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An Introduction to Sociotechnics

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The Polish school of sociotechnics (social engineering) was invented by Adam Podgorecki in 1966. Its theoretical foundations stem from Lev Petrazycki's concepts of legal policy and Tadeusz Kotarbinski's praxiology, i.e., the science of efficient action. Podgorecki defined sociotechnics as a set of directives that teach how to invent purposeful and rational social changes. The terms "rational" and "purposeful" suggest that Podgorecki understood social engineering as an application of praxiological principles to the sphere of science-based interventions into social life (e.g., social problem-solving).

In 1966 Podgorecki published his *Zasady Socjotechniki*—[Principles of Sociotechnics] (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna). This basic book was followed by four of his edited volumes: *Socjotechnika*—[Sociotechnics] (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1968); *Socjotechnika*—[Sociotechnics: How to Act Efficiently] (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1970); *Sociotechnics: Styles of Action* (Warszawa, 1972); *Sociotechnics: Functionality and Disfunctionality of Institutions* (Warsaw, 1974). The main contributors were scholars gathered around Podgorecki and their interests were devoted to formulating principles of efficient application of social sciences and to various methodological problems of social engineering. After flourishing for eight years, the school of sociotechnics suddenly ceased to exist.

My book, *Socjotechnika: Zagadnienia Etyczne i Prakseologiczne*—[Sociotechnics: Ethical and Efficiency Issues] (Wrocław: Ossolineum), appeared in Poland in 1986—twenty years after the publication of Podgorecki's *Principles of Sociotechnics*. Taking advantage of recent achievements, the 1986 volume presents another vision of social engineering. This one is based on Jarosław Rudnianski's general theory of social struggle. This particular view of social reality reformulates the basic notions and definitions of sociotechnics. The conclusion is that a considerable number of sociotechnical actions, particularly

those on a global scale, are characterized by conflict and struggle and also that sociotechnics is one of the methods of exerting power over a social system.

Sociotechnics is viewed here as an applied science which shapes human attitudes and impels individuals or groups toward a certain mode of behavior by influencing both the emotional and intellectual spheres of the human psyche. "Social steering" is seen as a practical application of a set of directives that have been chosen by a power elite to gain and strengthen control over a society. A variety of "social steering" activities are analyzed throughout the book.

The second chapter discusses how sociotechnics is used by rulers in unarmed social struggles against both internal and external enemies and also how it is applied in armed conflicts to increase the efficiency of military actions. This chapter focuses on social orders which generally may be characterized as centralized or monocentric.

Social struggle in a dense social environment requires full control over the members of a team whether it is a small group, an organization, or a society. In such a struggle, today's foe may become tomorrow's ally while an ally may become a foe. In this situation, members have to be subordinated to the highest possible degree so that attitudes and behavior can be quickly altered. Rulers also carry out a *sui generis* struggle against their own society. (The less legitimated the authority, the more severe the struggle.) Rulers may use social engineering to atomize society and set its groups at variance.

The second chapter also describes in detail the four main sociotechnical methods. (Taken as a whole, they form an anthropotechnical—using people as *sensu largo* tools—social engineering.) The methods are:

1. Manipulation of ideals and values. The most treasured values—dignity, freedom, social justice, patriotism, equality—are said to be realized only by actions demanded by the rulers.
2. Stirring of nonelementary needs. Needs such as power, possession and prestige are stirred and channeled. Then certain attitudes and behavior are demanded in return for supplying goods which satisfy these needs.
3. Intensification of fear. Rulers, by using force and various forms of violence, make people fear that disobedience may threaten their security and spell disaster.
4. Disinformation. Rulers, by hiding or perverting facts and providing false information, shape the people's picture of reality.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the role of science (as a body of knowledge) and scientists in preparing and applying social steering. Careful attention is given to the interconnections between the scientific community and the power elite. The methods that rulers use to impel or force scholars to work for them is of particular interest. The direct methods are identified as the incorporation of leading scholars into the elite's external circles, the exploitation of the values and ideals of leading scholars, and the enforcement of a "market-science paradigm"

where salary and work facilities depend largely on the applicability of research results. The most common indirect method is the use of scholarly results without the knowledge and permission of the author.

This chapter also deals with the gaps and shortcomings of social science which disable practitioners so that they cannot formulate rational directives of social action. At the same time, it points out successful engineering actions and reconstructs the model of society and the human psyche that seems to be accepted by those who undertake social engineering. This model is compared to another one (based on the works of Antoni Kepinski, Carl G. Jung, and on humanistic and philosophical psychology) and demonstrates the narrowness of the initial model.

Chapter 4 concerns the problem of defense against an anthropotechnical sociotechnics in which human beings are used as tools without regard for their needs and rights. After outlining the omnipresence and multiformality of social engineering, the most efficient method of defense is identified. This defense is based on a realization of the set of moral values found in humanistic ethics. The active and conscious aspiration of these values immunize an individual against both exploitation of ideals and stirring nonelementary needs as well as toughen the individual against fear intensification. The person who strives to act for the good of others and to develop his or her own morale is seen here as somehow resistant to manipulative social engineering.

The subject of the fifth chapter is the ethical evaluation of anthropotechnical sociotechnics. As a frame of reference, several ethical systems are discussed—Christian ethics, ethics of Indian philosophy and Tadeusz Kotarbinski's independent ethics. The motives and purposes of those who implement sociotechnics are evaluated here as are the methods used and the intended and unintended results.

The analyses lead to the conclusion that sociotechnics can break moral norms that guard human dignity, freedom, justice, and other important human rights. Sociotechnics is found to be capable of destroying people's confidence, atomizing a society, and creating a negative moral climate. The obvious dangers stemming from such a situation are outlined.

The last chapter is devoted to humanistic sociotechnics—a field which seeks to help people in their inner, moral development and also observes crucial moral norms. Several principles of humanistic social engineering are provided and the conditions for effective practice are described. Finally, some suggestions are provided concerning further research.