

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE ON IDEOLOGY IN THE WORKS BY R. K. MERTON

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The aim of the work is to study the process of formation of ideology as a product of social structuring based on the interpretation of the scientific works by Robert Merton.

This American sociologist emphasized that a value system depends on the social structure of a particular society. He asserted that the value systems should be assessed in the context of their connections with a social organization. Moreover, the more complex the stratification system is, the wider is the ideological field.

For some groups he determined value systems which are stipulated by the peculiarities of their social state and characteristics of their social structure.

In particular, the ascending class having high level of education inclines more to the revolution ideologies, uprisings and negative perception of reality. Those of them who were not lucky enough to gain education mostly find their outlet in mysticism, faith in luck and fate.

There are three versions of reactions on the ideology of uprising typical for that social groups which are not interested in the significant institutionalized transformations: conservative (there is no sense in any changes as all social vices can be under any regimes and social, economic formations); reformist (it is possible to solve almost any problem by gradual improvement); liberal (the reasons of person's failure depend on his/her abilities to adapt).

That classes which can be determined as low-middle tend to a hyper-simplified dichotomization, exclusion of uncertainty, insistence, and stereotypes, white and black decisions, mechanical repetition of a determined set of actions, foresight, etc.

The result of investigation of works written by the American sociologist may be used in the course of studying social reality and ideological field in the modern Russia and others countries.

The key words: Robert Merton, social structure, ideology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Robert Merton is a representative of such important sociological approach as structural functionalism (or functionalism). His interpretation made this approach the most effective way of understanding social reality and determined the direction for the works of the whole generation of sociologists. The ideas put forward by Merton, his hypothesis can be successfully applied for the investigations in different fields of social life. The question of correlation between the social structure and

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ideology is not an exception. By using the last term we mean the system of socially stipulated worldviews.

2. THE METHOD

Merton does not state the question of investigating the influence of the social structure on the ideology as the main and direct question. One of the subjects in his scientific interest was the correlation between social and cultural structures, and the mentioned-above problem is an implicit element (implicitly present) (Merton, 1957; Merton, 1938). In this work we make an attempt to pay more attention to those parts of Merton's heritage which showed the influence of the social structure on ideology. First of all, we should describe some basic elements of his theory referring to the theme of this work.

For the aims of his investigations this prominent American sociologist distinguished two elements in the cultural structure.

The first element may be determined as "setting cultural aim, intentions, and interests representing required legal aims for all members of the society or some of its members who are the part of this society" which form a determined hierarchy of values (Kozyrev, 2013a; Kozyrev, 2013b). They become a sort of frameworks setting person's behavior.

The first element of cultural structure may be determined as principal, and the second one as normative and controlling. It "determines, regulates and controls acceptable ways of achieving these aims (Merton, 1957). First of all, here we can mention different social standards (customs, taboo, traditions, etc.) as well as the mechanisms of the social control.

Moreover, these two elements of cultural structure are in a rather firm interaction with each other. All social groups correlate cultural aims with the possible ways of their achievement which are established in the institutionalized moral system that is the choice of a way is determined by traditions, ethical system, religious norms, etc.

3. THE RESULT

According to Robert Merton, the reaction of the social groups on that aims approved by culture and the ways of their fulfillment provided by the social structure as well as the contradictions between them depend on that social state of the groups and opportunities for climbing career ladder, which they have.

In those groups which aspirations are restricted because of their social position the mentioned-above reaction may be shown in two different ways.

Firstly, those people who see the difference between the aims (values) and the ways of their achievements in the social structure estrange themselves from it and can even resort to uprising. It is that type of adaptation when people deny present values of reality and try to put into life new, modified reality.

As Merton himself remarked, “rebellious fox rejects from overall fancy for” (Merton, 1957).

Such uprising against the institutionalized system can grow into organized political action only after creating new, alternative reality which will find its symbolical reflection in the ideology, ideology of action (Merton uses in this case the term “myth”). The responding measure of their adversaries may be the following.

The first step is conservative. Counter-arguments in this case are focused on the idea that the reason of frustration is beyond the institutionalized structure of the society. Unemployment, poverty, social, economic, and political crises are typical for any society and they cannot be legally abolished by law. These mentioned-above things are unavoidable and it is usually only the particular elements of these social phenomena which may be changed.

The second step is reformist. In this case the concept of increasingly improving situation is applied. The keynote of this ideology is the following: “You should endure a little bit more, and then everything will be good”.

The third step is liberal. In this case the rival feelings are transferred from external into internal world of a person. It is exactly a person who becomes the source of “failures” as he/she has failed to adapt to a social environment and use that opportunities he/she was given. As the result it is declared that “life is what you make it”, and he/she should blame himself/herself in misfortune.

It is interesting to point out that it is exactly the representatives of rising class with all their overstated claims, who usually spread the uprising ideology. They organize offended and oppressed people into a revolutionary group. We will consider this issue in a more detailed way below [Merton, 1957].

Secondly, the overwhelming majority of people do not realize the reasons of their frustration in a full way, and refer their difficulties to the account of random factors. Their consciousness is full of mysticism, superstitions, faith in luck and fate (Merton, 1957; Merton, 1938). As in a well-controlled and stable society each diligent and hard-working person should achieve his/her aims as the result but when private social experience is full of contradictory examples proving that these virtues are not useful, then in such society the inclination to superstitions, aspiration to risk find fertile ground. As Merton underscores, the high interest to the gambling games which may be noticed in some strata is a subconscious reflex on the restrictions of the social structure. Moreover, the mentioned-above ideology of individualism (liberal count-reaction to uprising) adds fuel to the fire focusing attention to psychological, not social aspects of achieving success [Merton, 1957].

Different social groups may also choose other ways of “response” to react against the difference between cultural and social structures. Ritualism can be referred to them. According to Merton, it is typical for the Americans of low-middle class [Merton, 1957]. It is that sort of reaction when some aspirations determined by culture are rejected, at these the tendency to follow institutional

norms are kept. In particular, ritualism may be seen in the situations arisen within the frameworks of constant frustration caused by the important aims or long experience by which the result does not coincide with the conformism [Merton, 2006: C. 312]. It may be seen in hyper-subordination, which can be characterized as an aspiration to hyper-simplified dichotomization, exclusion of indeterminacy, persistence and stereotypes, white and black decisions, mechanical repetition of one and the same set of actions cautiousness, self-restrictions, etc.

The next type of adaptation is escape. The pattern of escape includes both: rejection of that cultural aims which were accepted earlier and the ways of their achievement. This type of reaction may be typical not only for unemployed, homeless people or other people who can be referred to the so-called "social bottom". There may also be people relinquished from their main duties.

The symptoms of escape are the following: cynicism, disappointment, indifference, rejection of affects, opportunism, inner fatigue, nostalgia for the past, and apathy to the presence, loss of connections with those cultural aims which were familiar to this person before, that results in loosing social connections. The circle of friends and acquaintances becomes more and more narrow, their interest in socializing with other people melts, and a person deprives of spirit and orientation in life [Merton, 2006].

The last type of reactions is called innovation. It is an attempt to achieve culturally accepted aims with culturally judged ways. Mostly it is crimes but referring to a determined social investigations Merton points out that innovations are typical not only for declassed elements. Rather respectable and usual representatives of the society can also commit such crimes, although they can hardly belong to the criminal subculture. For the followers of this type of adaptation may be typical such features as disgraceful behavior, disruptiveness, instability, mass negativism [Merton, 2006: C. 261].

In order to continue our interpretation of Merton's scientific investigations we should answer the following question: where is the connection between the mentioned-above types of behavior, their features and ideology in general, the aims of this work in particular?

The fact is that any ideology tends to monopolize social consciousness, fill it only with itself. In the frameworks of competitive struggle for minds between different ideological directions this aspiration is restricted and leads to attraction of as great amount of followers as only may be possible under these conditions. It is something similar to the process going in biology and called filling ideological niche. That is why an expert should take into account the interests and worldviews of those whom he/she addresses in case he/she wants to be in demand and to be heard. Otherwise the social concept which was primary social is not social as the result, and it turns into the set of entirely personal worldviews. Consequently, the ideology of the groups and societies is the reflection of that

social situation in which they live and that social position they already occupy or want to obtain.

It is interesting to point out that Merton distinguished a question on transition of loyalty of people in the high or low class to their own class. The mentioned-above fact about cases when the representatives of rising class (not of the downtrodden) tend to organize offended and oppressed, and rebellious in the revolting groups seems to be a particular example of that transition of loyalty to another class, not to that one a person belongs to. [Merton, 2006: Ñ.414]. He tried to explain it with the reference group theory. Briefly its core is the following: due to some reasons a person chooses a peer group, that is that one to which he/she does not belong. Consequently, this person becomes a provider of another ideology, another value. After it Merton put forward a couple of hypothesis based on scientific material of “American soldier” (it is a publication of the results of sociological research of behavior and opinions of military men participated in the Second World War), clarifying the reasons of such peer orientation.

The first issue attracting attention is the correlation between the level of person’s vertical social mobility and the way this person perceives such changes. As it turned out, the more dynamic social transition is the more quickly rising on the social scale is and the less satisfied this person is. It is obvious that quick development leads to heightened expectations but it is not so obvious how they appear. Moreover the representatives of other social groups are not so frustrated although being under the same conditions. Merton’s idea is that different social groups (or their representatives) choose different classes as referential on the bases of similar aims and values. Moreover, they choose that referential frames of reference not as the result of lawlessness without paying attention to anything except entirely their personal preferences. Absolutely not. The choice of a person is determined by the social structure (Merton, 1957).

For example, better-educated person requires more, he/she is more demanding to the opportunities for the development given by the society. Although these heightened expectations can be explained and excused in a rather logical and trivial way: they have spent great amount of time, efforts, and often even money, then it should bring more dividends in comparison with those who have not put so much in it. Education, first of all higher education, is an attributive of high social position as well as the institutional way of rising on the social scale. Maybe if it were as much-spread as secondary, then people with high education also would not have such demands [Merton, 2006: C. 364-365].

However, if we speak about the situation in Russia, then the higher education as a social high-class attributive is a little bit blurred. A person has it, it is not obligatory a feature of a considerable social status. Many groups which must have high professional level due to their professional activity (teachers, doctors, state and municipal servants of middle and low level) have rather low positions in the

hierarchy. Although taking into account the statements of some state senior officials referring to the decrease of the number of Higher Educational Establishments this situation is about to change in the nearest years (“Andrey Fursenko offers to decrease amount of higher Educational Establishments in Russia”, 2010; Arganovich, 2012).

Except educational factor there can be another peer landmark: that is the institutional system of norms, values [Merton, 2006: Ñ.385], the resource of authority, well-paid work, and at last ideology. When a person from another group perceives the values of this group it contributes to transition in this group. In this case we can often encounter with the situations which may be described with the following statement: “To be more royal than the king himself”. It is exactly new members who show special diligence following its norms and values, trying to show their devotion to the group. There is also additional impulse for such aspirations: it is negative reaction of his/her former group, whose representatives perceive such transition as apostasy and even as betrayal [Merton 2006: Ñ.395-409].

We should repeat that it depends on the characteristics of the social structure which attributes will become a ground for comparisons. In the rigorous and at the same time legitimate systems of the stratification of right, duties and privileges of every stratum are perceived as morally accepted and just, and the transition to higher class is difficult and is perceived as a reward for special merits, consequently, people will more rarely consider the state of another stratum as a ground for assessment of its own. It is possible to state that in this case the dimension of the peer system of axes will decrease to 1 or 2 dimension(-s), that is the comparison will be limited by the representatives of your own or the nearest class [Merton, 2006: C.411-412].

What refers to the way a rising class perceives its state, and then there may be the following reasons for their heightened expectations and demands. The acquisition of any socially considerable attribute of a social state (for example, education) results in choosing that group as a reference group which has the same attributes but higher social state with regard to his/her own group or the nearest one. In case a person has the mentioned-above attribute it does not lead to a mechanical acquisition of all sets of resources belonging to a peer group that is why in spite of intensive social mobility not every representative of a rising class achieves that expected status. That logical frustration appearing at this leads to disappointment, pessimistic perception of reality, claim for its changing. Taking into account that higher education in the described group is relatively wide spread (that makes rational perception of reality more possible), then it is rather expected reaction on the contradictions between the social and cultural structures and may have the form of uprising. They want to find like-minded persons, they want to be heard and understood, and it leads their activity to downtrodden groups which state is even worse. That is exactly the way how the peer system of axis of rising

class may transform by changing the object of comparison: in this case the interests and values of lower stratum become significant and dominant.

Although here we should add that significance of values does not mean that the representatives of the stratum with the highest mobility aspire to become the members of the lower classes. Their interests attract their attention as much as it coincides with their ideology of uprising. It has nothing to do with pretense or deception, many of them sincerely believe that changing social structure will influence on everybody or at least on majority in a good way.

The main reason of it is that the access to the institutionalized resources², with which people can significantly influence the social relations are monopolized by the upper class. That is why, the rebels do not have another way except attracting as much people as possible and to encourage them on any political activity- revolution, uprising, or any other types of mass protests. In this case either the state power is seized or pressure is exerted on the political and economic elite.

There are also some other Merton's ideas important for the aims of this work and referring to the correlation of technological progress, differentiation of labor and worldview of some social groups. The increase of technological strength cannot be absolute benefit for the whole society. For some strata it may become a threat for their state as well as decrease social mobility, increase social differentiation and deepen the differentiation of labor. The complexity of new technologies causes necessity of high educational level, consequently, the directors, well-paid employees are recruited from those strata which have more opportunities to obtain higher education. The workers have almost no chances for moving up the career ladder, and the social gap between these groups (workers and managers) is increasing [Merton, 2006, p.787]. Moreover, technological sophistication of social labor leads to the intensification of its differentiation, emergence of new specialties that devaluates former professional skills and knowledge, and increase the risks to become unemployed.

That is why it is rather logical to expect that the groups occupying lower social positions in the industry, and which are under the most considerable influence of the scientific and technical progress will feel fear, nervousness, sense of uncertainty and general distrust towards any technical changes.

The mentioned-above reason as well as the complexity of stratification, which it causes in other social groups (first of all it refers to the highly qualified specialists, engineers, scientists), results in abdicating social responsibility for their actions in a full or partial way. It is a typical position of a representative of such strata: "It is engineering (science) that is my field of interest, and that is the senior officials and politicians who should think about the implementation of an innovation (discovery), that is go beyond my professional knowledge and duties, and consequently, I am not in charge of it".

This worldview and acquired inability to solve the problems of social relationships leads to a dependent state in the political life, social and economic politics [Merton, 2006: C. 792].

As Merton underscores, a particular role may also play lack of accurate and available information on consequences of that or another technological innovation. This supposition is mostly right for the modern situation (Merton, 1957; Merton, 2006: p. 792]. It is typical for a public discourse (at least that one covering in Mass Media and accelerating by different ecological movements) to pay more attention to the questions of the way technological progress influences the environment but the problem of its influence on the social environment are not taken into account.

4. DISCUSSION

As the conclusion of the analysis and interpretations of Robert Melton's creative works referring to the research of the influence of the social field on ideology, the following things can be said.

Firstly, American scientist often underscored that the values depend on the social structure of this society. Moreover, he agrees with Manheim [Mannheim, 1994], and supposes that worldviews should be considered as their correlation with the social organization [Merton, 2006: C.707-708]. The more sophisticated the system of stratification is, the wider the ideological field is. Secondly, for some groups he determined worldviews, which were stipulated by the peculiarities of their social state and the characteristics of the social structure.

In particular, the rising class having high level of education usually more inclined to the revolutionary ideologies, uprisings, and negative perception of reality. Most of those who were not lucky enough and did not gain higher education find their outlet in mysticism, faith in luck and fate.

The reaction on the ideology of uprising showing by social groups which do not have any interest in the considerable institutionalized transformations may be divided into three forms:

- conservative (there is no sense in any changes, as the main social vices take place at any regime and any social, and economic formations);
- reformist (it is possible to solve almost any social problem due to gradual improvement);
- liberal (the reasons of a person's failure lie in his/her own abilities to adapt).

The classes which can be determined to lower middle aspire to oversimplified dichotomization, exclusion of uncertainty, insistence, stereotypes, white and black decisions, mechanical repetition of the set of determined actions, cautiousness, self-restrictions, etc.

For those strata that have lost their wide range of main responsibilities the following features are typical: cynicism, disappointment, indifference, opportunism, moral fatigue, nostalgia for the past, and apathy to the present.

The groups occupying relatively high positions in specialized fields (engineers, scientists) aspire to evade social responsibility focusing their interests entirely on their professional activity that leads to a sort of social infantilism. It seems that the worldview of these groups is mostly flexible and can be easily influenced by the authorities or Mass Media which work under their control. As contrasted to them, another class engaged in the industry (workers, junior engineering and technical workers) inclines to distrust to social and technological changes and has the following reactions: fear, nervousness, and sense of uncertainty.

5. CONCLUSION

It is not rational to copy blindly without interpretations the results of scientific investigations conducted by Merton to the Russian reality (as well as to reality of any other country). Nevertheless it does not impede us from using his works as Ariadne's thread in the course of studying the question of correlation of structure and ideology in the Russian Federation (Bondaletov, 2011; Frolova, 2014) and others countries (Ejumudo, 2014; Gramling, 2013; Gaziano, 2014; Becker & Mehlkop, 2006; Andorka, 1995; Burke, 2004; Berger & Yair, 2011).

Notes

1. It is obvious that ideology itself cannot aspire to anything as it does not have will, and it does not have its own being. Here we mean ideological mechanisms with its inventions, preachers and followers.
2. The main resource is the state authority as well as its derivate – legal form of governance. They can also use additional economic resource for bribery, social resource (“connections”, “the old boy network”) for acquiring necessary position or lobbying necessary decisions.

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