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*Research*

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### SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN A SOCIALIST SETTING

Summary: A recent article in the Hungarian provincial paper Kisalföld has provided a glimpse into the current research and research methods of Hungarian social psychologists. Like their colleagues in sociology, the psychologists also appear quite ready to jettison old, politically-motivated concepts and replace them with an observable "Western" approach.

During the past few years, the social sciences in Hungary have increasingly taken on a more objective character by dropping the substance of Marxist dogma, while continuing to pay lip service to its forms and more general tenets. The pressing need to come to grips with the novel and complex problems posed by an urbanized, industrialized and technological society has no doubt played an important role in this process. Of at least equal importance, however, is the change in official political attitudes and outlook which has permitted free inquiry into areas that were previously regarded as closed issues.

The best-known proponent and practitioner of the "new scientific approach" in Hungary is Andras Hegedus, head of the Sociological Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). Lesser known, but of equal potential importance, are the members of the Academy's Psychological Institute, to which a Social Psychology Group was added in 1965. A recent article in Kisalföld,<sup>1</sup> the Party daily of Győr-Sopron County, has given a brief, but interesting account of the current preoccupations of this latter group and some of the conceptual tools which it employs in its research. The article begins with the following definition of social psychology, as taken from the Small Philosophical Dictionary:

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<sup>1</sup>G.B., "Social Psychology," Kisalföld, 3 March 1968 (an interview with Dr. György Hunyady).

1. The totality of feelings, moods, habits, ideas, illusions, volitional endeavors and particular features which are characteristic of people due to the collectivity of their socio-economic circumstances. The social psychological features characterizing classes, nations, social strata, occupational groups, etc., are historically evolved . . . 2. The expression "social psychology" refers to that branch of science which studies the psychology of society. Marxism-Leninism establishes the basic task of social psychology as the analysis of the socio-economic nature of the objective factors, laws and action stimuli shaping social feeling and mood, as well as the study of the socio-economic nature of other psychic processes.<sup>2</sup>

An idea of what lies behind this short dictionary definition is provided by Dr. Gyorgy Hunyady, a member of the Social Psychology Group of the Psychological Institute. According to Hunyady, it is necessary to supplement the current Communist version of the history of the science by including a description of the "very interesting and violent debates" over social psychology which occurred in the Soviet Union during the 1920's. These debates, he says, subsided in a short time "primarily for political reasons," and research turned in other directions. "For a long time, on the basis of the Pavlov concept, psychological phenomena were investigated only from the physiological aspect, while their social determinants were neglected." At the end of the 1950's, however, social psychological research quickly revived in Eastern Europe and the USSR. And "last year, at the 18th International Psychological Congress, held in Moscow, Soviet researchers presented themselves in full armor and up to world standards, [thus] overcoming several decades of backwardness."

Having quickly and concisely placed the blame for the scandalous neglect of an important scientific discipline on the politically motivated actions of the Soviet Union, Hunyady then turns to the activities of Hungarian social psychologists. Like

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<sup>2</sup> Compare this definition with one given by two prominent Western social psychologists: "Social psychology is the scientific study of the experience and behavior of individuals in relation to social stimulus situations. Social stimulus situations are composed of people (individuals and groups) and items of the sociocultural setting." Culture, as the authors later make clear, refers to both material and non-material culture, including such items as cooperative labor, property rights, tool-making, housing, division of labor and trade. Sherif and Sherif, An Outline of Social Psychology, rev.ed., Harper and Bros., New York, 1956, p.4.



the sociologists, much of their research is now concerned with group studies, and their professional literature is currently discussing the question of the number of people which can properly be considered as constituting a group (csoport). According to Hunyady, the Academy social psychologists generally apply this term to any collective of from three to 40 members. This would include school classes, brigades, and the employees of individual offices. Such a size is easily amenable to examination and testing and provides clear, unambiguous data for evaluation. Although the results are "naturally not valid for society as a whole," they nevertheless enrich "the historical materialist picture" of that entire level. This is so, it is explained, because "in contrast to bourgeois researchers, we emphasize the decisive role of material forces."

#### On Methods and Findings

The investigative methods and techniques of Hungarian social psychologists appear, from this short description, to be quite similar to the more common techniques applied by their American counterparts. Those specifically mentioned by Hunyady include questionnaires, interviews and word-meaning tests. In their investigation of children in the fourth class of a Budapest gymnasium, for example, the following questions, among others, were asked:

"Who would you choose as your friend if you were in trouble?"

"To whom do you turn for advice?"

"Do you have an ideal among your classmates?"

In addition, the children were queried with respect to their individual and group goals and habits. Following the questions, the researchers offered to take a picture of the class, and the pupils were allowed to choose those with whom they would stand before the camera. In this way, states Hunyady, "the particular physiognomy of the collective took shape before us." The researchers were able to see who the "stars" of the class were, who their "admirers" were (and the relationships among them), and identify those who had been pushed to the "periphery of the collective's life."

Turning to a description of some of the findings which have been made, Hunyady declares that there "are several facts that have already been proven by now in a social psychological sense." For example, boys and girls (together) do not form a single subgroup, as can be seen from any mixed Pioneer patrol, where the collective has two nuclei instead of one. "Groups are formed according to scholarly achievement, sex and the position held in the youth movement, while the occupation and material position of the parents is hardly ever a criterion in our country any more." The pattern of relations formed on this basis is called the group's "structure of affection." This, of course, does not exhaust the

characteristics of the group, and Hunyady briefly takes up the examination of its "ideological" structure, by which he means "not its political, but its general social outlook."

It is here that a word-meaning test is administered to the individual pupils. Examples of some of the paired "call words" utilized include: bricklayer-banker, Englishman-Rumanian, tradition-revolution, and red-primitive. Those who belong to a particular sub-group, i.e., a circle based on common friendship, agreed in their opinions for the most part and did so without the need to confer among themselves beforehand. Among the conclusions drawn from this investigation, Hunyady cites the "very observable English orientation" which was displayed by a group which gave preference to jazz, dancing and girls over their studies. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this point. He does, however, take up another "ideological" aspect, viz., that some pupils differed from others in the originality and independence of their opinions on the test. Moreover, he adds, when they were ranked according to the "affection" which they received, they were relatively more popular among their peers than their more conformist classmates.

### The Practical Significance

"For the time being," Hungarian social psychologists are engaged in methodological inquiry and are working on "a Marxist analysis of the basic concepts" of the science. These methods will soon be necessary because of the future role of social psychologists in aiding educational work. Industry, of course, is also an important area of research. Unfortunately, Hunyady implies, "researchers are still pursuing in numerous factories today psychological investigations of a physiological nature, e.g., the examination of fatigue, the effect of wall color on output, etc." It is "obvious," however, that "the time will come" when "we will also take into consideration" the effect on "labor productivity" of a worker's relations with his colleague in the brigade or work place.

Of even greater significance from a political and economic viewpoint is the need to "place the methods and tools of influence and persuasion on a scientific basis." Hungarian researchers are now investigating, for example, which sources of information--TV, newspapers, radio, the opinion of colleagues, etc.--are accepted as the most trustworthy. In addition, they are also observing the channels of information flow in the factory and attempting to discover those groups which act as transmission belts, i.e., those through which the workers' opinions reach the leaders. Hunyady predicts that it will not be long before the fundamental conditions of leadership effectiveness have a social psychological basis.

Whether or not this prediction comes true, it is clear that Hungarian efforts in the field of social psychology, like those in sociology, are quite "Westernized" in their approach and



thinking. There is no attempt here to produce a "Socialist Man," either as a model to be emulated or a goal to be achieved. Likewise, there is no shallow analysis based on the Marxist concepts of class or of false consciousness, nor any sham analysis based on "bourgeois remnants" or "petit bourgeois mentality." Instead, it is quite obvious, from their rejection of the Pavlov concept as the sole valid approach, that the Hungarians are trying to discover how and why people really act, rather than attempting to confine reality within the uncomfortable boundaries of a preconceived ideological framework. For the sake of both the Hungarian people and future contributions to science, one hopes for success in these endeavors.

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