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SOCIAL ACTION, SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION
AND SOCIAL POLICY

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I Introduction: the semantics of the problem

Confusion in terminology in social studies is so wide, that I apologize for feeling compelled to frame a number of definitions before I can treat the subject properly. Defining subjects provides in the mean time a first opportunity for analysis.

1. For the purpose of this paper Social Policy is defined as the one which is conducted by public authorities. The final decisions then are with those who exercise political control. Within the framework of these decisions however, professional social agents use to administer the social policy. These administrators bring along with them their own professional ethics, so that the actual social policy presents a mixture of political intentions and professional social ethics. This mixture is very particular to social policy. This is never mere politics. Neither is it merely politics applied to a specific field. It has an ethical bias, which is represented by the administrators of the same.

The administrators are supposed to conduct a policy indeed. This is to say, that they are supposed not to act haphazardly, according to the urgency of needs merely, or according to immediate political advantages primarily, but to act consistently and consciously over time and space in order to reach certain pre-established goals. A policy at the mean time is aware of limited actual or potential resources, as well as of the obstacles. It is aware that not everything can be done at once and can be realize everywhere. It locates its activities in such a way that the ultimate goals are reached in a reasonable time at an optimum degree. Policy thus implies planning and techniques.

A conflict is likely to persist within any social policy: the short term successes

needed by the politicians, and the ethical attitude as well as the long term social planning of the administrators.

2. There are but few words so vague (or should I say so dynamic) as the very word social.

I shall therefore go shortly through the history of the meanings it had in the combination with action, keeping in mind that all the past meanings are all still in full usage.

2a. Originally, the word social activities replaced the word charitable activities and this replacement coincided with the secularization process in society. Social then was every activity that was meant to help underprivileged groups, to help groups who stood and stand weak in their society. We have soon learned to distinguish two categories among these, the ones who stand weak because of individual deficiencies, the physically or mentally underprivileged (handicapped) people, and the ones who stand weak, because society, or the social milieu does not offer them the opportunities to live decently, viz. the economically or politically underprivileged groups.

The first category had to be cared for by the better-offs. This has been changed later on into social work in its narrower sense, when care became cure.

The second category were in the beginning of the XIX century, the poor class. They were originally approached in the same way: they were left to the care of the rich. Later they became distinguished into different groups: workers, farmers, sometimes ethnical groups or the youth. These politically and/or economically underprivileged ones often organized rather programmes for self-help, thus preparing social action, which in a later stage was conducive to social legislation and social security system.

2b. Another concept of social we find in the terminology of social services, and the social security provisions, covering all health services, educational institutions, (general education as well as vocational training or agricultural extension, by the public or private). In this context "social" covers the sector of life next to, and often as a correction of the field of the economics. From the economic standpoint the social sector will be defined as investment in people. Those, however, working in these social fields, will oppose to be considered as an instrument to economic ends and see social services as directed towards the human development proper. Social services are in principle meant to serve all individuals and not especially the underprivileged groups.

2c. Today, in relation to the development of poor regions or countries, social activities also are dealing with more sociological factors. When some groups have been or are, underprivileged, it often was so because of the structure of society. Stagnation of economic development also is sometimes due to such structures, at least partially. A feudal type of society, big gaps inbetween the strata of a society, the persistence of closed small communities, the concentration of all industries or services in one or two metropolises, a constant fight between political parties in the hands of a new excessively rich families, all these are definitely structural obstacles to socio-economic development.

In the same way economic development may be greatly impeded by a traditional culture or value systems. A state of mind continually referring to the past, or to supernatural causes, or to authorities, instead of taking the destiny in one's own hands, instead of trying to analyze and to understand the facts, instead of working efficiently and managing time and resources, certainly is a constant obstacle to economic development.

Today, at least in academic discussions, social policy is called upon to change those structural and cultural factors in order to pave the way for economic and political development.

It is quite a different concept from the social work for underprivileged groups, different also from the notion of human development of the individual. It deals with the society as a whole, determining the conditions for human development, and causing or preventing distress within it.

3. When we distinguish social action from social policy, - and we want to do so - a distinction between the state and the society is implied. The state essentially is the power structure which controls society. This holds true also in a democracy of the Western type; by which society in turn supervise the state, supervise the exercise of its power and control. Social policy, as has been said, is understood here as the social activity of the state, which may comprise all forms of social activities, as analyzed under 2.

Social action then are the social activities of the autonomous society and its parts. Legally they will all be called private activities. These may, however, present a whole range of activities in between at the one end charitable action by rich ladies for selected poor people, and at the other the well thought and well organized activities of trade-unions taking responsibility for the national economy. Sociologically speaking there is an enormous difference between merely private, individual activities and collective social actions, raising within and from the parts of the society.

It is on these collective social action, that, I think, we have to concentrate, when discussing its relations to state conducted social policies. Such collective actions, however, may be or have been of a different kind.

Social actions sometimes are non-articulated, spontaneous movements, weakly organized, such as upheavals, resistances, protests; sometimes they are well organized, have clearly defined goals and act in a planned or in a strategic way. There are of course, also

many forms inbetween, mainly when spontaneous collective action is on its way organizing itself for permanent action.

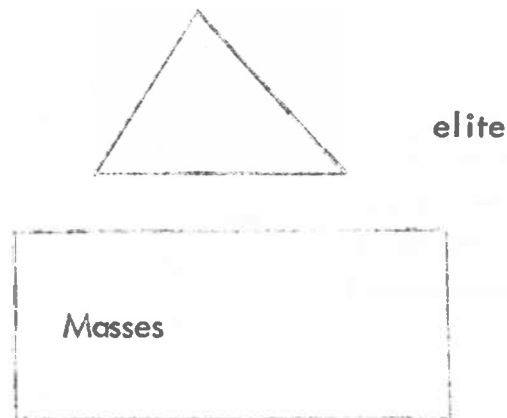
Historically social action, being collective action, has been categorized as social improvement and social reform, to which has to be added anarchistic action. Anarchistic action is opposing or fighting the present state of social affairs, without offering alternatives. Social improvement action accepts the essentials of the present structure of a society (e.g. the capitalistic one) but wants the improvement of the social or economic position of some groups within that structure. Social reform action aims at changing the essentials of the societal structure (e.g. from a capitalist into a socialist, from a feudalistic type into a society which materializes equality before law, from a cast structure to a class structure).

II The background of social action.

After this very analytical approach we are seeking a normative approach about the relation between social policy and social action. Before we can find such a normative approach, we have to find an objective yardstick, or the underlying values, as have manifested themselves in social history.

I think we can find this yardstick in the history of stratification. Most traditional societies consisted of a rather small and privileged elite group, which possessed all rights and privileges, and on the other hand the mass, which lived at the service of the elite, had to obey them and did obey them spontaneously, the people which had to expect all good things in life from this elite. The mass actually was not undifferentiated; they were servants, peasants, artisans, or dependent workers, but the elite considered them as the one backward, uncivilized group. Also the elite considered themselves the very society, the others as non-society.

This type of stratification can be symbolized in this way:



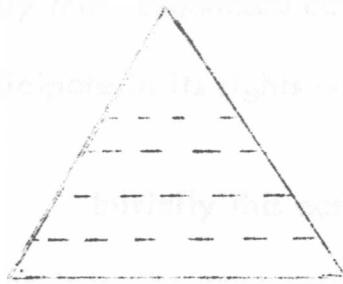
Let us turn now to the French Revolution as one of the main social changes which have occurred in world history. It was preceded by a shift within the masses, when education, which so far was a privilege to the elite - the nobility and the clergy -, also organized for some groups in the masses. Some of them created and entered free professions. At the same time some merchants and beginning industrialists got enriched. At the occasion of the French popular revolution, the lower elites, the lower nobility and clergy, made the newly educated and enriched group enter into the society, i.e. share the rights and privileges of the elite. This new group revolutionized the existing elites by introducing its own value system.

After the revolution, however, there was a new separation between the haves, which were also the civilized people, and the have-nots, or the uncivilized ones.

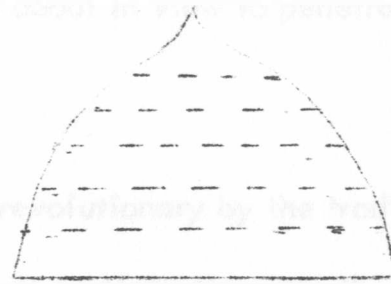
During the XIX century, happened the social revolution of the workers' class.

Fundamentally the same thing happened. Groups of the have-not got some education and a regular salary. They were able to express the dissatisfaction of the have-nots. The lower elites of the bourgeois society joined them and brought them the organizational power. The workers organizations captured the rights and privileges of "the society", political, economic and social ones. So they entered the society and changed it according to their value system.

The present situation can be symbolized as follows:



or



A gap always remains between the society and a poor class, slum dwellers, sometimes tenants, usually considered to be the uneducated uncivilized people, because they have a cultural pattern different from that of the society.

From this we may understand what has been the general pattern of social action as collective action.

The group or groups which are outside the rights and privileges of those who make society, are consciously or unconsciously dissatisfied with their situation. If they have no practical hope for change, they either react by apathy or by irrational outbursts. They are often accused of apathy mainly before public or private programmes of assistance. Probably they feel that such programmes are rather framed to prevent them to become aggressive by diminishing their dissatisfaction. Sometimes also they suddenly burst out in unarticulated upheavals or revolution, which are bound to be unsuccessful as long as they miss organizational power.

As has been said, organizational power has to come from the lower elites, from those who had the education of their class, but who also are frustrated by their lower position.

When these join the dynamic forces of dissatisfaction in the non-societal groups, it is very likely that organized action of these groups comes about in view to penetrate society, to participate in its rights and privileges.

Initially this action will be considered as revolutionary by the traditional society; and so it is, because such action does not aim only at participating into the rights, but also at imposing its values.

If, however, this movement becomes successful, the new groups install themselves within the society, and become a stratum of the integrated stratification. Once this is achieved, the revolutionary period is over and the so-called constructive period begins. This means their action will be concentrated on the defense of the position obtained and the improvement of that position, as well as they become pressure groups on the governments to enhance their interests.

If this analysis is workable, it shows that what type of social action is to be expected depends on the type of stratification of a society. If the stratification is one with gaps of non-communication between certain strata, and by with certain groups feel themselves excluded from impact on, and benefits from the society, an anarchistic type of social action is to be expected from the underprivileged groups, which are not able to organize themselves, because they do not get the support from the lower ranks of the recognized society. When, however, such groups gain organizational power, the social reform type of action is to be expected. Finally, when they succeed to become an influential part of the society, and become the lower strata in one stratification without gaps above them, then the social improvement type of action can be expected.

If we look, however, where it is all about, it seems that lower groups are always

striving not so much after absolute equality, as well after impact on the society, partly for their group benefits, partly for importing their own value system in the society. Social action essentially is an expression of emancipation movements of the lower strata, of maturation of backward groups.

III Public social policy and Social Administration.

Let us turn again to social policy. As has already been said, social policy is framed by the politicians and the social administrators.

The social administrators are professionalists. As such they tend to extend and improve the services they administer, if at least they have not degenerated into routinization. By nature they are more inclined to improve than to innovate. This improvement implies also the extension of the social services and the social security measures over more individuals. In this way their activities may be steadily extended over economically and politically less privileged groups. They never can aim at revolutionizing the society by these less privileged groups, as this would bring them into conflict with their principals, the politicians.

It is very rare that the social administrators deliberately take up the promotion of structural and cultural changes of the society, or of its parts, in view of economic development. Although these changes are badly needed for development, their coming about is rather left to spontaneous processes a consequences of development, be it sometimes under planned economic incentives, then they are consciously promoted. Nevertheless, such structural and cultural changes should be at the heart of education, or of such development programmes as agricultural extension, community development, or promotion of cooperatives, trade-unions and the like. We do observe that social administrators prefer to establish and extend their social services within the existing cultural patterns and within the existing social structures

and then leave it to sociologists to observe what cultural and structural consequences these services may have. From this we may already observe how badly the challenge of social action is needed to renew the society.

The politicians, who finally decide about the resources at the disposal of social administrators, are at the same time broadening and narrowing the planned policies of the administrators.

They do broaden them by bringing them in a wider societal and political context. First of all they set the social services into the societal framework. They decide whether the social services will be only public services, or predominantly private ones, whether they will be publicly supported private services - by local or by central government -, or will be competing public and private services. These decisions, of course depend from the social philosophy of the rulers.

Secondly, they set the political framework, because they integrate the social policy into the overall policy, or subordinate it to this policy-. So they may subordinate the social policy to the economic policy and measure the resources for the social policy according to their input into the economic system. Or they may subordinate the social policy to national political goals, such as the integration of the nation, the national prestige in the international community, or the prevention of too fast an urbanization. Theoretically it could happen that the politicians subordinate the economic or political goals to social welfare. This is rare, though some political regimes (Egypt, Zambia, Chili) seem to identify national prestige and social welfare promotion.

On the other hand the politicians tend to narrow the planned policies of the social administrators. These latter prefer to plan over a longer time, distributing the available

resources in such a way over time and space, that their efficient use is granted where they are established, and so that they can be expanded step by step over the territory of the country. The politicians, however, are usually after short term successes, which are profitable in the next election campaign. So they disturb the longer term policy by their tendency to satisfy all potential voters on the short run. They push the spreading of the available resources so thinly everywhere, that they might not be effective anywhere. They also make promises to their voters, which cannot be fulfilled and thus they disturb the confidential climate needed for good social administration.

Such tensions are unavoidable. Political life is as much a social reality as social welfare requirements. Both act rational in their own field, but their rationalities may be incompatible. This conflict is not rare. The solution is not and should not be in the suppression of one of them, but rather in their mutual recognition and understanding. This means that the tension should be consciously maintained and outspoken, so that they can correct each others excesses. As government and politicians are in the possession of power by institution, a fairly strong corps of administrators is needed to maintain the balance.

Political groups in power do not use to pay much attention to the necessary structural and cultural changes in the society, as these suppose long term processes, which may well meet resistances on the short run. Neither will they, politicians, be inclined to foster the liberation of economically or politically underprivileged groups, unless the government itself is the expression of social action in its constructive stage.

We rather observe that most political groups in power direct the social policies in such a way that they can prevent profound structural changes. They tend to develop social programmes and to organize social services in order to patronize the underprivileged groups, unless the government itself is the expression of social action in its constructive stage.

We rather observe that most political groups in power direct the social policies in such a way that they can prevent profound structural changes. They tend to develop social programmes and to organize social services in order to patronize the underprivileged groups; in order to improve their conditions so far only, that too great a discontentment is prevented; in order to keep them quiet.

IV Public Social Policy and Collective Social Action

The latter mentioned point seems precisely to be the tangent between social policy and social action.

It is beyond doubt that the responsibility proper to the politicians is the integration of the social policy into a wider economic and societal context.

It is doubtful, however a social policy as framed by the administrators and politicians - also when their mutual tensions are willingly maintained - will ever meet the necessary cultural and structural changes, if they are not continuously challenged by collective social action.

This is not to say that cultural and structural changes needed for a fostering of economic development are of the same kind as those which are fostered by social action. There are too many examples of spontaneous actions which initially were conducting to the decline of the economy. But social action draws continuously the attention to the fact that more is going on than uses to be in the minds of the social policy-makers, and more is needed than what they are conscious about. Development is not a merely economic phenomenon. It is an overall change of culture and society, in which economic development is to be rooted. Policies are required to guide this overall change, which becomes manifest in social action, into the direction of economic development, or in rooting economic development.

There is a natural opposition between social policy and beginning social action. Politicians and administrators both belong to the recognized part of society. They do not necessarily defend their own interests, but they defend the dominating values of their existing society. The present society fundamentally despise the non-societal people, the uncivilized, the uneducated, the backward people - all according to the standards of the dominating society. When social policy is applied to them, it is to "socialize" them, to "adapt" them. When, however, the non-society people come to action and come to maturity, they rather want to de-socialize the society, i.e. to change the value standards of the society according to their own ones.

Such action is called anarchistic by the society in vigour, This includes that this society wants to suppress the initial social action. The recognized society is right in judging so, because as long as social action is only protest and rebellion, it does not offer a practical alternative. Thus it is a destructive force and every society suppresses the destructive forces. In such a situation the earlier social policy, which was meant to keep the people quiet, is suspended and replaced by police or military forces. Nevertheless, such social eruptions should be a warning signal to the politicians. It might be, that in the country concerned the historical process of emancipation of a new group of underprivileged people has started, and will progress notwithstanding aggression to them.

If the politicians want to prevent progression of revolutionary action, they may know from sociological analysis, that they have to prevent at any cost the lower dissatisfied elite joining the unarticulated aspirations of the "masses". As long as the politicians can prevent this junction, the revolutionary movement will lack organizational power.

The unrest, however, continues and is disastrous for the development policies, which suppose co-operation with the leaders, regular efforts and continuous engagement in the

economy. Economic leaders are often surprised, that the economic incentives do not work. This is so (the leaders, however, may fail to see it) because the aspirations among the people, or among parts of them, are not primarily directed toward economic improvement, but towards the structural changes in the society, so that their values will become effective in it.

The usual mistake made by the politicians under this circumstances used to be another one. They want to suppress revolutionary movements where they become manifest, i.e. in the traditional structures as e.g. the rural, feudal ones. They often overlook that other structural changes are going on in the country, where no initial difficulties may appear, e.g. changes from the feudal into the urban, industrial structures, or from a tribal into a class structure. In such new structures the dissatisfied lower elites may have joined the dissatisfied unorganized masses and start an organized movement, before the traditional leaders were aware of the fact. Under such conditions the same emancipation movement goes on, but replaces its center of action. Finally the action may return to the place of original starting points, but now in an organized form.

Once the emancipation movement has gained organizational power, social action changes its nature: it becomes a social reform action. This constitutes a new challenge to the social policy makers. The reform action now constitutes an opposition in the political sense of the word. From paternalistic care for the underdogs and the violent suppression of the movement, the relation between social policy and social action now becomes one of strategy.

This means that the politicians will realize bits of the wishes and requirements of the emancipation movements in order to diminish its force and to alienate marginal adherents to themselves. By doing so they bring some small, but structural changes in the society, in order to prevent more profound changes. It all depends now from the quantitative pushing force of

the opposition and from its qualitative organizational power, how far these concessions will go. This strategy forces however, the social politicians to think more about the necessary structural and cultural changes than about incidental welfare provisions. The social reform action endangers the very staying in power of the ruling groups. These groups will try to ensure their continuity. Therefore some of them may in time join the reform action and so split the ruling groups themselves. This undoubtedly will influence the social policy in all fields.

The social administration the impact of social reform action will prevent their routinization. In the line of the politicians the administrators will be called to improve and extend the social services over potential adherents of the movement. Very likely such an emancipation movement will oppose a paternalistic approach from the part of the administrators and require practical and efficient services. The administrators will have to be careful not to encounter too severe criticism from the opposition. Which attention will keep them awake.

Moreover, it is also very likely that individuals with sympathy for the social reform in their hearts, penetrate the social administration. In the way the ideas of the social reform movement can gain ground in the policy itself, even against the intentions of the politicians. The social administration, as a corps of administrators, may be much more aware of what is going on than the politicians are willing to recognize. Then the administrators will strive for more autonomy. By their professional ethics and foresight in planning, the administrators may mentally identify themselves more with the opposition than with the political leaders, they are supposed to follow.

The tension which often is found between the party policies, the supervising board of individuals over social services (a relic of the patronizing approach) and the professional administrators (in the public as well as in the private sector) may well be explained in this way.

When the social reform action becomes more and more successful it installs itself in the regular political forms in order to participate in the official power structure, or in order to be prepared to take the power over. Then social action takes the form of social construction. It takes responsibility for the society, its reconstruction and its services. It now contributes to the creation of new social legislation and to new social services. It institutionalizes its successes. Now also the way is open to make the structural changes to serve the development policies.

Also when the ideals and goals of the social action have been taken over by the politicians, or the collective action has replaced the former politicians by their own ones, and thereby a new framework has been set to the social administrators, the collective action remains a challenge to politicians and administrators. Of course, it may happen that collective action dies from its own success, but as long as it persists, it permanently will test the leadership of the politicians on the values and ideas of the social movement. Also it will test the efficiency of the social administration. As such it presents the social improvement phase of collective action.

To maintain this positive function of social action vis a vis politics and administration, it is necessary that the leadership over the social action remains separated from political and administrative roles. Also when the social movement has brought into existence new social services (institutionalization) and the leaders will be called to take responsibility over them, so that the movements tend towards bureaucratization, the leadership over the social action has to be handled over to independent persons.

The conclusion of this paper is that social policy as framed by politicians and social administrators reflects the views and ideas of the respected society. Social action, as

spontaneous or organized collective action, reflects the dynamism of the overall society, especially its emancipation movements. As such it is a continuous challenge to the existing social policy. It is not to be expected that the politicians in power and the administrators in service will challenge the less privileged groups to express themselves in their own, non-adapted, way. Although this probably would not be the worse form of social policy.