

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

What is happening in Soviet sociology? The question is receiving a good deal of attention right now. This lends special interest to a discussion of the subject that appeared in the *Slavic Review* of March 1965. The discussion is by Robert A. Feldmesser, and deals with my *Science and Politics, The New Sociology in the Soviet Union*. I would like to make a few remarks about the discussion.

Professor Feldmesser places more emphasis than I did on recent Soviet attempts in the areas of community organization, the family, crime, and also class structure. Instead, my own emphasis was on the "sociology of work"—the impact of technological change, the general education and vocational training of industrial workers, and attitudes to work. Soviet scholars and officials continue to speak of broadening the scope of sociology. This may begin to produce results in the next year or two. In the early 1960s, which my study treated, Soviet social scientists published little or no research in the areas that Professor Feldmesser mentions. It is precisely in this context that the study of work looms so large.

I could not tell from Professor Feldmesser's discussion whether we agree or disagree about the nature of Soviet sociology. I myself found two very different things in the "new sociology." It seemed to me to possess some unique potentials in both scholarship and official life. At the same time, I found in it much theoretical and methodological paucity. In my study I described the various elements of this paucity. As to how we might view Soviet sociology, my position was (and remains) that "Scholars abroad are bound to wonder whether this intimate bond [between a dominant state and an emerging field of scholarship] can produce any scientific harvest whatsoever. No conclusive answer is possible for at least several years" (*Science and Politics*, page 5).

Finally, Professor Feldmesser points to an extremely interesting question. What may the present "rejuvenation" of Soviet economics portend for sociology? When I wrote my survey of sociological blueprints and first steps, I saw no answer that satisfied me. At present, I am inclined to doubt that sociology will follow the path of economics at all soon.

What matters most, I believe, is the degree to which this or that field can be secularized, can shift from sacred to profane ways of thinking. Here the two disciplines vary so greatly that any parallel breaks down.

True, in the Soviet setting these disciplines share an intimate link with the state. Yet economics had a long record in Russia as a separate field of scholarship; sociology has none or almost none. Economics kept an identity during the Stalin era; sociology did not. Economics deals with the allocation of resources and hence efficiency, sociology with social relationships and hence social control. This makes all modern economics inherently utilitarian and technical; except for its most applied domains, sociology is still highly normative and macroscopic in regard to societies as a whole. Most academic economists work with production officials, while scholars in and around sociology tend to be close to ideology officials.

Above all, perhaps sociologists seem to lack a special professional function—a function that would make them so uniquely valuable to the state

that deviant ideas or ways of thinking become acceptable. Some of the natural sciences gained such a status after World War II, with the rise of nuclear weapons and space technology. Economists began to do so in the past decade, as political economy gave way to mathematics and cybernetics as their main stock in trade. The Soviet Union being an intricately changing society, a determined and omniscient state could conceivably come to depend on the sociologists' practical ideas and data on "social engineering" as much as it does now on atomic scientists and some economists.

Barring this turn of events I do not anticipate any early transformation of sociology along the lines of the partial but far-reaching secularization of economics, unless the system itself changes greatly.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Perhaps mere zoologists should not read *Slavic Review*. I picked up the latest issue [March 1965] and found the very first page remarkable. Surely Professor Haimson exaggerates the importance of "sympathy strikes" "in Moscow and Warsaw, Revel, Riga, and Tallin, Kiev, Odessa, even Tiflis." In fact, we might say he exaggerates quite exactly by a factor of  $\times 0.114$ , for the simple reason that Revel and Tallin are the same place, so that there were seven and not eight such strikes!

You may say it's trivial, but it's also rather incredible. Here is presumably a professional specialist writing in a scholarly journal who does not recognize the names of the capital of Estonia. Not only so, but his article was considered sufficiently important to be commented on, in the same issue and at considerable length, by two other specialists. Yet no one spotted this. It may be trivial, but it shakes one's confidence in that kind of scholarship. Alas, there is not much in the rest of the article to help restore it.

Zoologists should not read *Slavic Review*; I do, and I protest. As a university teacher I protest because American universities are cluttered with solidly established professors of Russian language and other Russian matters who in plain language don't know their own subject. An attempt on my part to speak Russian to such colleagues has, in several instances, resulted in that colleague's precipitate flight across the campus. Keep them out of *Slavic Review*.

Need I explain that the usual English equivalent of the Russian *Revel* is Reval.

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