



THE SOCIOLOGICAL MARXISM OF MICHAEL BURAWOY

Michael Burawoy's idea of public sociology instigated a heated debate about the purpose of sociological research and bestowed its author an important place among contemporary social thinkers. The article presents the intellectual path that led Burawoy to formulate his well-known idea. Starting from his first book, he developed a coherent and original theory that was indebted to Marxism but was reaching beyond its horizons. Through grounding his conceptual work in sociological field research, Burawoy created his own understanding of such concepts as class, interest or production. By linking the participant observation of workplaces' local regimes with the global political dynamics of social systems, the theory of sociological Marxism paved the way to formulating the new idea of sociology. Burawoy's sociology aims at combining a realistic investigation in the interests and dispositions of social actors with utopian imaginaries of contemporary culture.

Key words: Michael Burawoy; social theory; sociological Marxism; public sociology; class

Without a doubt Michael Burawoy is one of the most recognized contemporary sociologists, and at the same time his basic books, combining ethnographic research with theoretical panache, are not as intensely read and interpreted as they deserve. The most obvious reason for this situation is that Burawoy became famous due to his concept of public sociology, which he formulated quite late and while holding the most important positions in American and later international sociological associations. Numerous debates and polemics around public sociology, only to a small extent related to Burawoy's earlier works, have turned towards general disputes about the place of sociology in the social world, relations with non-academic audiences and the ethics of engagement (see, for example, Sztompka 2011; Burawoy 2009b). Such a turn of events was probably necessary, so that today a broad, inclusive debate about the role of sociology could take place, but at the same time the theoretical and research path that led to the formulation of the public sociology project has been misrecognized.

One has to admit the path was quite twisty. Burawoy studied in Great Britain, Zambia and Chicago. He conducted his research in such distant places as the Zambian copper mines, a Chicago agricultural machine factory, Hungarian steelworks and Soviet furniture and rubber factories. When traversing countries,

educational institutions and workplaces, however, Burawoy maintained a constant theoretical point of reference and that was Marxism. At the same time, he treated the writings of Marx and his followers not as sacred texts but as knowledge to be confronted with reality – theories that would have to be modified if they were to retain both explanatory and critical power.

Burawoy belongs to the generation of Marxists who, since the 1970's, have changed the way of theorizing as it prevailed in this paradigm after the Second World War when among others Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti were defining its conceptual framework. This generation of Marxists, as Perry Anderson (1976) has pointed out, belonged to the center of capitalism, was immersed in the academic world, focused on the interpretation of Marx's works from a philosophical perspective. The individual authors were not much interested in the work of other contemporary Marxists. In Burawoy's generation, all these parameters change. In addition to Burawoy, the most important representatives of his generation – Immanuel Wallerstein, Ernesto Laclau and Antonio Negri – are sensitive to non-western contexts, through their texts and actions they are involved in extra-academic contexts and, compared to the previous generation of Marxists, they are more interested in each other's work.

I propose to interpret this generational transition in terms of the change of reference point in Marxism from the tradition of *sociation* (*społeczeństwo*) to the tradition of *composition* (*kompozycja*) (Gdula 2015). The first one focuses on the problems rooted in object-subject relations. The questions consider here the process of becoming the socialized human being, the proportion of freedom and constraint in social life and the role of culture or ideology in reproduction of social order. One can trace modern genealogy of this theoretical tradition from the writings of Rousseau, through Marx, Weber, Parsons to Habermas and Bourdieu. The problems that constitute the tradition of composition are related to multiplicity of actors and complex materiality of social life. Authors writing in that tradition investigate how many actors exist in social world, what are the relations between them, what are the conditions of actors' access to certain domains of social reality. This brings the question of materiality and non-reductionist studies on technology and body practices. Modern genealogy of the second tradition starts with Machiavelli. It is present in the writings of Simmel, Gumpelwicz and Gramsci in the beginning of institutionalization of sociology and in Foucault (*biopower*), Laclau and Latour in contemporary social theory.

From the very beginning Burawoy's perspective can be included to second tradition. His studies are devoted to the diversity of workers and other social actors. He explores complex interests functioning in specific regimes of production. Burawoy is interested in the processes and possibilities of change of

these regimes but not so much as a leap into the realm of freedom but rather as a political process combining the interests of different groups and redefining production relations. Thus, Burawoy is not only an heir to the radical language of Marxism, for which there seems to be a fairly secure place nowadays, at least, in Western academia, but an interesting political thinker essential for understanding and transforming societies, especially in the current phase of capitalism.

Decolonization and Class

Burawoy first confronted the critical theories of society with the reality of his research on the Zambian copper mines, four years after national independence in 1964. He undertook the study (1968–72) while working in the administration of the Anglo-American Corporation and trailing the process of „Zambianization” in one of the mines. The image that emerges from Burawoy’s first book is far from Marxist orthodoxy. This cannot come as a surprise as at the time Marxist concepts were for Burawoy strongly mediated by the writings of Frantz Fanon (1963[1961]) and his analysis of postcolonial societies (Burawoy 2009a). Therefore, the analysis of the mine goes beyond uncovering the structural conflict between miners and owners, triggering additional dimensions related to race, political relations and the international situation.

The copper company that Burawoy researched belonged to a sector of strategic importance to Zambia. Ninety percent of the country’s exports were related to copper, which supplied from fifty to seventy percent of budget revenues (Burawoy 1972: 2). Profits from the mines and, thus, management of these enterprises was crucial for the success of the government’s modernization plans and state stability. In addition, there was a symbolic dimension of “Zambianization” related to claims for autonomy and control over the country after regaining independence. Nationalization of the mines and the program of introducing local, i.e. black managers to guide the enterprises were to be a testimony to the control exercised by the Zambian people over their own country. Burawoy’s book painfully confronted the optimistic picture of „Zambianized” companies with reality.

Although it occurred with the declaration of independence and then the nationalization of the mines, the process of replacing the previous management with new black managers reproduced features of the old order. The process of Zambianization consisted in promoting the prior managers into new positions, specially created for them. As a result, white expats retained much of the real power in the organization. The previously binding rule of the “color bar” that whites are not be subordinate to blacks was upheld not in formal way but in actual practice. Therefore, the racial division was reproduced behind the official message about reclaiming of the mines. But Burawoy does not stop at

exposing the white domination as an extension of colonialism, but he describes the mechanisms through which the color bar was created and reproduced in the company.

An important premise of creating additional positions for whites was the issue of their experience and qualifications. The promoted black managers were newcomers and lacked managerial skills. White managers were presumed to be more efficient and achieve better results. The company decided to use their work even if it meant increasing the managerial ranks and even if it led to additional conflicts between managers and their subordinates. Burawoy examines the interests of different groups in the racial order of the mines.

One was the black workers. Their interests, also represented by the trade union, were defined primarily in terms of increasing wages and improving working conditions. For the rank-and-file workers, the possibility of promotion was very unlikely and so they saw the chances for improving their own status primarily by increasing the wages (Burawoy 1972: 72). They were, therefore, not interested in “Zambianization”. In fact they could be quite hostile to the new Zambian managerial class, often preferring their white predecessors. How could this be? Burawoy notes that this situation had three main causes. A large part of the young workers could no longer remember how the mine operated in colonial times and how white managers had changed their attitude towards employees, using their power more subtly than before. Not without significance, and this would be the second reason, workers were inclined to believe that they had been betrayed by black managers who were allied with political leadership and the government, demanding sacrifices from the miners while living a luxurious life. Thirdly, the persistent dual management structure meant that the newly promoted black managers were incapacitated by their dependence on white managers, and so workers preferred to be subject to the decision-making management, i.e. whites.

A second important group favouring white managers in the mines were government elites. Although „Zambianization” had their official support and they themselves drew legitimacy by restoring the country to the local people, nonetheless, the political interest of the elite directed them towards a silent acceptance of racial division. First, the government was keen on the high economic efficiency of the mines, and they thought better results were guaranteed by the use of white expats. It can be said that the government faced the dilemma: whether to focus on full Africanisation of the enterprise and risk revenues or accept a racial “compromise” that would provide more resources to meet the country’s needs. The governmental elites chose the second solution, but in addition to the aforementioned calculation, something else was involved in their arithmetic. They were aware of the great strategic significance of the mines not only in economic but also in political terms. The reserve with which they regarded the new black

leadership resulted from the fear that a new Zambian managerial class might become popular leaders and, thus, dangerous political rivals.

Already in this first of Burawoy's studies, there is a clear framework that will guide his future work. He undertakes an empirical examination of the interests of a multiplicity of actors and the materiality of social systems. But this is no narrow empiricism since he neither shuns theoretical generalization nor submits to commonsense explanations which haunt researchers who declare the primacy of facts. Burawoy makes clear his choices and rejections that place him in opposition not only to mainstream sociology but also to major critical perspectives.

Although he states, for example, that the analysis of social configuration of the mine and its social context leads to conclusions that class takes precedence over the race in the determination of basic social divisions and that black managers successfully contribute to the exploitation of black workers, at the same time, he immediately points out:

(...) a simple two-class comprising the categories of worker and owners of means of production is inadequate for the treatment of changes that have been occurring over the last four decades. Rather it is necessary to consider a multiplicity of interest groups or classes whose relations to one another has been largely governed by their position vis-a-vis the means of production. I have argued that the persistence of the colonial 'economic base' with the copper mining industry retaining a central role, has limited changes in the social structure. On the other hand, whereas relations between groups or classes may have not altered significantly over this period, the idiom in which these relations are expressed, the channels through which conflict and co-operation, the recruitment to and consequently the membership of different groups, have all changed significantly. Such changes have in turn modified the social structure, but only within limits defined by the "economic base" (Burawoy 1972: 114).

Taking the economic base in quotes and distance towards the two-class model of analysis isn't here only a correction to the unidimensional analysis of other Marxist approaches. Burawoy develops an alternative path than that defined, on the one side, by reference to the division of property, economic coercion and exploitation, and, on the other side by worker alienation and an ideology that serves as a tool for perpetuating domination.

Burawoy's attention is rather directed to questions about how specific conditions of production favor the constitution of various actors and their interests without prejudging before the research what kinds of actors one might find and what interests they may exhibit. This approach avoids carrying an actor's identity between contexts and, then, using it to organize the analysis of reality by distinguishing between essential and contingent features. Burawoy doesn't point out that the workers are primarily subjected to exploitation (essence), and their acceptance of white leadership is related to the specificity of the historical situation in which they are located, i.e. they are black, relatively well-paid, and no longer

experience colonial oppression, etc. (contingency). Instead he reconstructs the interests of workers without introducing such a predetermined hierarchy and without deploying the critique associated with it. Interests, such as striving to raise the level of wages related to increasing the efficiency of the enterprise and the desire to be guided by efficient managers, are considered a real and not ideological or contingent component of the class structure, determining the position of workers and affecting their strategies. It is significant that Burawoy puts the concept of economic base in quotes. It is not a category designed to examine contingency in order to reach the essence. It is rather something that set limits on the situation in which actors form their interests and strategies. This is clearly visible in the case of the government elite analysis, which must choose between a principle of national autonomy on the one side and raising revenue for development with a given economic base.

When you look at Burawoy's analysis from the perspective of time and the evolution of critical thinking, you can see that he distances himself from dismantling certain categories - such as efficiency – that introduce differences that are important from the perspective of the actors under consideration. The tendency to dismantle such categories whether they be efficiency, health or sexuality has increasingly dominated critical thinking since the 1970's. Thanks to this, the areas where critical thought operated were extended, showing the mechanisms of power in the spheres treated previously as neutral. At the same time, however, it meant the spread of criticism focusing on the dismantling of naturalized categories and postulating their complete rejection as a basis for relations of domination. In critical thought it has often led to far-reaching refinement of theoretical considerations, although, at the same time, it threatened to ignore differences and stakes of great importance to social actors. Burawoy's perspective cannot be dismissed as naïve. It is rather a testimony to the fact that criticism can be based on different principles than unveiling the entanglement of neutral or common sense knowledge in the structures of domination. This is especially true when the categories we use refer not to elements of the system-wide mechanisms of domination, but to local realities that are crucial for social actors under study. Burawoy's further research projects can be treated as a way to develop the analyses of different configurations as a necessary foothold for building a broader picture of social reality.

Why the Worker Gives his Best?

In 1973–4, Burawoy was employed at Allied, a South Chicago branch of a multi-nation corporation that produced engines for agricultural and construction equipment, and began a study that led him to pose fundamental questions

about Marxist visions of labor and politics. The books *Manufacturing Consent* (1979) and *The Politics of Production* (1985) represent Burawoy's effort to develop his own perspective.

One of the first things that burst into the eyes of Burawoy when he landed on the shop floor was the pace of work. Workers worked at a great tempo – or so it seemed to him – and, as a newcomer, he had a problem to keep up with the others. It took him quite a long time to learn how to work at the expected rate. What is important, the workers were not subject to rigid, direct control by their supervisors but “voluntarily”, or as he would say “consented” to maintain a high rate of work. Their activity was focused on „making out” and a significant part of the workers’ intellectual, emotional and social energies were devoted to strategies to achieve this goal. Burawoy faced a Marxist anomaly: the exploited themselves were concerned to maintain the level of exploitation; they did not rebel against the system that exploits them. His analysis is a search for a Marxist answer to the question on how this is possible.

First of all he draws attention to the system of wages in the factory. Workers work on a piece rate system based on production standards defined for a given job. Rates are established as the number of manufactured pieces to be produced per hour. Employees are required to produce 100 percent of the standard rate, although it is assumed that they will produce 125 percent. A surplus of 25 per cent means additional earnings for them, which range from around 15 per cent of total remuneration (payment for the production level is only one of the elements of remuneration in addition to the extra money for work on shifts and benefits). If workers produce below the 100 percent norm they are not punished but receive a wage calculated as if they had performed according to the standard norm, i.e. 100 percent (Burawoy 1979: 48–51).

In other words, the system is not primarily based on coercion and punishments, but rather on incentives and rewards. Workers are in a situation where they can earn more by increasing their work rate while being guaranteed a minimum wage corresponding to 100 percent. Left to themselves, the majority decide to increase their work effort and commitment to exceed the standard 100% and thereby increase earnings. Apart from strictly material interests in increased effort, there is also a certain dramatization of the production process through investment in work as a game. In conversations, workers exchange the best ways to „make out”, share experiences and ways of working faster and more efficiently (Burawoy 1979: 51–62).

The second issue that strongly affects the position of workers in the work process at Allied is the existence of an internal labor market. If a vacancy arises in a given position interested workers, already working at Allied, bid on the position. The new occupant is chosen on the basis of expertise and seniority with the enterprise. Only when there is no interest among Allied workers, does the

company reach into the wider labor market.

This institutional solution has far-reaching consequences for defining the interests of workers. Employees are more individualized as they think of their careers as the movement between different jobs in the factory and as they take advantage of the explicit rewards for loyalty to the company. Relations between supervisors and workers are also relaxed as the former, in order to hang on to their best workers, realize that disgruntled workers can always depart by bidding on alternative jobs. In other words, they can vote with their feet without the increased costs and risks associated with leaving the company. The result is a softer supervision, taking into account individual worker dispositions, and encouraging the use of positive incentives rather than penalties as a means to achieve production goals.

The third institutional factor that shapes the specificity of work at Allied is the system of bargaining between management and trade unions. Subsequent contentious issues are transferred and debated at higher levels of unions and company management and finally adopted every three years with the renewal of the collective agreement. At Allied, as well as in other branches of advanced industry in the USA, there is only one trade union in a given company that represents all employees, resulting in the reduction of the number and intensity of conflicts and a significant coordination of the interests of owners and employees.

The existence of this type of collective bargaining system is a form of class compromise between capital and labor, but it also has the effect of individualizing the interests of workers. The collective agreement is as legal document that gives workers a range of rights and obligations. Violations of the contract, lead to specific dispute procedures and a grievance mechanism. This formalization of the legal order of the enterprise is peculiar to the US. When one compares it for example to British system where agreements were more likely to be temporary arrangements concluded between the dominant unions in the company and management, one can see these agreements are open to criticism from minority unions or opposition forces in dominant unions. And so in the UK there were more frequent industrial conflicts in which workers adopted collective strategies to achieve their goals. (Burawoy 1985: 135–137).

The image of labour relations emerging from Burawoy's research could be a convenient point of reference for the defenders of modern capitalism and the critics of Marx. Contrary to the predictions about the coming collapse of capitalism, which would be destroyed by self-organizing workers, we are dealing with flourishing capitalist companies, where workers and owners cooperate to generate profit and, consequently, the general well-being. Burawoy recognizes that Marx's vision has its limitations and may not apply to contemporary labor relations. At the same time, he does not accept the consensual vision of capitalism as a system that spontaneously and definitively overcomes the conflict

of interests. His complex analysis is carried out in a double opposition: both to orthodox Marxism and to the prospects of naturalizing capitalism. Burawoy's main conceptual tool here is historicization.

One of the most influential Marxist books about work in the US was *Labor and Monopoly Capital* by Harry Braverman published in 1974. It was a very important and critical point of reference for Burawoy. Braverman's point of departure is the reconstruction of the idea of labor alienation in Marx's oeuvre. The condition of possibility for alienation is the separation of design (conception) and execution. The mental part of operations transforming nature is performed by people other than those who perform physical activities. There is, in short, a forcible separation of mental and manual labor. This opens the door to the transformation of work from a creative activity involving the whole person into an instrumental act of specialized and deskilled work. It is through capitalist accumulation associated with the separation of conception and execution that the alienation of man is completed (Braverman 1998 [1974]: 31–40). Capitalists pursue their greatest profits by increasing worker control and lowering workers' earnings. They accomplish both ends by maximally simplifying the production process, that is, by separating conception from execution or deskilling. In this way, capitalists intensify and rationalize work, but also avoid having to pay skilled workers for their complex work. The development of capitalist industry thus leads to the dissemination of alienated labor without hope for the end of alienation of exploitation.

This vision of a society subject to pauperization and alienation is firmly rooted in Marx's analysis, which, according to Burawoy, is not so much false as limited to a specific historical context. Marx created his concept of production on the basis of the realities of nineteenth-century British society, when industrialization occurred at a very rapid pace. The production system drew on large masses of people being pushed out of traditional and less effective economic activities, often in the rural areas. This resulted in a system based on strong price competition between companies, a labor market with large surplus of labor, despotic organization of work, simplification of production process and dependence of workers on capitalists for their survival as there was no other means of subsistence than through wage labor (Burawoy 1985: 88–90). This system, called by the Burawoy market despotism, was neither the first capitalist production regime nor its final model.

Earlier, capitalist enterprises used patriarchal relations to organize the reproduction of the labor force. Men were responsible for organizing the production process, in particular the employment and supervision of mothers and children. This model was quite popular in England during the industrial revolution and its end was brought by technologies that changed the scale of production (Burawoy 1985: 89–91). In turn, Allied, which Burawoy investigated in the mid-1970's,

belongs to the production regime he describes as hegemonic. In several fundamental respects, it differs from the despotic regime. Companies do not compete with each other fiercely, but they function either as monopolists or as part of an oligopoly, preempting competition that reduces the pressure to reduce wages in pursuit of higher profits. Workers are usually qualified and organized, which stabilizes the relation of forces between owner and employees. This goes along with a variety of institutional solutions, such as the previously described internal labor market or the collective bargain. Under the hegemonic regime, the state plays a different role than in the market despotism. Its significance can be well captured by considering the division into reproduction of the workforce and production processes (Burawoy 1985: 138). In market despotism, the reproduction of the labor force depends to a large extent on participation in production and the income from work. Workers and their families satisfy their needs almost entirely through buying goods and services with their wages. On the other hand, in hegemonic regimes, the state satisfies some of the employees' needs, for example in the field of education, health or even partly income in the form of various benefits. This implies a far-reaching separation between reproduction of labor and production, which reduces the dependence of employees on capitalists. The second function of the state is related to the regulation of the production processes itself, a regulation that is basically absent under market despotism, where the state's regulation of capitalist relations is limited to the protection of property and compliance with contracts.

The hegemonic production regime, according to Burawoy, exists along with other types of production regimes in different sectors of the economy. In addition to the developed branches of production where hegemonic regimes are typical, there exist sectors where the rule of market despotism is unswayed. For example in agriculture, where workers are often immigrants, wages are low, dependence on employers is high and companies compete to reduce the prices of commodities. It can be said, however, that, at least in three decades after the war, hegemonic regimes dominated in advanced capitalist societies and established the direction for the transformation of the world of work. Burawoy also notes that one can distinguish several variants of the organization of hegemonic regimes depending on the scope of state intervention in industrial policy and the scale of needs satisfied by public funding. The analysis of the cases of USA, Great Britain, Sweden and Japan (Burawoy 1985: 137–152) can be considered as an earlier and simultaneously related to the Esping-Andersen's typology of contemporary varieties of capitalism (compare Esping-Andersen 1990).

By historicizing capitalism, Burawoy creates a perspective from which one can criticize the cultural naturalization of capitalism. Superficially read Burawoy's ethnography could be interpreted in terms of the specificity of American culture in which the heritage of Protestantism, the individualistic

ethos and pragmatic attitude of the Americans melt together to create a particularly convenient social environment for economic prosperity. Just as Burawoy avoided referring to racism as a comprehensive culture of domination that produces similar effects in different places of the globe, he does not look for some American specificity that allows to understand “everything”. Instead Burawoy reconstructs the historical process of forming a hegemonic regime in the US. It was shaped first of all during the Great Depression, when companies withdrew certain concessions that employees managed to get during the First World War. Despite unemployment in the factories, strikes spread and the world of work boiled. In this situation, Congress passed several acts that brought some stability to the relationship between labor and capital. The most important was the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 guaranteeing workers in most sectors the right to organize and collective bargain. It was within the framework created by this new law that the interests of workers, trade unions, owners and government agencies were defined (Burawoy 1985: 141–143). The configuration of relations that Burawoy analyzed in his research at Allied is a consequence of this process. At its source was not an American mentality or a Protestant culture, but a specific political situation related to intense class conflicts and attempts to regulate them.

Historicizing the context in which regimes of production are forged and reproduced makes one sensitive to the changes that can be brought about by new capitalist dynamics. As early as the beginning of the 1980's, Burawoy notes that the regimes characteristic of post-war years was giving way to new forms. They differ from hegemonic regimes by the weakened the position of employees in the workplace and the reduction in the satisfaction of needs from public funds. This was made possible, in part, by the greater capital mobility between the center and periphery (both within countries and on a global scale), and broader opening of the labor markets for immigrants. In the post-war years concessions were granted to the workers which were based on the prospects of increasing annual profits of enterprises. Now they are under pressure of financialization, which alters the relative returns on invested capital, forcing less profitable types of economic activity to “structural changes” and reduction of costs. Even workers in the advanced industries are often faced with two alternatives: cutting wages or the number of jobs. Burawoy proposes to call this emerging configuration a hegemonic despotism because the strategies of actors and conflicts between them are still largely embedded in a hegemonic regime with its proper legal regulations and employee representation.

Burawoy's theoretical sensitivity enabled him to identify early on changes occurring within Western societies in the 1970's. Interestingly, he began to describe what was later referred to as neoliberalism (see, for example, Harvey 2008). What distinguishes Burawoy from other critics of this tendency is the

consistent search for forces that can turn it around and the belief that it will be possible to establish new, more balanced social configurations. I will return to this issue in the last section of the paper, meanwhile we need to look at one more important topic of Burawoy's theorization, which is socialism.

The Socialist Worker and the Worker's State

Among Marxists an interest in socialism is far from obvious. Most of them deal primarily with capitalism and its criticism. This is not very surprising since most of Marx's concepts have been developed in relation to capitalism, and for Western Marxists, the basic social context of academic and political activity were capitalist societies. Those interested in socialism as an existing social order, which began its life in 1917, were divided into two groups. Marxists involved in the project of building a new society and enthusiastic legitimization of the authorities of socialist state and Marxist critics of socialism who regarded actually existing socialism as a species of state capitalism in which the role of the owners of the means of production is occupied by party bureaucrats. Burawoy is a very original Marxist, who not only undertook research on really existing socialist societies, but also considered rethinking the experience of real socialism as important for reflecting on possible scenarios of social change in capitalism.

Burawoy's first approach to the study of socialist societies was different from his earlier studies, as it was based on second-hand ethnographic knowledge. In addition to the examination of early and advanced capitalism, colonial and post-colonial capitalism as well as pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia, in which the state played a particularly important role, *The Politics of Production* devoted a whole chapter to production politics under actually existing socialism, what he called state socialism. The starting point for his reflections was the book by Miklos Haraszti: *A Worker in a Worker's State*.

Haraszti was a student when he got involved in the criticism of the authorities for which he was expelled from the university and sentenced to work in Red Star Tractor factory between 1971 and 1972. *A Worker in a Worker's State* describes his experiences and was intended as a critique of actually existing socialism. While reading it Burawoy found descriptions of machines, labor and production problems all too familiar from his time at Allied. There were, however, also significant differences making the former Allied worker realize that Haraszti was working in a political and economic system, completely different from the Chicago machine shop.

If Allied's machine operators worked quickly, at Red Star they had to work even faster. Literally, they each worked for two because where Allied operators served just one machine, at Red Star they served two. As at Allied, machine

operators at Red Star worked on a piece rate system, paid according to the number of pieces they produced. However, while the workers in the United States had both a guaranteed minimum basic salary and an informally agreed upon maximum output, in Hungary there was neither a guaranteed salary nor any limit on exceeding the norm. So workers had to work at a dizzying pace to get a basic salary. They were under constant pressure of the norm set by the managers and enforced by foremen. Trade unions did not defend them because in a socialist factory they are part of a coercive apparatus that cares about maintaining a high level of exploitation. The state's control over the labor market combined with the policy of full employment also meant that the workers could not choose between different workplaces. This created a very specific configuration of control, which Burawoy calls bureaucratic despotism. Workers are subject to the authority of a bureaucratic party that retains control over the means of production, setting labor standards, and allocating and distributing wealth. In this configuration, the atomization of the workers was accompanied by constant antagonism with the state ruled by a single party. Hence, in the functioning of industry, cold moments, when workers are dominated by bureaucracy, are intertwined with hot moments, when they radically oppose its power as happened in Hungary in 1956 or in subsequent workers' strikes in Poland.

Although Haraszti's analysis had a decisive influence on Burawoy's reflection on state socialism in the early 1980's, he nevertheless supplemented it with an analysis of the differences between the economic rationality of capitalism and state socialism. Here he was inspired by the work of the economist Janos Kornai who argued that just as capitalism is an economy that suffers from overproduction and thus has problems with the organization of demand, so the socialist economy suffers from supply constraints. This is manifested in constant shortages resulting from a mismatch between what is produced and what is needed (Burawoy 1985: 160). The problems typical of capitalism are dealt with by delivering unemployment benefits, protection of employees against managerial despotism, minimum wage legislation, and programs for job creation. On the other hand, in the case of socialism, the answer to its problems was to promote self-organized cooperatives, both inside and outside production, to make up for shortages.

The way the socialist system deals with its own limitations is the trail that leads Burawoy beyond the analysis of Haraszti who assumes that the worker is subject to the absolute dictate of the norm determined by the officers of the bureaucratic system. Meanwhile even if the socialist state does not recognize the autonomy of trade unions and does not create solutions at the workplace that limit ruthless exploitation, it nonetheless allows the workers to meet their needs not only by getting income from work, but also by producing for their own needs and market or quasi- market activity (Burawoy 1985: 193). In this way, we return to the issue of reproduction of the workforce, which in the hegemonic regime

was organized partly by the state but in socialism is satisfied by the market. In this socialist configuration the labor market ceases to be a tool of cost reduction and worker discipline. It becomes an arena free of planners' decisions, providing extra income and the satisfaction of needs for employees and their households.

This combination of state and market leads to specific divisions within the working class. Burawoy referring to Szelenyi work points out that the split between city and the country is much more important than in capitalist countries. Workers living in the countryside, constituting in Hungary, half of all the laboring population, usually had better housing conditions and greater opportunities for production for the market and their own needs. Workers from cities found themselves in a very different situation. Their income was restricted to salaries, they had problems with access to goods in the shortage economy and additionally faced housing problems. This translated into their greater tendency for collective protest, which contrasted with the more individualistic attitude of workers living in the countryside.

The revision of Haraszti's perspective went further when Burawoy, who had abandoned the possibility of working in Poland with the declaration of martial law at the end of 1981, went to Hungary and began 8 years of work and research in Hungarian factories, including the famous Lenin Steelworks. The result of his Hungarian research was the book *The Radiant Past* written together with János Lukács. Many of Haraszti's observations turned out to be accurate – there was a certain bureaucratic control and nobody on the shop floor treated trade unions as representing workers' interests. However, Burawoy and Lukács found the image of atomized workers subject to the dictatorship of the norm reflected the very specific experience of Haraszti at Red Star that was going through a period of reforms. At least some of the pressure on workers resulted from attempts to increase the company's economic efficiency through despotic means, including running two machines at once that was not typical where Burawoy worked. Furthermore, Haraszti did not recognize that the atomization he experienced was the result of his marginalization as an employee punished for political reasons and as a dissident intellectual of Jewish origin. Burawoy's experience from the steelworks and other factories sheds a slightly different light on working in a socialist factory.

The socialist factory functions according to the logic of the is part of the socialist shortage economy. For production processes, this means above all liquidity problems resulting from shortages in the supply of components and raw materials. Conventionally, socialist managers use their social and political capital to speed up deliveries of scarce goods, but in Hungary managers had developed an institutional solution, namely the creation of teams of workers organized to solve the problems of supply constraints. Such self-organized teams created horizontal ties within the factory that fostered better synchronization of

activities and greater liquidity of resources. Workers on the shop floor are not just isolated individuals trying to achieve norms, but cooperate in inventing solutions to poor quality or missing materials, broken machines, and mal-coordination of parts of the labor process. Elizabeth Dunn (2004) wrote about similar processes in relation to factories in Poland in the times of socialism, confirming the accuracy of Burawoy's and Lukács' observations and their generality across socialist societies.

Burawoy's research on socialism allows a better look at how he conducts his analysis of social configurations. When we compare his approach with the classical division between economic base and political and cultural superstructure, it is obvious that Burawoy is much more likely to focus on the connections that define actors and shape their interests and identities. This is exactly how he approaches the division between city and the country, which influences the strategies and the interests of socialist workers. This division within the working class is not an accidental disturbance of the basic structure, defined by the relations to the means of production, but is deeply rooted in the material conditions of the actual socialist regime which, at least, to a limited extent relies on the market and the natural economy when it comes to the reproduction of the labor force.

Even when Burawoy refers to the classical Marxist distinction between base and superstructure he does so in an unorthodox way. Analyzing the influence of communist ideology on the way work is organized he is far from treating it as an epiphenomenon of the base, viewing it as simply strengthening existing domination. On the contrary, he notes that the rituals in which the communist ideology is invoked operate subversively, pointing to an ideal that stands in sharp contrast to the realities of socialist organization of work. Ideology is considered in close connection to the rituals within the factory and analyzed as a part of socialist reality.

Burawoy does not refer to the notion of totalitarianism when analyzing socialism. This is not due to his political sympathies and the desire to conceal the nature of real socialism, but is closely related to the nature of his theoretical project. He does not resort to totalitarianism in the same way that he did not refer to racism in the case of the Zambian mine, or to American culture when analyzing the Chicago factory. In his approach there are no shortcuts to grasping the nature of the social system as a totality. Rather Burawoy pursues a laborious reconstruction of the configuration by identifying actors, their interests, strategies and identities. In a socialist factory, for example, he does not grant trade unions a separate existence, because they are part of the bureaucracy and must be considered together with enterprise management and the party apparatus. This approach does not mean neglecting the structures of domination. It engages them, however, not by denouncing the whole social system – for example as

racist or totalitarian – but through the analysis of patterns of supremacy and subordination. This approach understands interests in a much complex and ambivalent way than contrasting the interests of dominant and dominated. It analyses the interconnections of the interests of specific actors, which cannot be reduced to an ideological illusion. In a given system, interests form a strong weave, which cannot be disentangled by will alone.

This does not mean that configurations are immutable. However, their transformations can only take place within limits set by the restricted flexibility of actors' interests and dispositions. According to Burawoy and Lukács the organization of the socialist factory cannot be reduced to bureaucratic domination. It also included the collaboration of workers that, in turn, created possibilities of working class collective self-organization aimed at reconfiguring power relations in the factory. These hopes were still alive for both authors when they observed the collapse of socialism and it was not yet clear which system would emerge on its ruins. The emergence of workers' councils in a number of enterprises pointed to the possibility that workers might play a significant role in the new system, especially when they obtained co-ownership of enterprises (Burawoy, Lukács 1992: 169–174). However, Burawoy and Lukács also allowed a different scenario in which a bourgeoisie emerges out of the socialist bureaucracy to introduce capitalism, a weakened working class, a center-dependent development, and an unstable democracy. Looking back on the changes in socialist countries and further research conducted in Russia during the 1990s, it was the latter scenario that prevailed (Burawoy 2009a).

Why Public Sociology?

The years following the fall of real socialism were marked by the conviction of the ultimate triumph of the capitalist system, which was commonly perceived as more rational, effective and better suited to human nature. After 1989, history was to change into an infinite process of expanding freedom and multiplying wealth. From the very beginning, Burawoy was skeptical about such diagnoses, and this was not only due to his attachment to socialist ideas, but arose from his way of understanding capitalism, which was far from the lyrical vision that dominated the 1990's. The author of *Manufacturing Consent* was aware of both the negative sides of capital accumulation and the lack of any organic connection between capitalism and liberal democracy. To understand his quest for alternatives to the ongoing processes after 1989, it is worth looking at his lengthy text "For a Sociological Marxism" devoted to the ideas of Gramsci and Polanyi.

Burawoy's point of departure is what he regards to be the Achilles' heel of Marxism, namely its misrecognition of society understood as actions and

relations formed beyond both the market and the state (Burawoy 2003). Marx and Engels may refer to society in utopian visions of communism ("The free development of everyone is a condition for the free development of all"), but in their investigation of existing social relations they partition the capitalist system into a hierarchy of layers with the lower ones (the base) governing the higher ones (superstructure). Western Marxism's ignoring of society led, in the long run, to theories focused on demonstrating the solidity of mechanisms of domination and, as a result, abandoned political engagement (Burawoy 2003: 197–198).

Particularly valuable, therefore, are the voices of Marxists and others inspired by Marx who deviate from the mainstream misrecognition of society. The most notable contributors in this regard are Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi. For both, society is not an eternal but rather a historical creation. For Gramsci it is a civil society, i.e. associations, trade unions and parties that appear in late 19th century Europe. Actors in civil society form their demands in relation to the state as the sphere of regulation. Nevertheless, the autonomy of actors from the state is the condition for durability and intensity of class conflicts. For Polanyi society is an active society remaining in a complex relation with the market. On the one hand the market threatens or literally destroys the social fabric, on the other hand, the destructiveness of the market mobilizes social actors in its defense. For Gramsci and Polanyi socialism is a system in which state and market are subordinated to society.

Fascism dramatically affected both Gramsci and Polanyi in personal as well as political ways, crucial for the evolution of their understanding of socialism. Fascism was a powerful impulse to the formulation of their original interpretations of the dynamics of advanced capitalism. Neither were satisfied with the analysis that reduced fascism to the recurrence of barbarism, to the expression of a national culture (e.g. German militarism) or to a scapegoat that diverted attention from some true culprit. They both saw in Fascism something more than a disturbance of order or reaction to a crisis. For them it was rather one of the possible orders that emerges from the dynamics of capitalist systems: "Gramsci and Polanyi allowed capitalism to develop in multiple directions, assuming diverse configurations of state, society, and economy. The question was not where the economic contradictions were deepest or the forces of production most developed but rather to explain the different paths to liberal democracy, social democracy, fascism, and Soviet communism" (Burawoy 2003: 206).

In their analyses there is no false optimism deriving from an inherent progressive logic of history, which despite turmoil will lead to a happy end – the establishment of a society liberated from the constraints of capitalism and the threats of fascism. At the same time, they did recognize the importance of political process and conflict involving alliances and class relations leading to social orders with differing modes of dominations and levels of inequality.

For the sake of accuracy, Burawoy admits that this method of analysis finds a stronger expression in Gramsci's analysis of the struggles around hegemony than in Polanyi's analysis, in which the self-organization of active society against the market forces and the processes of commodification have a more spontaneous character (Burawoy 2003: 231). Burawoy particularly emphasizes the importance of Gramsci's analysis of the passive revolution. According to him it is the best example of the investigation of divergent class systems and struggles for hegemony. Gramsci, analyzing the Italian national revival of the second half of the nineteenth century, showed how the division of the dominated classes reduced their political influence. Separating workers from peasants and linking the latter to the interests of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie condemned the working class to a lonely fight which effectively limited the chances of Italy's evolution towards a more egalitarian and democratic system.

Looking at the dynamics of global processes since the 1970's, Burawoy notes that there has been a shift towards increasing the importance of market mechanisms and related coercion. The consequence is, among others, the relocation of jobs on a global scale, the increase in job insecurity, limiting the growth of real wages and the weakening of the position of trade unions. The beneficiaries of these processes are the owners of capital who manage to maintain a high rate of accumulation. Following the deliberations of Gramsci and Polanyi, Burawoy does not assume that the increase in the importance of market mechanisms will lead to a crisis or an automatic correction of capitalism. Additionally just as in the 1930's, the effects of a possible crisis (the text was published 4 years before the fall of Lehman Brothers) may be varied. Burawoy notes that the direction of change depends on the political process and the role of the forces of society. Here he designs an important role for sociological Marxism:

The socialist transition can no longer be understood as the collapse of an entire order to be replaced by a completely new one. It no longer springs from the coincidence, in time and space, of economic contradiction, class struggle, and the seeds of the new. Nor will the socialist transition of tomorrow be centered on the nation-state alone but will include local struggles, of disparate kinds, connected across national boundaries in a simultaneous War of Position and War of Movement. This calls for a new type of Marxist, not the legislator of classical Marxism who would formulate the laws of the collapse of capitalism, or the organic intellectuals of a working class revolution, but the ethnographic archeologist who seeks out local experiments, new institutional forms, real utopias if you wish, who places them in their context, translates them into a common language, and links them one to another across the globe" (Burawoy 2003: 251).

These words are basically the credo of public sociology as defined in probably the most famous presidential speech of the American Sociological Association (Burawoy 2005). Distinct from academic, policy and critical sociology, public

sociology is defined by its orientation to the public sphere, that is the dialogical relationship with non-academic audiences to whom it gives voice and helps to define goals, interests and strategies. This sociology is focused on strengthening other actors than business and bureaucracy. It uses the symbolic power of research, defining, translating, and combining the interests and identities of diverse groups to counterbalance market and state forces (Burawoy 2009).

Burawoy's proposals for public sociology are not an attempt to overcome Marxism or move away from it. Public sociology is rather the result of the development of his specific project of Marxism and can be considered as its integral part. The discussions inspired by idea of public sociology – also important and interesting discussions in polish sociology (see. eg. Wareczok, Zarycki 2014; Pawlak 2015) – often misrecognize Burawoy's effort to redefine Marxism. Burawoy distances himself from analyses beginning with the identification of totalizing mechanisms of domination, he doesn't use layered partitions of social systems which leads to unmasking the ways in which superstructure is determined by the base, he also rejects the idea of "essential" interests of actors which gives ideology the role of disturbing the realization of historical necessity. Instead, what is characteristic for what Gdula calls tradition of composition in social theory, he begins by identifying the specificity of various actors – not just workers and capitalists – embedded in a historically defined configuration. He reconstructs their interests taking into account local conditions and going beyond the strictly defined sphere of production. He asks how social reproduction and state institutions are organized to serve the satisfaction of needs. Finally, he is sensitive to the strategies used by the actors in a particular, seeking answers as to how they relate to broader social relations.

There have, of course, been various criticisms of Burawoy's project (see for example Manza, McCarthy 2011). There are reservations about his fidelity to Marxist heritage; there are questions about the balance between an analysis in terms of classes and other dimensions of diversity and identity (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, political identities, etc.) and there is skepticism concerning the democratic character of civil society, which also includes racist, xenophobic or misogynistic groups. Nevertheless it must be admitted that the Burawoy's project is very original; it is strongly embedded empirically and reaches beyond the context of capitalist center. It is also necessary to underline Burawoy's sensitivity to the complexity of social relations and the various ways social actors struggle for and reclaim their agency. This virtue is not only of an academic nature, but it also has an important political value in times when mobilization in politics takes place in the name of and through appeals to unification.

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