

Macků, Jan

## Progressive traditions of the Czech sociology

*Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. G, Řada sociálněvědná.* 1966, vol. 15, iss. G10, pp. [7]-16

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/111829>

Access Date: 08. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.



JAN MACKŮ

## PROGRESSIVE TRADITIONS OF THE CZECH SOCIOLOGY

At the present time, when the work in the branch of sociology has been renewed at our universities and institutes, it is proper to remind ourselves of the history of this empiric and theoretic science in our country.<sup>1</sup> This seems desirable, among other reasons, because of the fact that there is no science in any country to develop regardless either of the development of the particular scientific discipline on a world scale or of its results in the respective country.

As to the history of Czechoslovak sociology itself, we may assert that it attained an international standard and was appreciated in foreign literature.<sup>2</sup> That is why our present sociology faces the task of resuming its progressive home traditions. To resume traditions, to acknowledge their validity in any science, consequently also in sociology, means, however, the necessity of realizing in which problems it is indispensable to exceed the traditions, which solutions it is possible and urgent to *surpass*.<sup>3</sup>

The problematics of the history of our sociology is of a rather wide range and heterogeneity. For this reason we shall merely concentrate on some questions concerning the relation of the present-day Marxist sociology and our former non-Marxist sociology in this paper, and on such sociologists whose work can be resumed with qualification and carried on at present.

### I

The relation of our contemporary sociology and its Czechoslovak sociological tradition should be tackled from two standpoints of view:

1. From the standpoint of the *relation of Marxist sociology to non-Marxist sociology*.

2. From the standpoint of the *long cultural interruption* caused by the Second World War, as well as by the subsequent so-called personality cult period.<sup>4</sup>

The question of the mutual relationship of Marxist and non-Marxist sociology may be seriously dealt with only at the present day when the dogmatic sectarian prejudices are being gradually overcome and when the positive aspects of the cultural heritage are being accepted in the spirit of creative Marxism.

When evaluating our culture we must not start with simplified criteria, as it used to be the case in rather recent years. Neither the question of the relationship of idealism and materialism nor the connection of individual scientists' political affiliations with their theoretical work, should be simplified.

Let us illustrate this problem by means of the work of our pre-war sociologists.

In 1926, Jan *Dušek* published an extensive *Sociology*<sup>5</sup> in Prague. His epistemological platform was materialist monism, he referred to Darwin, Haeckel, of the sociologists primarily to Spencer, then to Gumpłowicz and to others. As a motto to his work he used the quotation "Sociologus nemo nisi biologus". Though we might think some of his ideas ridiculous, we cannot fail to see the rough reductionist tendency<sup>6</sup> originating racial theories in sociology, the Nazi geopolitics etc. Vulgar materialism, as well as naïve realism, can manifest themselves in equally detrimental political theories as some most outspoken idealism.

Let us mention the work of *Bedřich Vašek* as an example of an extreme idealism. *Bedřich Vašek*, professor of sociology at the Theoretical Institute at Olomouč, combines in his *Sociology*<sup>7</sup> — epistemologically, as he says himself — two sources: 1. the observation of social life, and 2. divine revelation. His work contains, basically, the doctrine of the Catholic Church. It is a theological sociology.

In both quoted examples extra-social principles and conceptions are applied to social phenomena. Both cases point out the danger of one-sided deductive approaches when building sociological systems.

When reconsidering our sociology during the period between the two World Wars, we must not, however, set a sign of equality between the significance of the works of individual sociologists and their adherence to political parties.

An example illustrating the necessity of differentiating among sociologists organized in one political party is offered by the rural sociology which used to be supported by the former agrarian party.

At the impulse of Dr. *Milan Hodža*, a sociological department was founded at the Czechoslovak Agricultural Academy publishing relatively very conservative works, such as "Filosofie selství" (The Philosophy of Farmerhood) by *Holeček* on the one hand, but, on the other hand, some very valuable sociological results which can be made use of by our present rural sociology.<sup>8</sup>

The next problem, i.e. that of the long *break in the development* of our sociology, is a serious one, as well. As a matter of fact, that break had started as early as the period of Munich and lasted till the liberation of our Republic in 1945. The closing down of Czechoslovak universities and the interruption of all connections with abroad had unfavourable consequences for the further development of our sociology.

The relatively short interval of 1945—1949 was not long enough to overcome the war-time interruption to the full. Though the "Sociological Review" brought reviews of sociological work in the United States, France, Poland and other countries during World War II, it was not possible to get acquainted with the complete development of the science of sociology during the War and the years thereafter.

The post-war process of reestablishing the work in the branch of sociology was again interrupted, which is a well known fact, for a long time during the period of the so-called personality cult.

Under such circumstances the question arises as to whether, and to what extent, we can consider the possibility of resuming the work of our older sociology; whether its results have not become too antiquated.

The answer will follow from the next part of our paper. All the same, we consider it proper to lay stress on one important fact in advance:

Our sociologists, at least the best known among them, started off from the classical school of *Émile Durkheim* who is generally regarded as one of the founders of modern sociology. At the same time they did not accept his theses without qualification, particularly the representatives of the Brno sociological school. As the works of two representatives of the present-day American sociology, *Talcott Parsons* and *Robert K. Merton*, awaken the most vivid attention in his country as well as in the neighbouring Poland, it is useful to mention that *Parsons* followed *Durkheim's* footsteps, too (besides *Max Weber's* and *Bronislaw Malinowski's*). *Merton*, on his part, is also influenced by *Durkheim*, as well as by *Karl Mannheim* and other West-European sociologists.<sup>9</sup>

In a sense *the structural-functional conception of society in the interpretation of these leading American sociologists is not thoroughly new in the light of the views which were reached by our pre-war sociology*. At the same time the latter avoids the sociologistic nominalism and psychologism of the American structural-functional school.

## II

After these introductory remarks we shall try to give an account of the progressive traditions of our sociology. We shall not endeavour to enumerate all names. They can be found elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Yet we should like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that there are cases of considerable inexactitude, not to say blunders, in many surveys of the development of Czechoslovak sociology.<sup>11</sup>

Our treatise will concentrate on outlining developmental *tendencies* of pre-war Czechoslovak sociology and, besides, on characterizing the sociological *systems* of those representatives of our sociology whose respective works deserve to be carried along, in a way.

The emergence of sociology in this country may be laid in the years when positivism, somewhat belatedly, found its way to our country. The most important Czech positivist was *František Krejčí* (1858–1934). *T. G. Masaryk* (1850–1937) is generally acknowledged as the founder of our sociology. His importance, from the viewpoint of sociological traditions, consists particularly in his having introduced *Comte* to us and in having acquainted our philosophers with the latter's opinions on sociology as a science about society.

*Masaryk's* work aimed partly at the philosophy of history, that traditional problematics of both Czech philosophy and sociology (here belong especially "Česká otázka" (The Czech Question, 1895), "Naše nynější krise" (Our Present Crisis, 1895), and „Otázka sociální" (The Social Question, 1898), partly at the discipline of sociology itself, in such works as, above all, "Sebevražda" (Suicide. Der Selbstmord als soziale Massenerscheinung, 1881, 1904 in Czech), "Rukověť sociologie" (Handbook of Sociology — Naše doba, 1900) and "Základové konkrétné logiky" (Principles of Concrete Logic, 1885).

The evaluation of *Masaryk's* sociological ideas can be based, on the one hand, upon the articles of some non-Marxist theorists, and, on the other hand, upon some critical papers written by Marxists. From the viewpoint of historical materialism an interesting analysis was given by *Ludvík Svoboda*.<sup>12</sup> He objects to the excessive emphasis laid on social statics and to the lack of interest in social development in *Masaryk's* sociological conception, and further to his

individualistic psychologism. Of the non-Marxist authors a penetrating critique was given by J. L. Fischer<sup>13</sup> who justly points to the fact that Masaryk's conception is not sociology in the proper meaning of the word, but rather social philosophy.

Masaryk, of course, had a remarkable influence upon practically all our pre-war sociologists.

Eduard Beneš may be considered to be his direct pupil; his immediate successor at the Caroline University was Břetislav Foustka (1862—1947). It was due to him that the first seminar for sociology on Czechoslovak territory was founded, among his other merits we may point out a vivid activity in translating fundamental works of world's sociology.

The main task of our sociology during the period between the two World Wars can be briefly summed up as follows: 1. The organization of empiric sociological research studies, and 2. the construction of sociological systems. From the standpoint of the traditions of our sociology, from the standpoint of our possible resumption of these traditions, the systems which were created by our non-Marxist sociologists are, naturally, of greater importance for us.

Among our most outstanding systematists we should name Emanuel Chalupný (1879—1958), assistant professor of sociology in Brno. His principal work *Sociology, I—V*, is a really extensive, in many respects instructive work.

E. Chalupný conceives sociology as a *science about civilization or culture*, and therefore as one of the pronouncedly humanistic sciences dealing with human society, as *one of the branches of anthropology* in the broadest meaning of the term. Anthropology, according to Chalupný, has the following branches:

1. *physical anthropology* dealing predominantly with the corporal, biological properties of man (consequently with that sphere which is traced by anthropology as a branch of biological sciences);
2. *psychical anthropology* which studies the mentality of man (which, of course, is called psychology in his classification of sciences);
3. *cultural anthropology* which is called sociology.

According to Chalupný, sociology and cultural anthropology fuse practically into each other, though he remarks that the discipline of cultural anthropology is mostly concerned with the so-called primitive cultures, whereas sociology usually studies the problems of contemporary societies in industrially developed countries.

Sociology as a science about civilization can be more closely delimited, according to Chalupný, by determining the constituent parts of which society is composed. *Human activities* (material and mental) from the basis of human society. These activities are stimulated by *agents*: in the first place by *men* (individuals and social groups), secondly by human *products*, and thirdly by *nature*.

The process of an activity tending towards its products is called an objectification. Every social activity being directed towards its objectification, it is possible to define sociology as the "science about objectification".

The extensive work of Emanuel Chalupný is doubtlessly inspiring in many ways, though a good deal of his ideas cannot be accepted without qualification. Chalupný did not succeed in avoiding an often rather outspoken formalism, as happens to be the case with scientists concentrated primarily on the problem of a strict classification and assortment of all phenomena.

Personally, I am convinced that the system of the Brno Sociological School

is much nearer to our present Marxist sociology, especially so since this school applies the structural-functional conception of society which is being successfully elaborated even in the present-day Marxist sociology.<sup>14</sup>

The two main representatives of the Brno Sociological School were Arnošt Bláha (1879—1960) and J. L. Fischer (\*1894). First of all let us deal with the system of J. L. Fischer. When concentrating our attention on the system of professor Bláha further on, we shall then be able to take notice of his empirical research studies and of the works of his pupils.

J. L. Fischer, known mostly as a philosopher, started his university career as a lecturer in sociology in Brno, 1926. Fischer's sociological system is set forth in his work "Krise demokracie" (The Crisis of Democracy).<sup>15</sup>

Philosophically, or better to say gnoseologically, he started off from the criticism of "theoretic mechanicism", as he denotes the positivistic and mechanistic materialist conceptions. Theoretically he tries to comprehend reality — which he determines as "an extensive qualitative differentiation in its dialectical development" — through his "syntactic philosophy" the principal categories of which are: *quality*, *structure*, and *function*.

The starting point of his philosophical system is the problem of how it is possible to take cognisance of and comprehend the real determination of social formations and processes which are in a *permanent development* and can be investigated solely in a concrete historical situation. What is common to all of Velká nad Veličkou, worked out the plan of a many-sided research of Brno investigation of our society, he organized the sociological study of the village. social formations in all historical circumstances is the fact that they *satisfy a certain social function*.

That is why the functional method is, as J. L. Fischer writes in 1933, the only to cover both the dynamic and the static aspect of the dialectic development of specific social formations and of the whole social structure.

J. L. Fischer distinguishes between 1. *functional determination*, i.e. the real meaning, the "substance" of social phenomena, and 2. *functional conditioning* which means, as Fischer says, "the predominance of the whole over the parts", i.e. that the specific social formations are bound by the social whole.

Hence society represents a system of social functions. Social functions are interest-conditioned tendencies, leading to their objectification.

The system of functions tends towards a *consensus* which is structural (social order), as well as organizational (the State).

We cannot deal more closely with the system of J. L. Fischer in this brief informative treatise; suffice it to mention the fact that the author is again thinking it over and developing it at present.

The leading personality of Czechoslovak sociology according to practically all our and foreign surveys of the history of our sociology is doubtlessly Arnošt Bláha (1879—1960).

It is important to emphasize that he carried out *sociological research studies* in this country ever since 1910. He always required a systematic sociological and of the border-land (the district of Těšín), he gave his pupils impulses for numberless monographic studies, etc.

His main sociological works were monographies: "Město" (The Town, 1914), "Sociologie sedláka a dělníka" (The Farmer's and the Worker's Sociology, 1925), "Sociologie dětství" (Sociology of Childhood, 1926), "Dnešní krise rodinného

života" (Our Present Family Life Crisis, 1933), and particularly "Sociologie inteligence" (The Sociology of Intelligentsia, 1937) which was a unique work in the world's literature at the time it was published.

In 1930 he founded and ever since was the editor-in-chief of the journal "Sociologická revue" (Sociological Review). For Marxist sociologists it is important to note that there was the section "Theory of socialism" in charge of which was Ludvík Svoboda, where he followed up systematically the work in the branch of historical materialism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere; that the editor for sociology of art was the Marxist critic and aesthetic Bedřich Václavěk; that the person entrusted to write about pedagogic problems was the teacher-communist Oldřich Blažek, etc.

The above quoted works of Bláha were a preparatory step to a book that has remained unpublished so far, to his "Sociologie" (Sociology) upon which he concentrated during the world War II and during his retirement after having finished his teacher's activities. There he defined his theory of social reality — it may be denoted by the term of functional structuralism — and applied it to the problems of social and cultural life. The publications of this work is under consideration.

Bláha managed to avoid both extremes known from the history of sociology, i.e. the one-sided objectivism (denying the significance of subjective factors in history), as well as the excessive subjectivism. Within the framework of his structural deterministic conception of society Bláha assigned the individual his proper role in social development. In this respect, too, we may reexamine his conception, especially in connection with the present-day discussions concerning the relationship between the object and the subject in the interpretation of Karl Marx.<sup>16</sup>

Society, according to Bláha, is neither a mere sum of individuals, nor a mere space association. It is linked together by means of an internal bond (socio-psychological structure of society) as well as by means of an external bond (sociological structure of society), i.e. by means of an objective order which regulates social activities. This internal and external unity of society issues from a *general social situation*, from a common *need of a social whole* to live and to survive as a whole. Various social, that means: orderly, activities are differentiated according to specific needs of the social whole which they satisfy, i.e. according to *specific social situations* created by these needs. These differentiated social activities or *social functions* (tending to satisfy social needs) are bound together by being parts of the social whole. Consequently, they are mutually interdependent, and that in a specific manner in every concrete social situation the character of which is besides determined by geographical environment and by the physical and psychological structures of the members of the social whole.

From the standpoint of an individual member of a social whole, to function socially means to function according to a social order, according to social norms. These norms should not be conceived only as norms exactly formulated and sanctioned as they have been formed in the process of historical development. They should be understood as pressure of all upon all, as a necessity issuing from the fact that these members of the social whole, if their permanent co-operative life is to safeguarded, have to order their mutual psychological relations as well as relations pertaining to common activities, into socio-psycholo-

gical and sociological structures (the psyche of a family, nation, political party, types of activities).

Let us enlarge upon the mutual relationship of the individual and society as it follows from Bláha's structural determinism. In Bláha's conception the activities of man are socially determined. Every individual always acts in the conditions of a certain *social situation*, under the pressure of social norms. This is one side of the reciprocal relation between the individual and the society. However, the individual is not passive with respect to social determinism, being *co-creator*. Not only social constraint, but also "conscious activism". The creative activity of individuals who are co-creators of social determinism is one of the components of the structural factors determining social processes.

In this respect every creative and active individual is reserved the possibility of affecting social situations and cooperating in the process of transformation and the development of social regulations determining the function of the given society and the individual. Bláha is very convincing in explaining his conception of the creative activity of the individual as a co-creator of social influence in many places of his work "Sociologie inteligence" (Sociology of Intelligentsia, 1937).

In this way Bláha overcomes Durkheim's doctrine about the one-sided influence of social environment, thus approaching the present-day sociology as to the conception of the reciprocal relationship of the individual and the society.

Bláha clearly conceives every "I" as a certain structure, too. Every "I" represents, within the framework of this conception "a system of an individual 'I' implying a number of social 'selves'", according to the individual's affiliation in various social groups (I — as a family member, I member of a certain nation, class, profession. This conception of different social "selves" is very close to the theory of social roles as it is current in the social psychology and sociology of today.

Among Bláha's pupils we can mention primarily his assistant Dr. Bruno Zwickler (1907—1944), further Dr. Juliana Obrdlíková<sup>17</sup> and Dr. Mojmir Hájek who is at present member of the renewed Sociological Department at the University in Brno.

The Brno School of Sociology, represented above all by the names of Arnošt Bláha and J. L. Fischer, doubtlessly may be considered as that trend of our sociology which has come most closely to the present-day conception of social reality.

Trying to form the conception of modern Marxist sociology, i.e. sociology starting off from Marx's theses about society, and to preserve his critical, creative attitude towards investigated social phenomena, our Marxist sociologists can in many respects tie up with the traditions of our sociology, especially of its structural-functional school.



## NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- <sup>1</sup> The present treatise starts off from the paper "O tradicích československé sociologie" (The Traditions of Czechoslovak Sociology) presented by the author at a symposium on sociology at Smolenice in March, 1965, where he dealt with the history of Czechoslovak sociology in greater detail.
- <sup>2</sup> We draw the reader's attention to the appreciation of Czech sociology in the work of Harry E. Barnes and Howard Becker, *Social Thought from Lore to Science*, N. Y., 1938. In the "Handbuch der Soziologie", edited by Ziegenfuss, Stuttgart 1956, too, a part is devoted to Czech sociology.
- <sup>3</sup> In this respect the attitude towards traditions was understood by J. L. Fischer in the period after the First World War in his article "Prvý exkurs o tradici" (The first Excursus on Tradition).
- <sup>4</sup> Thus, e.g., at the Faculty of Arts in Brno the lectures of sociology were interrupted in the school year 1949–1950 and have been fully renewed as late as the school year 1964–1965 by an optional lecture and a seminar under the direction of Doc. Dr. Jan Macko and Dr. Mojmír Hájek.
- <sup>5</sup> Jan Dušek, *Sociologie*, Prague 1926.
- <sup>6</sup> I take the concept of reductionism to be a concept set above all doctrines characterized by the reduction of the historically "higher" forms of existence to historically "lower" forms, such as the biologizing tendencies in sociology, giving an explanation of organic Nature merely on the basis of physical chemistry, etc. The mechanicism of this conception is one of the forms of reductionism.
- <sup>7</sup> Bedřich Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie, I–III (Christian Sociology)*, 1929–1936.
- <sup>8</sup> Recently, Jan Tauber has critically reexamined the traditions of our rural sociology treating such works as Tomáš Čep, "Kapitoly ze sociologie venkova" (1933, Chapters on Rural Sociology), Anton Stefánek, "Základy sociografie Slovenska" (1946, Introduction to the Sociography of Slovakia), etc.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. the works: T. Parsons, E. Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Harvard University Press 1951 and R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 1951.
- <sup>10</sup> Besides the literary sources quoted in note Nr. 2 we would like to direct the reader's attention to the works: V. K. Skrach, *Tschechische Soziologie, Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie*, V, 3; I. A. Bláha, *Współczesna socjologia czeska, Odbitka z Kwartalnika Socjologicznego*, Nr. 2–4, 1931, Posen.
- <sup>11</sup> Thus, e.g., in the quoted "Handbuch der Soziologie" which is in other respects well worked up we find the note about professor Arnošt Bláha having emigrated after 1948 and living in Canada which is an entirely wrong, ungrounded information.
- <sup>12</sup> Ludvík Svoboda, "Masarykova Rukověť sociologie" (Masaryk's Handbook of Sociology), *Sociological Review* 1947, Nr. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> J. L. Fischer, "Dvě kapitoly k Masarykově sociologii" (Two Chapters on Masaryk's Sociology), *Socialistická revue* 1930, Nr. 1 and 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Sociologie*, Orbis, Praha 1965.
- <sup>15</sup> J. L. Fischer, *Krise demokracie (The Crisis of Democracy)*, I – Svoboda, II – Řád, Index Brno 1933.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, N. Y., 1961, Roger Garaudy, *Perspectives de l'homme*, Czech translation Praha 1964, etc.
- <sup>17</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. Obrdlíková for a number of most inspiring suggestions concerning this paper, as well as for her having kindly revised the English translation.

## POKROKOVÉ TRADICE ČESKÉ SOCIOLOGIE

Cílem článku je naznačit některé progresivní stránky ve vývoji české sociologie, jejíž celková vědecká úroveň byla v období mezi dvěma světovými válkami kladně hodnocena v zahraniční odborné literatuře.

V první části se autor zamýšlí nad vztahem naší sociologie k dřívějším tradicím této vědy u nás. Ukazuje, že tento vztah je třeba posuzovat ze dvou aspektů:

1. z hlediska poměru marxistické a nemarxistické sociologie,
2. z hlediska dlouhodobé kulturní přetřžky.

Odmítá zjednodušená měřítká marxistické kritiky nemarxistických názorů, jak byla uplatňována v období tzv. kultu osobnosti. Ukazuje dále, že mnohé názory našich sociologů jsou dodnes platné a v mnoha směrech velmi podnětné. Musíme je ovšem kriticky hodnotit. V této souvislosti autor odmítá stanoviska redukcionismu (Jan Dušek) i teologické sociologie (Bedřich Vašek), jež se v naší sociologii též vyskytovala.

Ve druhé části se blíže zabývá dílem předních představitelů naší empirické sociologie. Soustřeďuje pozornost zejména k těm jejím představitelům, kteří dospěli ke strukturálně funkcionálnímu pojetí společnosti. K nim patří filosof a sociolog kultury J. L. Fischer a především I. Arnošt Bláha, profesor sociologie na filosofické fakultě v Brně.

Při hodnocení Bláhova díla, které si zasluhuje soustavné studium a důkladný kritický rozbor, vyzdvihuje autor zejména strukturální determinismus, který umožnil Bláhovi vyvážet se striktního objektivismu i krajního subjektivismu a vcelku sporně osvětlit vztah jedince a společnosti, úlohu lidu i osobnosti. Strukturální pojetí společnosti pak umožnilo Bláhovi chápat dobře vztahy tzv. „individuálního já“ k různým „sociálním já“, jež je obdobné pojetí sociálních rolí v současné sociologii a sociální psychologii.

