

Reviews

Robert Klobucký: The Hlasism Movement: Nation and Sociology. The Beginnings of Sociological Thought in Slovakia

Bratislava 2006, Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 165 pp.

As late as in the last quarter of 19th century, one would struggle to find the word „sociology“ in Slovak texts. In the 1890s it can be found here and there in articles written by S. H. Vajanský in the National newspaper, however mostly within negative, critical and dismissive opinions. At this time, Vajanský can be considered a Slovak „new-Hegelian“ for whom dominant issue was that of nation which he understood according to the Hegelian noetics „truth is a whole“. For Vajanský, nation was this whole, nation within the system of Hegelian categories fulfilled this holistic function perfectly. After all, similarly holistic functions of nation existed in German, Italian, French or even English new-Hegelianism. Vajanský was opposed to sociology because sociology was breaking down this holistic philosophical understanding of nation into individual elements and areas that could be explored. At the end of the 1890s he wrote in the National newspaper that nation is a unit that does not need any Newton or Galvani to take some of its manifestations and prove its hidden, empirically not detectable but substantial reality (see also author's analysis of the Conservatives for example on p. 49).

The first attempt at institutionalising sociology within Slovak environment was probably initiated by the above mentioned negative attitude of Vajanský towards this discipline on one hand. On the other hand, at the turn of the centuries sociology was being taught at universities and it was gradually being perceived as a new empirical science about the society (one that is strictly opposed to absolute idealism, i.e. new-Hegelianism that had developed within philosophy in connection with the notion and issue of a nation). In 1895, Slovak museum society (established in 1893 after the dissolution of Matica slovenská) was focusing on four scientific areas when providing support to those researching Slovak history, language and so on – however the society also appointed people responsible for additional scientific areas that need to be considered – one of these was sociology. The fact that none of the three people appointed to this position was a sociologist only helps to illustrate the state of Slovak intellectual and educational spheres (Samuel Daxner and Ľudovít Bazovský were lawyers, Ivan Daxner was a bank clerk although actively involved in national culture).

And so it happens that our first heuristic and programmatic encounter with sociology is linked to the Hlasists. As R. Klobucký notes in various contexts, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries the only people to encounter sociology were Slovak students studying at universities abroad. Although several of them had sociology on the curriculum, none studied it as a profile subject, not even the Hlasists. We can agree with the author that up until 1918, we associate the evolution of sociology in Slovakia with auto-didacts and those members of the educated intelligentsia from other scientific areas (doctors, technicians, lawyers etc.) who were interested in its object and statements about the society.

In this respect, we would like to praise the reviewed book above all because it provides a detailed and all-embracing picture of the meaning of the term „Hlasism“, what it means and represents within Slovak cultural and socio-political thought. Based on consistent understanding and analysis of the sources of Hlasist programme it describes requirements, effects and contexts of realisation of this programme: of what could be implemented and what

had not succeeded or was doomed to fail. We bear in mind that the significance of Hlasism within Slovak historical development is not always appreciated and taken into account; until today we really do not know this movement well enough and due to this most of the time Hlasists are mentioned in light of their „Czechoslovak orientation“ – however, no explanation follows on when and why this idea of „state creation“ appeared. Thus, all subtle nuances of Hlasist programme aimed at modernising Slovakia at the turn of the centuries are obscured.

It is obvious that those reviewing this publication commend the original approach and explanation of sociological elements within the Hlasist programme as the greatest novelty of the text – such focus was in fact pioneering. Analysing sociological aspects of Hlasism, indeed „bringing them to the light“ is one of the segments that we would like to stress in connection with the above mentioned statement that we do not sufficiently know that Hlasism movement and its programme; and it is this analysis that we see as the important novelty of this book. Such all-embracing view, holistic and universal assessment of this issue has been lacking so far and many archival texts by A. Štefánek, V. Šrobár, M. Hodža, Š. Janšák and other Hlasists have now been brought to light and provide testimony.

In this context it needs to be said that although we consider Hlasists auto-didacts with respect to sociology, R. Klobucký on several occasions explains the sociological or sociologising elements of their Hlasist approach. In the early chapters of his book he argues for the use of historical method when providing a general overview of this topic. This method is not only used in this part – it is the basis for the whole book. During the first two decades of 20th century, sociology was not considered a fully-fledged academic discipline in Europe; its protagonists had to prove themselves in acknowledged disciplines (philosophy, law, history or similar) first and only then could they be recognised as sociologists.

On the other hand, however, sociology was somehow „en vogue“ and everyone was turning to it (see e.g. p. 68-76, or elsewhere). Having studied the legacy of A. Štefánek, one can say that he himself began to be inclined toward sociological arguments in the first half of 1890s, under the influence of opinions voiced in discussions between supporters of „conservative“ future development of Slovakia and the late Hlasist modernists (together with Prague members of the Detvan society) that took place in student clubs in Vienna (Tatran and Národ). A. Štefánek needs to be mentioned as he is considered to be the member of the Hlasist movement who was fittest in sociology in terms of theory (as stated later by Š. Janšák). But we will talk about that later. Back then, as shown by the author, sociology was not an academic discipline that was of interest for Hlasists. They turned to it and used all its instruments that could help them explore the real state of Slovak society. This was sociology's main heuristic, in author's words „new gnoseological approach to social reality“ where Hlasists preferred specific declarations about the respective areas of Slovak society's life to interpretation that crammed these aspects to abstractly deduced philosophical categories. This was the programme of Hlasists: realism and positivism, no idealist construction or some forms of idealism. Apart from this – and this is something the author emphasises on several occasions and within several contexts – mainly in the conflict with the Conservatives the focus was on enforcing the general, i.e. political view on future development of Slovak society, bringing about a substantial change of political opinions and attitudes towards public matters. That was paramount, and not sociology itself. Even Štefánek, the most sociological of all Hlasists, stressed this fact in many of his memoir texts where he dealt with the evolution of the Hlasist programme.

Apart from these contextual and historical statements and notes on issues, we cannot avoid the content aspects of the publication in our review. If we consider the main idea of the book,

i.e. functions of sociology and sociological elements in the Hlasist programme of modernisation of Slovakia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it seems to me that chapters 1, 4 and 5 are the most significant ones; however I have already dealt with some of their outcomes. Especially the first chapter with its methodological contents holds the key to understand the main idea of the book, especially in connection with the issue of a nation. Presently, this topic is contained in sociology's main subject – that of society. However, at the turn of the centuries the issue of nation as a social group was „more real“ than it is now when we decompose the individual aspects of nation into several sociological disciplines. Analysing this situation using current results of methodology of sociological history by contemporary historians is one of the precisely illustrated results of argumentation in favour of the main idea. R. Klobucký explains why to analyse early sociological approach of that time it is necessary to use historical methods of analysis and explication; only this method includes all important contexts and accumulations, it is able to explain external influences on the constitution and functioning of a social science such as sociology – starting with the evaluation of Magyarisation in the surveyed period and ending with the ideological „reasoning“ behind the dissolution and later restoration of sociology as a science in the 1950s-1970s. Klobucký demonstrates the complexity and indeed almost uselessness of methodological approach that utilises systematisation of sociological theories in light of the fact that back then only first fundamentals of sociology were being laid; he shows problems associated with using the presentist method and so on. Several nuances, like for instance the use of the term oxymoron to explain the inner ambivalence of many evolving phenomena and their description when adopting from another environment – the topic of adopting models in general – only serve to stress the heuristic readiness of the author to develop and explain this issue. The subject of adopting models – characteristic for small, less developed or even peripheral societies – was modified by the environment it was being transferred to. Once there, it never took on the form it had had in its initial space at the height of its development. The author also deals with the problems of liberalism as a political ideology, world view, philosophy of people as individuals or a social movement that in our conditions was injected into the rural and agricultural environment (oxymoron: agrarian liberalism etc.). For small and less well developed societies, the issue of model adoption remains topical even at present: let us remember frequent references to it after 1990 at various occasions and in many areas (the author notices mainly objections of A. Hirner to A. Pražák connected with the Hlasist period but concerned with the Slovak enlightenment). Many topics that R. Klobucký analyses while explaining methodological problems in the approach to Hlasist struggle continue to „live“ at present, too. This makes the reviewed publication an appropriate text not only for the part of cultural audience interested in finding out more about topics from our history that have so far not been explored thoroughly, but also for social scientists from other disciplines, and sociologists, not only sociological historians. This part also presents views that the author presented his stand on, however in a wider context they could evoke some discussions or require more explanation – for instance the opinion that under the Hlasists „the dominant political idea among Slovaks was nationalism“ (D. Kováč), or the asynchrony of modernisation and the implied anti-clericalism and similar – but these are open issues and can only support the discussion. Nevertheless, this would exceed the scope and range set by the author.

The last and longest chapter is dedicated to the Hlasist sociology of nation and R. Klobucký divides it into eleven subchapters. In order to be able to do this, Klobucký studied extensively sources spread over many different journals, in articles concerned with specific topics (Hlasist

humanism, the question of moral Magyarisation, Czecho-Slovak question, psychological and voluntaristic concepts of nation, Jewish question etc.). His analysis clearly shows that at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries in Austria-Hungary the relationships between the various nations and ethnic groups and their identities and self-determination were issues at least as important as social topics.

That is why academic sociology could not help but notice these phenomena. Already in mid-1880s the Austrian sociologist L. Gumplowicz attempted to process these conflicts between nations and ethnic groups into a some kind of sociological theory; German sociologist F. Tönnies looked at the process of transformation of original (ethnically, too) communities into modern societies. These attempts were not ignored by Hlasists who were very interested in such writings. The merit of Klobucký's work in this respect is the fact that he showed just how important and fundamental the question of nation was for Hlasists of this period; this is in fact something that is proved for the first time in this text because Hlasists used to be linked mainly to Czechoslovakism. Author supports this by the statement of V. Šrobár that until 1918 Hlasists formed nation and after 1918 state. From the writings by Gumplowicz Hlasists adopted the method of approaching the issue of nation as part of sociology of groups, nation for Gumplowicz as well as for Hlasists was a group in sociological sense. R. Klobucký also quotes W. Winclawski in his book on A. Štefánek where he claims that classical sociology never really saw the question of nation as a detached independent topic. Its subject was the society in general and its division into individual explorable segments. Klobucký's analyses too show that Hlasists opposed S. H. Vajanský and his views that in Slovak environment the intelligentsia is a pars pro toto of the Slovak nation. Arguing with Vajanský, they began to spontaneously or even intuitively lean towards identifying nation with society in order to demonstrate the real nature of problems within the Slovak society which will not be solved only by solving the issue of nation. Hlasists were clearly aware of the importance of the nation issue in this period. Even more pronounced is this issue with J. Lajčiak who appreciated the importance of Hlasists and after returning to Slovakia in 1905 he probably started to collect his notes and work on individual chapters and further topics for his book Slovakia and Culture. For Lajčiak, Slovak nation was an empirically self-evident and thus he felt no need to identify it as an independent problem.

At the beginning of this chapter, R. Klobucký reminds readers of I. Wallerstein's views on the importance of detaching the term and issue of society from the state, their differentiation and at the same time he stresses the significance of this division for the formation of social sciences and movements. This whole process had its subsequence and periods that were specified through the processes of creation of ethnic groups, nations and so on. Hlasists for example were familiar with the 1905 lecture by T. G. Masaryk Problem of small nation in which he elaborated on this differentiation and detachment. He talks of how after the dissolution of feudalism it became clear that along state, realm and church there also is a nation as a community of people sharing language, religion, culture. Nation comes before state in terms of development and the humanity „is naturally divided into individual nations“, says T. G. Masaryk. Gradually, more arguments appeared that state is not identical with society and the Hungarian society consists of several nations, these „large collectivities“ of ethnic and national groups. The heuristics of nation as a social group where one or several of these form a society thus got its firm place within sociology.

Referring to T. G. Masaryk, H. Spencer, Le Play and L. Gumplowicz, A. Štefánek develops his ideas on the constitution of nations from original and naturally existing groups of people

(tribe, family, clan, ethnic group and later nation and state). R. Klobucký shows how Štefánek and W. Winclawski helped him understand the importance of the idea of a nation for social conscience and self-determination of an ethnic group. He demonstrates how Štefánek uses the term „soul of a nation“ which he adopted from G. Le Bon and he shows that Hlasists were aware what it would have meant for Slovaks to lose their language in this period of intensive Magyarisation.

With regard to the subchapter dedicated to the Czecho-Slovak issue I would like to add some more remarks as the issue of Czechoslovakism is so important in Hlasist ideology. Author has defined his research objective with the year 1918; if he were to extend his analysis to the period after 1918, as he says himself in the introduction, his analysis would have been different in terms of methodology, contents as well as personalities. Such approach would probably have shown the ideology of Czechoslovakism in a different light. Other Klobucký's texts show that during the I. Czechoslovak Republic Hlasists effectively defended this ideology (J. Jablonický), and in doing so dampened the voices of criticism against it. Hlasism was subject of research after 1948 but the evaluation criteria of its significance were not among main ideological priorities. Later it has been stated that Czechoslovakism as a politically effective ideology lost its justification after the final peace conference in Paris in 1920 (Ľ. Lipták); other consider it a useful illusion at the time of creating ČSR, but in the long term describe it as lifeless and even having a retarding and harmful effect (Z. Šolle, V. Bakoš). V. Horňák even claims that in light of the understanding of nation as existed at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries in Czech regions, this idea of one nation with two „branches“ had in fact been complete nonsense for hundred years. A. Štefánek himself talks of history of Slovak nation stretching back 400 to 500 years; however unlike with many phenomena he neither uses nor demands scientific methods explaining processes and factors and results of ethnic differentiation.

Based mainly on Štefánek's memoir texts, Š. Janšák's biographies and texts by other authors, one of the subchapters contains an original interpretation of the fact that many of Hlasists were doctors, explanations why they were so many and the effects this had on conflicts with the conservatives. Similarly original is the subchapter on Hlasist anti-Semitism. It is surprising in terms of development of social thought to see what were the factors that a hundred years ago evoked such anti-Semitic tendencies and that not even the most mature of Hlasists were capable of eliminating and explaining. I personally remember how strange for me were the views of A. Štefánek on Jews and Judaism, compared to other opinions. Author himself is well aware of the originality of these topics (see his conclusion). The analysis of economic views of the Hlasists that differed from conservatives who emphasised other factors could be another one of these subchapters.

Within this bloc we can only express the wish that readers of this book will notice the Hlasist characters that have so far not been sufficiently appreciated (A. Štefánek), or that they pay attention to some texts that possess lasting significance (for instance Hodža's article Our realism, some texts on religion or science by V. Šrobár etc.).

The reviewer would like to express the wish that this text finds its way to the bookshelves of all those interested in the history of Slovak sciences, particularly of sociology and also those who pay attention to new surveys of important political movements in Slovak history.

Eudovít Turčan