth dimension is basically possible by the involuntary citizen's long-term experience of the closed society which, in our case, is the Soviet Union. We notice that even the second generation Americans (the children of the immigrants) lacking the experience of their parents show knowledge gaps in their studies of "culture at a distance," i.e., their parents' country.

Not pretending to be infallible I can still state with great certainty that it is safer to rely on the scientists with the fourth dimension than on those who make only elementary measurements, since the possible bias of the former is less than that of the latter.

## II. Normal Western Illusions

It is natural to behave "naturally," i.e., to define the situation in three-dimensional terms. Such are the usual Western scientists. Of the almost innumerable members of this club I will present only one case, Professor David Lane. In an article "Ideology and Sociology in the U.S.S.R." published in a reputable journal he affirms that In company with development of sociology in Western societies, the role of Marxism as a radical critique of industrial society has been replaced by a pragmatic approach to social problems.<sup>1</sup>

(Academician Nemchimov's conception) has set the tone for the Soviet sociological as distinct from philosophical profession. Sociological research was first tacked on to institutes of philosophy in the U.S.S.R. until 1968 when a sociological institute in the Academy of Sciences was set up.<sup>2</sup>

The awareness and rejection of the scholasticism engendered by macro-theory of the dogmatic Marxist kind is most important advance, for it opens the door to sociology as a scientific discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Lane, like the typical Western scientist, measures Soviet words with Western meanings and, noticing a new label stuck to sociology, believes that sociology is science in the Soviet Union. Pardon my irony. With this type of logic Professor Lane had to believe in magic: just stick a new label on the bottle of sour vodka, and it turns into sparkling champagne.

This phenomenon may account for the obvious fact that there are many more Marxists in the West than in the East. Its practical consequences may lead many diplomats into great blunders in international relationships. And here, in our own backyard, Americans of Baltic extraction may suffer undeserved consequences when the Soviet KGB "evidence" meets the needs of the three-dimensional OSI (Office of Special Investigation) in the so-called war criminal cases.

The method of this study is content analysis. The Soviet sources pertaining to sociology are analyzed directly or, when necessary, with some help from the fourth dimension. (The author has lived in two closed societies, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.) The most revealing book on the subject is S.J. Popov's *Kritika sovremenoj burzhuaznoj sotsiologii* ("The Critique of the Contemporary Bourgeois Sociology") published in Russian in two editions, 1967 and 1970; it was translated into Lithuanian in 1969. I compared the original and translation and found exact equivalence. Here, I will quote from the translation for my convenience and because I think it is more appropriate for the Baltic area students in this type of journal.

## III. Patterns of Style

The first thing that surprises or shocks the Western educated man who is used to precision, topicality, technicality, accuracy, objectivity, and value-neutrality, is the vocabulary and the forms of expression in supposedly scientific Soviet writing. I will now quote extensively from Popov's work.

K. Marx and F. Engels "chased idealism from its last shelter"<sup>4</sup> "Contemporary bourgeois social thought is of poor content since its main task is not to investigate social life objectively but to distort it."<sup>5</sup> "Western sociology is 'blossomless' ".<sup>6</sup> "Every bourgeois social theory is a parasite distorting any possibly important question of contemporary social life."<sup>7</sup> "Logical consistency and precision in thinking is not a virtue of which contemporary bourgeois sociologists may boast."<sup>8</sup> Geopolitics is "one of the worst reactionary ideological concepts, which tries to form a basis for predatory imperialist politics, the official dogma of Hitlerism..."<sup>9</sup> "...is vigorously cultivated in the United States of America after World War II."<sup>10</sup> Public opinion research seeks "to hide underground blows of people's indignation."<sup>11</sup> "In their studies there is rich and factual material which unmasks the myth of 'folkish' and 'humanist' character of the bourgeois social structure."<sup>12</sup> The

meaning of the theory of unified industrial society is "the discreditation of socialism and an attempt to prove that there is no need to crush the rotten capitalist structure."[13](#) "Not faceless 'technical demon' or 'scientific demon' but very concrete and clear monopolistic capitalism threatens security on earth!"[14](#) "Bourgeois sociologists" "build various pseudo-theoretical surrogates in place of the theory of the Marxist-Leninist class and class struggle."[15](#) "Crawling empiricism."[16](#) To finish the sample I present a longer quote which crowns the whole concoction:

Most reactionary bourgeois sociologists cry for help for sicknesses, wars, bless nuclear and bacteriological weapons which allegedly can make equity between the hungry mouths and food production resources.[17](#)

The Western sociologist standing in front of this mirror made in the Soviet Union, presented by Popov, will not recognize his discipline: one hardly finds a scientist who considers this type of vocabulary and patterns of style fitting scientific investigation.

## IV. Falsifications

Popov tells us that A. Comte

was not the founder of sociology as bourgeois sociologists sometimes affirm, but the originator of positivism and the positivistic tendency in sociology.[18](#)

Actually, Western sociologists consider A. Comte the founder of sociology not sometimes, but all the time. He is not accepted by Popov because the latter obviously needs an empty chair for Marx. With the same purpose Popov "postpones" the invention of the term sociology to the middle of the century though actually it was used for the first time in the early twenties of the last century.

One of the most unscrupulous frauds perpetrated by Popov refers to T.R. Malthus' contribution to the science of demography:

Malthus cynically affirmed that all ways which help to decrease the abundance of population, including wars, famine and sicknesses are good.[19](#)

Popov asserts that the Western psychologistic school "recognizes personality psychology as the only reality." To prove his point, Popov leans on A. Inkeles, but quotes him in part only:

As American sociologist A. Inkeles writes, the true sociological analysis of many problems will be impossible or entirely inadequate until we start to practically use psychological theory and psychological data in conjunction with sociological theory and sociological data. Indeed, I affirm that hardly a single important sociological analysis has ever been done without implicitly using psychological theory."[20](#)

As a matter of fact, A. Inkeles wrote quite differently, as follows:

I have argued that sociological analysis the attempt to understand the structure and functioning of social systems will often require the use of general theory of personality and knowledge of the distinctive personality characteristics of participation in the system as a whole or in major subsystems and in particular roles.[21](#)

Although Popov omits it, further in the same place Inkeles warns the reader:

To many this may at once suggest that I am proposing a 'reduction' of sociological analysis to the presumably more basic level of psychological analysis. I am by no means implying or suggesting this course of action. What is at issue here is not the reduction of one discipline to another but the articulation of the two for certain specific conditions.[22](#)

By inventing "even a least important sociological analysis" and by omission of "often" and the rest of the quote from Inkeles' writing, Popov succeeds in turning Inkeles' positive meaning into a negative one. Similarly Popov deals with S.M. Lipset,

Bourgeois sociologists certify that all systems of stratification in a society act as a source of discontent among those who are lowly placed...[23](#)

Actually Lipset writes "in general the system" instead of "all systems" and fully elaborates his ideas, namely:

Mechanisms of social stratification are probably located somewhere between these extremes, being the source of cleavage on the one hand, but also playing a major integrating function. The organization of working-class groups into trade unions or labor party, for example, both creates a mechanism for the expression of conflict and, perhaps even more important, integrates the workers into the body politic by giving them a legitimate means of obtaining their wants.[24](#)

One may easily notice that the unfinished quote sounds like a genuine part of Marxism, but the complete quote annihilates it all.

In another place Popov tells us that in his book faces *in the Crowd*,

D. Riesman admits that the most important purpose of concrete sociological research executed in the United States is to establish men's 'thought control', their behavior and character control.[25](#)

Actually the only reference to what Popov calls "thought control" (if it is not a Freudian slip about Popov's own system) is found in a footnote:

American intellectuals, having had little influence to bring about such change as nationalization, could speculate to the point of making the discovery that our techniques of social and economic manipulation make such a device as nationalization obsolete.[26](#)

But aren't these paragraphs as different as day and night? Popov criticizes Western structural-functional school for its alleged notion of "social organism", namely:

The partisans of this theory use the antiscientific ideas of Spencer who identifies human society with a biological organism.[27](#)

It is obvious that Popov is ignorant of the fact that Spencer's concept of organic society was faulted by E. Durkheim before Popov was born, and the functional school has not used the term "organism"; instead of it, functionalists have the term "system."

The examples of Popov's distortion and fraud can be multiplied many times. Indeed, I challenge the readers of Popov's *Critique* to find a single page without the above faults. In short, Popov does not fight with Western sociologists but with his own bogey-men.

## V. Formal Soviet Sociology

K Marx and F. Engels are considered the "genuine parents of scientific sociology" in the Soviet Union. Popov leans on Lenin, the perpetual authority, by quoting him:

Before Marx and Engels it was hard for sociologists to distinguish between important and unimportant social phenomena in the matrix of complex phenomena of society: they were not versed in finding an objective criterion for such distinction, and that rooted subjectivism in sociology. After investigating production relationships as the structure of society Marx and Engels found an entirely objective criterion.[28](#)

Popov also affirms that "it is not possible to separate sociology from philosophy."[29](#)

"Genuine scientific sociology" which is not possible to separate from philosophy may be "good Marxism" made in the Soviet Union but it is a contradiction in terms according to the Western modes of cognition and knowledge. The latter call that type of communication an Aesopian language and newspeak (coined by George Orwell); the language that confuses more than it explains.

Granted that, at their time, the founders of Marxism had important insight about special groups' influence on the individual, but after one hundred years that partial truth carried to extremes has become anachronistic. And the petrified Soviet social philosophy now plays the role of an outdated "survival" whose more appropriate place should be in a museum. However, its consequences are never ceasing. Thus, what Marx and Engels said about the society of the family one hundred years ago is considered the infallible truth for the present and the future, and is termed as objective knowledge. And conversely, what Western sociologists or anthropologists discovered about the same topics in their field work research must be false and should be considered subjective knowledge. Accordingly, Popov rejects without any proof the power of Western labor unions, the changes resulting from the management revolution, the persistence of the middle class, a democratic process where cleavages between social classes may decrease, etc.

Instead of concrete proofs that Soviet social thought is true and well functioning one finds only glittering generalities about "social justice," "equality," "freedom from exploitation," "the friendship of nations," etc., *ad infinitum*. And nobody could check which or all of the conflicting numbers or percentages allegedly supporting those generalities are false or true. The following quote is the most characteristic to this point:

These conclusions are supported by the best grounded and broadest empirical investigation' that has ever been carried out in history, i.e., the practice of the new formation of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.[30](#)

To a person who has some knowledge of conditions under the Soviet rule this sounds like abracadabra. Actually, that "practice of the new formation" has meant a cruel toll of tens of millions of captive human victims (some estimates top 80 million) and could be considered as the greatest disaster in terms of human rights, freedom, civility, happiness and the like. Such is the evidence of other millions of people who had been guinea pigs in that "broadest" experiment and somehow survived it. This is the knowledge gained with the fourth dimension, sealed with their own blood.

As it is to be expected, Popov has to be followed by other non-Russian nationality scientists. Therefore in Lithuania, the scientific candidate Romualdas Grigas does not deviate from the official dogma in his article on sociology "Sociologija šiandien: uždaviniai ir problemas" ('Sociology Today: Tasks and Problems'). In his review of elementary sociological concepts like peer groups, formal and informal interpersonal relationships, etc., the usual textbook stuff, he necessarily deplores the "penetration of alien bourgeois culture and ideological elements" into his country.<sup>31</sup> Also, he has to quote the hackneyed phrase of Lenin that "there is nothing more practical than a good theory"<sup>32</sup> and repeat what "comrade" L. Brezhnev said about the need to "creatively analyze theory" in the last party conference.<sup>33</sup>

The whole article by Grigas is full of generalities. However, the reader may unravel two almost contradictory ideas in it. On the one hand, Soviet sociology has allegedly the true theory, which is Marxist; on the other, it lacks...theory for practical purposes. And we may add: it could not be otherwise. The research done by Soviet applied sociologists is generally poor because nobody dares to question the basic tenets of Marxism.

To conclude, in place of sociology Soviet scientists continuously use the programmed ritualistic phrases of Marx and Lenin. What Soviet scientists call sociology in the Soviet Union is ideology-at best, and propaganda where the big lie assumes the dominant position - at worst.

## VI. The Sociology of Sociology

We have reviewed the basic notions of the official Soviet sociology, which is valid in the Baltic area as well as in other communist-dominated parts of the Soviet Union. Now we shall consider the deeper meaning of validity. As much as this type of sociology (i.e., Marxist) is enforced in all pertinent institutes such as economics, politics, law and sociology, it is valid. Formal deviation is not possible. But in the West scientists openly question their own positions. That leads us to informal sociology, or the sociology of sociology. This type of sociology would study, for instance, the real power of "primary organization," i.e., a party group or a security police clique, but not according to the picture the party makes for itself. To do that is tabu, and the party would deem it state treason. Actually, this type of study might support or reject the tenets of Marxism.

For the same purposes we might study Soviet sociologists themselves along these lines: do they really believe what they preach, and to what extent?

Here my knowledge is limited. But I hope another researcher with more complete mastery of the fourth dimension may test the following fivefold hypothesis of the sociology of Soviet sociologists:

1. It is possible that the Soviet sociologist perceives Marxist social philosophy as the final revelation of truth, therefore he embraces it as religion and by all means defends it from real and imaginary enemies; the contrary facts of reality would not bother him.
2. It is possible that the Soviet sociologist is so used to the Marxist-Leninist jargon that he feels like a fish in water with it; he does not discriminate between different situations and uses dogmatic clichés without ever scrutinizing them.
3. It is possible that the Soviet sociologist knows too well his reality and his government, which as they say, lacquers that reality, but he believes that every government practices fraud and exploits its subjects. Thus, he projects the vices of his society — "dictatorship," "imperialism," "people's exploitation," "fear of underground indignation/" "thought control/," etc., — into a Western society, as if redeeming his society's sins. He is like a respondent to the Rorschach inkblot test unwittingly disclosing His "collectivistic" personality.
4. It is possible that the Soviet sociologist knows too well his reality and writes not what he sees and feels but what he is expected to write. He lies and he is conscious of it since it pays off to lie there. He sticks with the power at the expense of truth. Anyway, it is a dead end street. And if he dared to write truth, he would not have a second chance to repeat it. (In Stalin's era he would simply disappear; nowadays he might be sent for treatment in a psychiatric hospital.)
5. It is possible that the Soviet sociologist knows his reality too well and writes according to the expectations of those in power. The only difference between #4 and #5 is that the latter exaggerates the described situation so much that the sophisticated reader would not miss a special meaning. Here the ambivalence of the "newspeak" is a great weapon allowing creative cheating of the censor and, at the same time, pacifying the conscience of the sociologist, at least in part. And the accomplished feat allows both the writer and the reader to laugh at the expense of those in power since both understand that the king is naked.

I think that these five types of scientists exhaust the gamut of the main adaptations between personal preferences and regime's requirements in the closed (totalitarian) system. May I venture a guess that the number of type 1 and 2 is the

smallest and that the number of type 4, the largest. By the way, many scientists may not represent "pure" types but would show a mixture of some features of other types.

## VII. Brief Conclusions

Soviet scientists, like other representatives of many sensitive professions, do not have a great choice. But the worst part of their situation is that they cannot avoid a choice. I hope that the majority of the captive people — workers, technical employees and others — have more chances to stay aloof and publicly noncommitted. But those who dare to publicly reject all five modes of adaptation and do not hide their traditional humaneness can hardly stop half way. Their further destination is the limbo of martyrs. The analysis of Soviet sociology, as mentioned before, should not be thought to relate to one field of knowledge only. The exemplified modes of adaptation are the bread and butter of Soviet daily life. In turn they breed personal alienation and social anomie. However, this should be a topic for another study.

- 1 Lane, David, "Ideology and Sociology in the U.S.S.R.," *The British Journal of Sociology*, March, 1970, p. 43.
- 2 Ibid., p. 47.
- 3 Ibid., p. 49.
- 4 Popovas, S., *Šiuolaikinės buržuazinės sociologijos kritika*, Vilnius: Mintis, 1969, p. 3.
- 5 Ibid., p. 5.
- 6 Ibid., p. 6.
- 7 Ibid., p. 6.
- 8 Ibid., p. 6.
- 9 Ibid., p. 9.
- 10 Ibid., p. 9.
- 11 Ibid., p. 16.
- 12 Ibid., p. 18.
- 13 Ibid., p. 33.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
- 15 Ibid., p. 49.
- 16 Ibid., p. 71.
- 17 Ibid., p. 64.
- 18 Ibid., p. 3.
- 19 Ibid., p. 62.
- 20 Ibid., p. 11.
- 21 Inkeles, A., "Personality and Social Structure," in R.K. Merton, et al., ed., *Sociology Today*, New York, Basic Books, 1959, p. 272.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Popovas, op. cit., p. 80.
- 24 Lipset, S.M., "Political Sociology," in R.K. Merton, et al., ed., *Sociology Today*, New York, Basic Books, 1959, p. 111.
- 25 Popovas, op. cit., p. 16.
- 26 Riesman, D., *faces in the Crowd*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965, p. 40, footnote #7.
- 27 Popovas, op. cit., p. 24.
- 28 Ibid., p. 48.
- 29 Ibid., p. 13.
- 30 Ibid., p. 55.
- 31 Grigas, Romualdas, "Sociologija šiandien: uždaviniai ir problemos," *Mokslas ir gyvenimas*, 1976, No. 8, p. 2.
- 32 Ibid., p. 3.
- 33 Ibid., p. 2.