

## PROFESSOR INOCENC ARNOŠT BLÁHA

Born on 16th July, 1879 — Died on 25th April, 1960

The life and work of the outstanding Czech sociologist I. A. Bláha is closely connected with the development of the Czech society in the first half of the 20th C. He was born in Krasoňov in Bohemia in a period which opens the economic, social, political and cultural development of our nation. True to T. G. Masaryk's activism, Bláha always endeavoured to contribute to the progress of his nation by actively reacting to its problems in his scientific, publicistic, educational, organizational and even political efforts.

Like many other leading personalities of our national history he came from a village teacher's family. In 1897 I. Arnošt Bláha finished his grammar school studies and entered the Roman-Catholic Seminary in Hradec Králové to become a priest. But after two years he was expelled on account of his adherence to the progressive movement of "modern catholicism" which sought for a revision of the Church system of dogmas. As he could not become a priest he decided to become a teacher. He spent the years 1899 to 1903 studying successively at the Universities of Vienna, Prague, Paris, and Prague again. Later on, in 1908—1909 I. A. Bláha spent further two terms in Paris, this time studying also at the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* and *Collège Libre des Sciences Sociales*.

The most intensive influence exerted upon I. A. Bláha came from the part of T. G. Masaryk, who won him over for sociology and influenced his epistemology and his conception of social phenomena. Bláha was also under the influence of Emile Durkheim and, especially in his ethics, of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Masaryk's ideas helped him to overcome his French teachers' ontological and, consequently, methodological, objectivism by his stress on the active role of the individual in social life. This fundamental conception which evades the extremes of both sociological objectivism and subjectivism is termed in Czech sociology as critical realism. It is the attitude manifested in Bláha's empirical researches, in which he used — besides objective techniques — the technique of "social introspection".

Among the first generation of Czech sociologists Bláha occupies a special place because of his pioneering role in a systematic investigation of the Czech society. He started it when teaching at the grammar-school of a small Moravian town of Nové Město na Moravě and his habilitation thesis is based upon it (*Město. Studie sociologická — The Town. A Sociological Study*. Prague 1914).

In 1918 Bláha attained "*veniam docendi*" in sociology at the Technical College in Brno, but the Austrian government refused to accredit him on political

grounds. His appointment took place later on in the newly arisen Czechoslovak Republic (1918). In 1919 Bláha became lecturer in sociology at the Philosophical Faculty of the newly founded Masaryk University in Brno, in 1922 he was appointed Professor of sociology and the head of the Sociological Department (Seminar).

Before writing his *Sociologie*, which appeared posthumously in 1968. Bláha had concentrated his efforts on the investigation of all fundamental categories of society laying always a special emphasis on the problems of the day and of his mother country. He wrote on sociology of the town, the nation, the peasant, the worker, the people, the family, the intelligentsia; of morality, of education, of adult education; of childhood, of the youth, of feminism. His studies were published either as books or appeared as articles in many Czech and foreign sociological journals (American, French, German, Polish). In this way, in a constant close contact with social reality, he elaborated his sociological conception and system which he expounded in his *Sociologie* and called *federative functionalism*. His system is, by far, not so formal as the much later published system of T. Parsons; in it much greater emphasis is laid on the activity of the individual than in other structuralist conceptions. It is a dynamic system giving space for social change.

As a university teacher Bláha educated several generations of sociologists and had influence upon many other sociologists, among them even Marxists, for his conception approaches Marx's views in many respects. Accordingly, we can speak of Bláha's Sociological School, whose members are also represented in this volume.

In 1930 Bláha founded, and became editor-in-chief of, the review *Sociologická revue* (it appeared in 1930—1939 and in 1946—1949). Round his review he succeeded to gather the majority of Czech and Slovak sociologists. He himself wrote contributions to Durkheim's *Revue internationale de sociologie* and was a member of the board of editors of G. Gurvitch's *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*. After World War II he took an active part in helping to frame several actions of UNESCO.

Besides his scientific and pedagogic work Bláha was also active in adult education and in cultural politics. In both ways he deeply affected our social life in the sense of a humanistic programme of the Socialistic Left.

Neither in life nor in work did Professor Bláha belong to those intellectuals to whom refer Julien Benda's accusations in his "*La trahison des clercs*". On the contrary, in both his life and work Professor Bláha always sought to defend ethical ideals of the importance of which — even for our modern mass society — he was convinced. It is only to be pitied that he did not live long enough to see the revival of sociology and of humanistic ideals in his country.

*Jan Macků*