Socialist Sociology

By Walter D. Connor

PAUL HOLLANDER, Ed.: *American and Soviet Society: A Reader in Comparative Sociology and Perception.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.
ALEX SIMIRENKO, Ed.: *Social Thought in the Soviet Union.* Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1969.
JERZY J. WIATR, Ed.: *The State of Sociology in Eastern Europe Today.* Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., Southern Illinois University Press, 1971.

DURING THE PAST decade and a half, "sociology" has been transformed from dirty word to household word in the Soviet Union, and it has undergone similar, if more varied, transformations in most of the nations of Eastern Europe. The phenomenon has interested Western observers for at least two reasons.

First, the emergence of sociology as a discipline, of social research as an enterprise, and of sociologists as in some sense "professionals" has raised the question of the possible transformation of systems of a "totalitarian" type—if not in the direction of Western-style liberalism, at least toward more rational and "humane" forms of social management. Sociology is seen as an important touchstone of such change: as Alex Inkeles has observed,

> *the extent to which sociologists may pursue their interests, fully publish their results, and freely state their conclusions is one important index of the degree to which a nation qualifies as a free and open society.*[1]

Second, the growth of social research in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has raised the hope of foreign scholars and observers, barred from conducting their own on-the-spot investigations, that access to the output of such research would enable them to learn much about social conditions in those countries, hitherto so wary of publishing—and even, perhaps, of gathering—such information on a large scale.

To what degree have this interest and hope proven well-founded? To what extent has the growth of sociology in the USSR and Eastern Europe turned out to be symptomatic of change in those societies and/or provided greater information about their domestic social processes and problems? Though their foci, purposes and origins differ, each of the books under review goes some way toward giving us answers to these questions, at the same time raising some new ones. Detailed analysis of contents totaling 1278 pages is, however, impossible within the confines of a review essay, and the reader will therefore have to be content with an exploration of some of the general themes that emerge from the books.

Professor Hollander has assembled a broad selection of parallel American and Soviet articles, ranging in coverage from values and ideologies to family life, from old age to crime and delinquency, from mass culture to ethnic discrimination. His objective is thus to present a comparative overview of parallel structures and processes in the USA and the USSR, as well as of cross-national perceptions. Ideally, his format is one of a two-by-two tabular presentation for each process, providing the reader with (1) an American treatment of "X" in the USA, (2) a Soviet treatment of "X" in the USSR, (3) an American view of "X" in the USSR, and (4) a Soviet view of "X" in the USA. Some of the compartments remain empty, but that is scarcely the fault of the editor. The Soviet selections are both representative (something that was no doubt easier to ensure with the Soviet selections than with the American, which are a sample from a far larger and more diverse body of literature) and illustrative of the "state of the art" in the USSR in the later 1960's. The editor's own discussion of the sociological enterprise in the two societies, of their common and

[1] Alex Inkeles, *What is Sociology? An Introduction to the Discipline and Profession,* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, p. 117.

different problems, is an informative one. One of his summary comments that still seems valid in 1972 is that Soviet sociology "has become very fashionable in the last few years and is surrounded by hopeful curiosity and expectations which are exceeding its professional and financial resources."

Less easy to summarize is the Simirenko volume. "Social thought" here takes on a certain expanded definition which seems to render the book, as a whole, somewhat shapeless. While political science, law, historiography, economics, anthropology and sociology clearly fall within the scope one would naturally give to social thought (and are generally well and informatively handled in essays by Bociurkiw, Barry, Mendel, Sherman, Dunn, and the editor, respectively), it is less clear that experimental psychology, psychiatry and structural linguistics do. The essays, which are original papers written for this volume, are loosely organized around the theme of changes since Stalin's death, but some maintain their focus better than others.[2] The result is some unevenness in quality, as well as inconsistency in the degree of attention given by the individual contributors to questions involving the linkage of ideology and political change to social science.

The third book comes with a different pedigree. Under Jerzy Wiatr's general editorship, nine East European sociologists have contributed essays detailing the growth, vicissitudes, current status, and future prospects of sociology in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. It is on the whole a well-integrated volume—with the various contributors addressing themselves to the same questions and topics—and a useful source of information about research emphases and institutional developments, as well as about the sociologists' conceptions of themselves, of the nature of sociology, and of its relation to Marxism as an ideological-historical system.[3]

THE PICTURE OF sociology in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that emerges from these books is a mixed one not only with reference to the significance for the political system of sociology *per se,* but also with regard to the potential utility of the "product" of sociology in these countries as a source of information for outside observers. One cannot do justice here to all facets of the picture, so it may be well to focus on some particular themes.

First, the "penetration" of sociology by ideology—a phenomenon marked by all observers of the discipline in Communist societies—did not originate with the advent of Communist regimes (though presumably the forms it assumed were new). As Wiatr notes, "sociology emerged in all Eastern European countries as social protest rather than [as a] purely academic discipline." It was, indeed, a form of intellectual activity carried on primarily outside the academy, by "scholars-*engagés*" of progressive-liberal-leftist inclinations, including but by no means limited to Marxists. Today, it has claimed the respectability and acceptance that come with university chairs, research institutes, and state support, and on the other hand it has become penetrated, to varying degrees in the different countries, by a single ideology — Marxism-Leninism — whose "progressive" qualities are open to legitimate and serious doubt. Yet, as Zev Katz has observed in these pages (with reference to the USSR, but with probable *a fortiori* application to the other European Communist countries), "sociological research and theorizing have challenged the validity of various aspects of official Marxist-Leninist theory and eroded a number of the official dogmas and images."[4] At the very least, Soviet and East European sociology and sociologists have come a long way since the period when the imposition of historical materialism as *the* science of society tolled the death knell of empirical research. As Andras

[2] Some contributors seem to make rather unwarranted assumptions about the degree to which official policy objectives have been translated into reality. It seems unlikely, for example, that many specialists in Soviet affairs (or Soviet citizens?) would agree with the claim Ziferstein makes in his contribution on psychiatry (in Simirenko, p. 338): "The omnipresence of the collective spirit is manifested in many ways. The lead headlines in the newspapers are always devoted to the latest achievements of the collective farmers in such places as the Krasnodarsk region who fulfilled 118 percent of their quota of grain sold to the government, or the miners of the Kuzbass who have already produced 120,000 tons of coal over their yearly quota. *To the foreigner all this seems boring, but to the Soviet citizen it is of absorbing interest.*" (Emphasis added.)

[3] However, in an attempt to "balance" reports from the various countries, problems of *imbalance* appear to arise. It seems very questionable that the current level of development of sociology in Bulgaria warrants a chapter of 38 pages, plus 10 pages of footnotes, when sociology in Poland receives only 41 pages, plus 5 pages of notes. Moreover, the footnote references for Bulgaria, Poland, Rumania and Yugoslavia provide a great deal of information on published sources, whereas the chapter on the Soviet Union has only three notes (of which two are to Lenin). This tends to "sell short" by a great deal the amount of interesting Soviet sociological research over the last decade.

[4] Zev Katz, "Sociology in the Soviet Union," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, D.C.), May-June 1971, p. 39.

Hegedus, in his contribution to the Wiatr volume (p. 81), describes that period in Hungary,

> *. . . any branch of scholarship dealing with the social problems of the age had only a single function—to serve as propaganda for the given political practice, the "patented" forms. And whoever broke this rule was open to accusation of being a reactionary, of playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Under this historical situation, scientific "objectivity"—even if it was loaded with a commitment to social progress—was regarded as a hostile attitude, something against which socialism had to be protected with the full force of law.*

If, generally, socialism is no longer seen as needing protection from sociology (though this is at least questionable in some places, such as Czechoslovakia since 1968), what *sort* of sociology—or, more generally, social science—has emerged in the USSR and the East European countries in the last decade? Is it symptomatic of critical changes, or is it only a development that can be easily accomodated within maturing socialist systems facing increasingly complex problems of the "system-management" variety?

The answer the books give seems to lie between the two. While the import of the development—and indeed encouragement—of social research should not be discounted, sociology in these countries remains, in practice, very largely a "managerial" science, as the reviews of research emphases and activities show. Studies of time budgets, utilization of leisure time, and worker satisfaction, of rural-urban migration and the planning necessary to accommodate new urbanites, still make up the bulk of the research, and there is no inherent conflict between such research and a basically "illiberal" (though not "Stalinist") political system. The data resulting from such studies, where available in published form, are often interesting and informative for Western observers, but they are also highly useful to the Communist leaderships as indicators of social forces, popular moods, and trends which must be "managed" and, to a degree, accommodated if those leaderships and the systems they run are to maintain themselves *in roughly their present forms*. In other words, no equation links even a flourishing sociological research establishment with liberalization.

This seems particularly clear in the case of another sort of sociological research in the USSR: *i.e.*, that which concerns the "career plans" of secondary-school graduates and their fulfillment. The systematic disadvantages experienced by collective farm and urban working-class youth in competing with scions of the intelligentsia for the scarce places in a higher education system that represents the "mobility ladder" have been clearly detailed in the researches of Rutkevich, Shubkin, *et al.* While the economy and the shape of the labor force dictate that not everyone can be upwardly mobile, the official response to the findings has been "underwhelming," with no evidence of any decisive moves to "do something" about these disparities in life-chances. If such moves *were* being made, one could consider them indicative of relatively important changes attributable, in some measure at least, to the encouragement of sociological research.

In a review essay of this type, one unfortunately tends to talk of "Eastern Europe" as a unit of analysis, deemphasizing the great historical and cultural differences between its component societies. Further, it is difficult to keep in view the gulf between the USSR itself and its close neighbors, whose post-World War II social histories have been so influenced by the imposition of Soviet "models." The institutional framework that was "imported" into these latter countries in the late 1940's was one of the Soviet invention and alien to the receiving countries. Surely, the "meaning" of the many elements of the Soviet model that are still in evidence—in greatly varying degrees—in East European societies differs from their "meaning" in the Soviet Union; and just as surely this fact must be taken into account in examining the differences in the sociologies of the East European countries. These differences are detailed in Wiatr's volume, while the Hollander and Simirenko books provide rich impressions of the style, problems and priorities of social science in the USSR.

WHAT OF THE future? The fact that the growth of sociological research in the USSR and Eastern Europe has not thus far been symptomatic of notable political change would seem to suggest that its *further* growth and consolidation in the years to come need not be paralleled by such change. Realistically, it seems more likely that with the "consolidation" and growing professionalization of sociology will come (indeed there is evidence that this is already the case) an increased emphasis on methodological and quantitative expertise, on sophisticated survey design and data manipulation, that will take sociology further away from any "criti-

cal" approach. Wiatr argues that Marxism's influence on sociology in Eastern Europe is expressed, *inter alia,* in "the emphasis laid on the study of large-scale social structures and institutions, [*i.e.,* in] the dominance of the macro-sociological approach"; yet much of the research of recent years has been more of the "micro" variety, directed toward gathering data relevant to specific problems of social management—which is hardly suggestive of a critical sociology. Hegedus may be closer to the mark in the way he sums up the situation (Wiatr, p. 84):

In the European socialist countries, including Hungary, the kind of social science which treats the present faces the dilemma of whether to become an apologetic science influencing behavior, or to provide the analysis and at the same time the criticism of the conditions that have developed. Some demand that it be the former, some the latter; the scholar who undertakes the former task may often gain considerable material advantages, whereas the reader who prefers to interpret the responsibilities of sociology may often invite censure, not excluding material disadvantages.

The output of Soviet and East European sociologists is certainly of value to different groups within their own societies—as well as to outside observers of those societies. But in general, even if sociologists so desired, they are scarcely equipped to play major roles in changing "the system." Empirically established social "facts" do not point unambiguously to a single, definite course of action. Besides, whatever the nature of the problems the sociologists delineate and whatever the direction of their findings, *acting* on these findings is a matter for those whose realm is politics rather than science. Policies and courses of action are chosen by political leaderships that are increasingly becoming assemblages of competing interest groups with differing sorts of "stakes" in maintaining the status quo. It is, if anything, rather interesting that sociology has progressed as far as it has, in sophistication and technique, in a situation where sociologists generally are *not* completely free, in Inkeles' words, to "pursue their interests, fully publish their results, and freely state their conclusions."

This is not to say that the emergence of sociology in the USSR and Eastern Europe signifies nothing. Even given its present limits, it indicates a drift of potentially great importance away from "high coercion" modes of coordinating society in which the political leaderships operate under conditions of "low information." But the ultimate direction of such a drift is still indeterminate, and there is good reason to agree with Katz that we should not assume that the direction is one "of Western-style democracy, or that it will necessarily involve a revolutionary explosion." [5] If the new respectability and continued growth of sociology and social research in the more advanced Communist countries warrant a great deal of interest and attention, they cannot justify any but the most modest speculations on the larger changes they may herald.

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

Religion in the USSR

By Michael Bourdeaux

RICHARD H. MARSHALL, JR., Ed.; THOMAS E. BIRD and ANDREW Q. BLANE, Assoc. Eds.: *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union, 1917–67.* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1971.

THIS COLLECTION OF essays was conceived and proposed as a project at a gathering at Columbia University in 1966, one of the first in a notable series of conferences on religion in the Soviet Union which has continued under various auspices on both sides of the Atlantic over the last decade. Appropriately, the book is dedicated to Dr. Paul Anderson, the doyen of scholars on the Russian Orthodox Church and a tireless advocate of the study of religion in Soviet society. Dr. Anderson has himself provided a thought-provoking chapter of "Reflections on Religion in Russia," which is a highlight of the volume.

In a perspicacious foreword, Richard Marshall delineates clearly the magnitude of the task still facing scholars in evaluating the phenomenon of the continued vitality of religion in the Soviet Union more than fifty years after the first dogmatic assertion of official state atheism. In doing so, he touches on some of the deficiencies of the book as well as on its achievements—deficiencies which stem primarily from the fact that there are still not nearly enough good analysts prepared to spend their time studying the extreme complexity and variety of the religious scene in the USSR today. As an important example, Mr. Marshall notes that it is quite staggering to see how many assessments of the Khrushchev period by political scientists fail even to mention the topic of religion, let alone to place Khrushchev's repressive antireligious policies in the context of his comparative liberalization in other areas.

The spine of the volume is Section II, comprised of five essays on various aspects of "Religion and Soviet Society" by six scholars of outstanding ability (one chapter is a joint work). If the rest of the book had been up to this magnificent standard, it would have been one of the finest on Soviet affairs ever published. Most of the names here are recommendation enough in themselves. Bohdan Bociurkiw contributes an excellent general essay on "Religion and Atheism in Soviet Society," which operates almost as a second introduction to the volume. George Kline, in "Religious Themes in Soviet Literature," has assembled examples from a wide field of choice, and his analysis will persuade many students to look with fresh vision at the works of several modern authors, especially Siniavsky (pp. 170–74) and Brodsky (pp. 177–84). It is a pity that Dr. Kline did not undertake a similar treatment of Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* deserves more than half a sentence, not to mention Solzhenitsyn's prose poems (though perhaps at the time Dr. Kline wrote, he had not seen the latter, which were first published in the West in 1965).

The three essays that form Chapters 5–7 provide overwhelming documentation on the Soviet regime's relentless hounding of religious believers ever since the Communists came to power. Among certain Western church leaders today one finds a misguided and naive optimism that in some way Soviet policy toward religious believers is becoming more "tolerant." Certainly there have been periods of greater and lesser violence, and the last seven years have seen fewer imprisonments, but the chapters in question leave no doubt that such variations are merely the swings of a pendulum, leaving unaffected the ultimate Soviet object of extirpating religion from society. The study by Donald Lowrie and William Fletcher of the Khrushchev period should be required reading for every single churchman who has dealings with the Russians. It is the best analysis of the late leader's antireligious purge (not too strong a word) to appear anywhere, and the present-day situation cannot be understood without reference to what happened under Khrushchev in 1959–64.

That these occurrences were no temporary aberration of an individual is proved by Joan Delaney's chapter on the "Origins of Soviet