

Helena Radlińska – a prominent ancestor in European Social Work

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As early as in 1969 – attending a seminar in Bristol/UK within the European Social Development Programme of the UNO – I have become acquainted with Social Work (Education) in Poland and Czechoslovakia. At that time this was quite unusual since both countries were “behind the iron curtain” and therefore not easily accessible.

I have been rather impressed to learn that the two “communist” countries had a long standing tradition of Social Work (Education). It was in this context that I heard for the first time the names of Helena RADLINSKA and Alice MASARYKOVA and of their contribution to the creation and the development of the professional training both nationally and internationally in the inter war period. The friendliness of the participants from the respective countries and the fact, that I could use my mother tongue in discussing with them even complex issues in our common field of interest encouraged me to keep contact.

During my undergraduate teacher training (1962-65) I had come across – among others – the ideas of Paul NATORP and his concept of “Sozialpädagogik” and the notion of “Gemeinschaft” (community) has inspired my own thinking.

As a postgraduate student of Educational and Social Sciences (1965-69) one of my majors was “Comparative Education” and I have become specially interested in the area of non-formal education in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC).

I have been astonished to learn how intense the exchange of ideas in our “scientific community” in Europe had been at the beginning of the last century: Makarenko and Schatzki for example had studied the German “Reformpädagogik”. In this way I had been very well equipped for future “research” e.g. a (small) comparative study on the development of Makarenkos collective(s) and the stages of group development in western social group work (1967) (2).

From 1972 onwards I have been involved in the activities of the “International Association of Schools of Social Work” (IASSW) and its European branch (EASSW). During their congresses and conferences I have met more and more colleagues from CEEC and namely from Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In 1985 I was involved in the foundation of the “European Centre for Community Education” (ECCE) and since then the activities of ECCE have been at the centre of my academic life (3). A series of lectures on the education and training of the social professionals in Europe (East and West) – given by visiting colleagues – helped to built up knowledge about the contribution e.g. Helena RADLINSKA had made to the European and International dimensions of our professions, and which, I dare to say, unfortunately we had totally forgotten about in the West.

Only a few days before the Berlin Wall came down I have met for the first time with Ewa MARYNOWICZ-HETKA (Bled/Y. on 02.-04.11.1989), who at that time held and still holds – in succession of Helena RADLINSKA – the Chair of “Pedagogica Społeczna” at Lodz University. Her remarks – from a Polish point of view – about the common education of the different groups of social professionals had caught my eye: “The education for social work demands that theory and the practice are connected. One of the basic principles of the social

pedagogy, which in our opinion is the foundation for the education of the future educators, social workers, socio-cultural animators, is a preparation for the research work. It is education with research and research with education. It is therefore a preparation for the action research” (MARYNOWICZ-HETKA, 1990, 233).

The end of the European divide now enabled me to visit Poland on several occasions. My interest in “Comparative Education” with special focus on the CEEC continued and up to now I was able to supplement my collection of substantial material about the “Polish School”. The fact that I am not able to understand the Polish language made me dependent on other (personal re-) sources (bilingual native speakers for translation and written material in either English or French) (4).

Digging in my archives I was able to find out from the proceedings of International Conferences on Social Work (Paris, 1929; Frankfurt, 1932 and London, 1936) about the contributions Helena RADLINSKA had made to European and International Social Work. From a comparative point of view I was interested in finding out more about her concept of “Pedagogica Społeczna” but not only for my personal curiosity but also for the wider European and International sphere of Social Work.

In the context of the evaluation of all ERASMUS programmes in the EU we invited Ewa M.-H. as a keynote speaker to the conference in Koblenz (1996) and at the opening of this conference we presented a plurilingual play based on the minutes of the two first International Conferences on Social Work (Paris and London) thus making among others Helena RADLINSKA – at least in Western Europe – “alive” again (SEIBEL, 1998).

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Paris Conference the same play “International co-operation – pipedream (utopia) or forgotten dimension?” had been repeated (and videotaped) in Jerusalem at the congress of the IASSW (1998). Here again a world wide audience has been lively reminded on our European ancestors.

In the course of the Thematic Network Project (TNP) “Social Professions for a Social Europe” (ECSPRESS) I had prepared short portraits of Alice MASARYKOVA, Helena RADLINSKA and Alice SALOMON and presented them on the AGORA during the conference in Ostrava (1998). The audience – this time colleagues from Eastern and Western Europe – has welcomed this extra tuition, thus linking the current situation with the old common roots (SEIBEL, 1999).

One of the offspring of these activities has been a series of “Historical portraits of important European leaders in social work” (Alice SALOMON ; Helena RADLINSKA < PL>; Alice MASARYKOVA ; Ilse ARLT ; Marguerite WAGNER-BECK and M.A.J. MOLTZER), who all have been heavily involved in the setting up of the European and International co-operation in the field of the social professions. These portraits have been written by authors from the respective countries, edited by me and are published in the “European Journal of Social Work” (EJSW, 2001 – 2003).

Postscript: Helena RADLINSKA and Paul Natorp

In preparing this contribution I have been very curious to find out more about “the foundation of Polish social pedagogy (pedagogika społeczna) on the concepts of Natorp” (LEPALCZYK / MARYNOWICZ-HETKA, 2001,193).

I was looking for the missing link. On the WEB (my virtual archives) I have found an

interesting article about Paul NATORP, originally written in Russian by the philosopher Sergius HESSEN (in 1924) and translated into Polish by Sławomir SZTOBRYN (1998). This article could be the key, and S. HESSEN at least one of the missing links: HESSEN's Russian-German background enabled him to study and graduate (PhD) in Germany (1909) and to take up academic teaching posts in St. Petersburg and Tomsk and he became professor (for the first time in 1917). After leaving the Soviet Union as a refugee (1921) he became an "involuntary cosmopolitan" (LIEGLE, 1987), he worked as a freelance writer and taught in Berlin, Jena, London, Rome and in Prague (1924 – 28) and finally settled down in Poland and became professor again and taught – at the same time as Helena RADLINSKA – in Warsaw (1935) and Lodz (1946).

His "long lasting academic teaching" in Poland has had a sustainable impact in this country (cf. LIEGLE, 1987, 469) (5). He tried to combine philosophy and pedagogics in the direction of "pedagogics as applied philosophy" and thus he became "very close to Paul NATORP and his 'Sozialpädagogik'" (cf. LIEGLE, 1987, 472).

In this way his "peregrinatio academica" is taken as an indicator.

He was an expert in and one of the founders of comparative education. At least in the respective German scientific community he is qualified as a mediator between and a representative of the Eastern and Western heritage of "Reformpädagogik" (cf. FROESE, 1967; DILGER, 1972; LIEGLE, 1987).

Helena RADLINSKA and the IASSW after 1945

Browsing through the material I have collected (my personal archives) it was only "by accident" that I found out in Helena RADLINSKA's letters to Irena LEPALCYK another interesting fact, namely that she continued the relationship with her friends in the IASSW even after World War Two. For example: On a journey to Brussels and Geneva (1948) she has met among others with Marie MULLE, like herself a founding member of the IASSW, who by now was Director emeritus of the "Institut d' Etudes Sociales d'Etat" in Brussels, and René SAND, who has been the President of IASSW from 1946-1954 (cf. LEPALCYK, 1994, 197-201).

Annotations:

(1) I would like to dedicate this article to my late friends Mietek Karczewski and Dr. Irina Scienko

(2) In 1999 I have presented these findings to and discussed with students at Lodz University

(3) "In this context the term community education is used to include the fields of social work, community work, youth work, work with disadvantaged people and other related educational activities". <http://www.fh-koblenz.de/eccc> [accessed 02.08.2004]

(4) Details of these "personal resources" can be found in one of my recent articles (SEIBEL, 2001 < in German > and 2002

(5) During Stalinism his Oeuvre has been kept secret and did not play an important role under Communism in Poland (cf. LIEGLE, 1987, 473) but it should now get – like the one of Helena RADLINSKA – more attention in Europe again. Since many of his work is published both in Polish and German (among other languages) it calls for and offers a chance of a common piece of comparative research

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