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***Misery of Social Thinkers in the Emerging Civil
Society***

The point of departure of this analysis was an awareness of the opportunities for social activism, by "social thinkers," that the changes provoked by late modernization occasion; and hypothesis that there are two polar types in terms of the response to these opportunities by the same social thinkers. After having identified forty social thinkers in each of two post-socialist societies, Poland and Russia, and twenty in each of two small liberal-democratic societies, Ireland and Quebec, we characterized them as either "conservatist" or "modernist." We subsequently surveyed them, by personal interview, as to their participation in professional, non-professional and certain civil-society activities. We also gathered some information on certain relevant characteristics such as languages spoken, use of new technologies, venue of publication, etc. The interviews were carried out in 1997 and 1998. And indeed, we arrived at some tentative conclusions as to the influence and frustrations, with respect to the shaping of the destiny of their societies, of the two types of social thinkers.

Modernization results in major social changes; simultaneously the potential for conscious and research-informed shaping of social processes becomes evident. Modernization processes now underway in many societies not only create new challenges for civil society and the emergence or re-emergence of its characteristic institutions, they also give rise to enormous problems engendered by the rapid imposition of social models and behaviour patterns transplanted from alien and more modern societies. These changes lead to misgivings about, and debates on, the future of any given society. In theory, one would expect that in societies undergoing the tumult of late modernization the role of social thinkers would be more considerable than formerly; and more so than in societies that were more gradually modernized.

A question that presents itself is: "To what extent and in what way do contemporary social thinkers with divergent ideological orientations participate in this important and inevitable process of modernization?" What do they contribute to a new societal self-definition and to the new contours of their society? More precisely, our present objective is to explore the role of two polar types of social thinkers in mediating the social models and behaviour patterns that societies undergoing late and accelerated modernization find themselves coping with.

If indeed a characteristic type of social thinkers are not succeeding in participating as activists in the new circumstances, their misery is likely to be consummate. If, on the other hand, they are succeeding, via civil society institutions, in shaping the society, they would indeed be enjoying considerable influence and, eventually, even power. A better understanding of the new relationship between, on the one hand, two distinct

and opposed groups of social thinkers and, on the other hand, contemporary civil society might well allow world society analysts more insight into the potential and the limits of both civil society institutions and social thinkers.

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