

Władysław Adamski – Pavel Machonin – Wolfgang Zapf (eds.): *Structural Change and Modernization in Post-Socialist Societies*

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Edited by three distinguished European sociologists, this book offers a collection of contributions from the international symposium 'Structural Changes in Post-Socialist Central Europe and the Actual Challenges of Modernization', which was held in Prague on 11–13 May 2001 and was organised by the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, the Warsaw Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IfiS PAN) and the German Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB). The aim of the symposium was to gain a deeper understanding of events linked to the transformation processes that Central European post-socialist societies have been undergoing in recent years. For the participants in the symposium, the transformation process – defined as the sum of fundamental non-violent changes of transitional character, which change the system of political, economic and cultural institutions and create new social relations – attracted analyses characterised by a distinct measure of scepticism and criticism, above all with reference to the concepts that had dominated transformational thought in the early 1990s, i.e. above all neo-liberalism.

The content of the publication is structured around the content of the symposium, and specifically around the two sessions it was divided into. The first section of the book – like the first session of the conference – is comprised of four national reports, each of which represents a single chapter: 1) The Czech Republic: Transformation and Modernisation (P. Machonin, J. Červenka, L. Gátnar, P. Kuchař, K. Müller, M. Tuček); 2) Hungary: The Outlines of the Transformation (Z. Spéder, Z. Elekes, I. Harcsa, P. Róbert), 3) The Polish Case: In Search of National

Specificity (W. Adamski, W. Zaborowski, K. Pelczyńska-Nałęcz, H. Domański, A. Rychar, E. Wnuk-Lipiński); 4) The Case of Germany: Transformation through Unification (W. Zapf, R. Habich, T. Bulmahn, J. Delhey). The second part of the publication includes four chapters, which address the controversial issues that were discussed in the second session of the conference: The Social, Cultural, and Civilisation Effects of Transformation (K. Müller), The Questionable Blessing of the Modernisation Concept (E. Allardt), Is 'Modernisation' Enough? (J. Juchler), Transition, Transformation, and the Social Sciences: Towards a New Paradigm (F. Bönker, K. Müller, A. Pickel).

The authors of the Czech report took the theories of modernisation as their starting point. The data they were working with came largely from research projects on social stratification. The main themes in the report are as follows: changes in the character of work and occupational structure; changes in research, education and technologies; transformations of the systems of stratification of individuals and families; the standard of living; lifestyle; attitudes and socio-political value orientations. According to the authors of the Czech report, radical economic reform based on the adoption of methods recommended from abroad and on the application of a number of original Czech policies did not bring the anticipated economic growth and increase in living standards. Furthermore, it permitted and involved unlawful and immoral economic behaviour and extreme forms of economic and social differentiation, with which many citizens disagreed. Other accompanying features of reform included a number of failings in political life, rising crime rates and a low level of legal consciousness. The Czech authors argue that improvement in the quality of life, which is the fundamental point of modernisation, was not achieved to the expected extent, and that a number of unexpected risks and dangers also appeared. There is still a deep and yawning gulf between the half-modern and

half-wealthy Czech society and the model of an advanced post-industrial information society based on knowledge, as is clear from the way Czech society is lagging in such fields as science, research, development, technologies, the standard of living and lifestyle. The authors of the Czech report nonetheless stressed that it has not been their wish to create a caricature of a pitiable country that constantly complains and demands help from outside. On the contrary, they are trying to show that most of the difficulties listed arose out of the country's own errors and could therefore be effectively tackled by properly thought out progressive steps.

The theoretical framework of the Hungarian report is provided by the concept of welfare as linked to the problem of transformations of the social structure. As the authors point out, at the beginning of the 1990s it was already evident that, of the countries undergoing transformation, it was in Hungary that people were the least satisfied with the political and economic changes and 'nostalgia' for the previous regime was most widespread. At that time there was considerable disillusion apparent in Hungarian society as a result of economic difficulties, large-scale unemployment and growing inequalities in many different groups of the population. The changes could not be accomplished overnight, and this led to disappointment among those who had expected that democracy would enable them to increase their level of consumption and material standard of living. While the supply of goods on the market grew, among substantial sections of the population the possibilities of enjoying the kind of level of consumption people wished for actually diminished. The transformation into a market economy and political democracy brought high social costs. At the turn of the millennium, however, there were already grounds for believing that Hungarian society had overcome this difficult period. According to Hungarian sociologists, in 1999–2000 there were perceptible signs of improvement

in many areas of social life. It had taken a decade before the general improvement in Hungarian society started to be reflected in the perceptions of individual citizens.

The Polish report focuses on change in the political system, which it explores in a more extended time frame, reaching back to the beginning of the 1980s. The authors of the report explicitly employ a structurally orientated theory of conflict as a conceptual guideline to interpret the development from the structural contradictions of the socialist system to its fall and subsequent transformation. Using empirical data the authors identify the structure of social conflict, its part in the fall of the system and in the subsequent course of the transformation of the system. The analysis conducted by the Polish sociologists is based on a long series of surveys known under the title 'Poles', which first started in the latter part of 1980 and continued in 1981, 1984, 1987/1988, 1990, 1995 and 2000. Using this data the authors distinguish between two main phases of the development of the society-wide conflict: a) the stage of selective rejection of socialism in the 1980s, and b) the stage of selective approval of capitalism after the political breakthrough of 1989). As far as the second, stage of development is concerned, the authors conclude that the Polish version of neo-liberal strategies of restructuring the post-socialist economy and especially the policy of shock therapy placed demands on society that were too great for them to be able to secure genuinely mass support among the population.

The basic perspectives explored in the German report are questions of welfare development and modernisation, which the authors consider to be the most important dimensions for an evaluation of the unification of Germany. The German sociologists rely mainly on data collected in the 'German Socio-economic Panel' project and the comparative survey 'New Democracies Barometer'. East Germany is a special case among the post-communist countries. Unification brought a number of undoubted advantages