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LOWER CLASSES IN PÉCS 1850-1920
FROM POOR-RELIEF TO SOCIAL POLITICS

PHD THESIS

1.

This dissertation analyses the transformation of the social care in the second part of the 19th century in a local level through the example of Pécs. In the course of the analysis of the history of social care we will draw a distinction between the system of poor-relief and modern social politics and the appearance of the second one which we regard the essence of the transformation. The poor-relief, that we define as the typical form of care in preindustrial societies is regarding its main point tending to the individual handling of the risks of the personal walk of life. And we define social policy those forms of social care which primarily intend to ensure and stabilize the social position of the wage-worker and the reproduction of the lease-work with the help of non-marketing means. We distinguish formal and material social politics which are treated as consecutive periods of social politics by social history. This dissertation will not discuss the previous one that we regard as the labour safety laws or factory legislation which aim at the physical defense of the worker, the game time and the regulation of working conditions and later on ended in the formation of labour law. In a wider sense we could reckon the preventive public health legislation as well among these. Contrarily the material social policy which developed mostly later on the formal one in most European countries can be identified with the various forms of labour insurance and social insurance which were based on the recognition of the collective responsibility of the social security of the workers. But in a wider sense we could reckon among these those measures which were made for to secure the reproduction of the workers and generally other social ranks as the housing policy, the policies tending to handle the unemployment and the pension insurance. We do not consider poor-relief and social policy as alternating historical forms of social care. Beside the solutions of social policy the poor-relief like practices and interpretations could live on or even integrated on the lowest level into the social policy systems. In this dissertation we examine that beside the poor-relief in what ways and with what conditions the solutions of modern social policy do appear in local politics.

2.

Until the 1890's the municipal poor-relief in Pécs consisted of the hardly limited subsidize and the poorhouse nursing of the disabled poor and the repressive arrangements against begging. The basement of this system was established in the 1840's. The financial funds of the various forms of subsidize were covered by foundations (poorhouse fund, hospital fund). But because of their mostly constant income this kind of system of poor-relief was not able to handle the consequences of the economic crises and seasonal unemployment. The city always tried to bridge this contradiction by giving effect to law enforcement measures against the typical barometer of poverty the begging – without any permanent success. In contrast to the adult poor-relief the support of orphans and foundlings was not financed by foundations but by the expense of municipal budget. Therefore, there was a chance on the one hand to handle the consequences of the social and economical changes, mainly the growing of population and on the other hand to form a conscious municipal policy. The establishment of the Rudolphinum Orphanage (1858), the expansion of this orphanage (1878), the opening of the foundling hospital (1886) and the extension of subsidize to the widows growing their children by their own were the main signs of this progress that went hand in hand with the permanent growth of the budgetary expenses appropriated to the support of orphans and foundlings. The organization of state child support enforcement system between 1898-1903 have taken away that field of poor-relief from municipal control which by the measure of financial outgoings and institutional structure was mostly disposed to develop.

3.

Instead of the monetary subsidize which had primacy in the field of the municipal poor-relief in the 1840' in the first decades of dualism, the restricted (institutional) poor-relief came to the front. The establishment of the Rudolphinum orphanage (1858) could be considered as the antecedent of this process however the favor of restricted caring methods became definite political purpose from the end of the 1870's. Behind the building of the new orphanage (1878), the opening of the foundling hospital (1886) and last but not least the plans of the poorhouse in 1877 we shall see the intention to hide the various forms of poverty and to discipline of the poor. This phenomenon derived from the sudden demographical growth in the city in the 1860's and 1870's and the economical crises of the 1870's.

4.

From the end of the 1890s, poor-relief in the cities experienced a great transformation due to the economic crisis of the turn of the century and the social reforms which affected the municipal poor-relief as well, strengthening it administratively. The point of the change was the separation of the subsidize from the poor-relief fund. Thus it became possible to adapt to the changing economic and social circumstances, which was reflected in the budgets as well. In practice, the living wage was not geared to strict bureaucratic rules but to the claims of the needy ones. Furthermore, the program also included the communal work for the unemployed. Nevertheless, we cannot talk about a socialpolitical program, as it was only the modernization of poor-relief. The innovations at the turn of the century did not really mean a real change in poor-relief as the supports were available for only a small - and continuously decreasing - number of groups.

5.

Beside the poor-relief of the town which was available for only a small group of people, charity played a very important rule. Until the turn of the century, the benefaction was represented by only one association, the Charity Women's Association of Pécs which was founded in 1871. The subsidize of the women's association was very similar to that of the poor-relief of the city and was indifferent to social and economic changes. The soup kitchen which was founded in the 1890s was specifically established to keep off the seasonal dangers that affected the poor. We can already identify the characteristics of modern poor-relief in the activity of the women's association in the first decade of the 1900s. Nevertheless, the harmonization and centralization of the social and the authoritative poor-relief was never brought into effect, partly because of the associations' resistance, partly because this intention was strong only during the times of economic crisis and there was no conceptional change behind it.

6.

The children's asylum opened its gates in 1886. The establishment of first asylum of the town cannot be explained as a simple nurturing and educational program, however, it does not fit into the poor-relief of the town either, as it was not founded for the sick, the old or the orphan, but specifically to help the working class and give their children a place where they can be during the day. The place was regarded as a help for parents, and its expenses which increased from year to year were covered by the city budget. Thus, it was a sociopolitical disposition

which aimed at the stabilization of living conditions of those who lived on their jobs. The opening of such an asylum was motivated by the aim of lowering the rate of infant mortality and by moral fears and fit in the line of those tutelages and nurturing through which the liberal society - before the birth of municipal or the social policy of the state - tried to handle the tensions caused by the huge pauperization and a weakening social cohesion. It was a paradox phenomenon, as this institute was established in Pécs when the signs of social disintegration were not yet visible, and after 1894, in the time of the crisis, at the turn of the century there were no more expansions concerning the children's asylums.

7.

Housing policy is the only field where we find any modern sociopolitical initiations in Pécs. The program of municipal flat building which came to the front between 1910 and 1914 had no connection with either of the local poor-relief organisation or with its aims. However, this program was not considered as a sociopolitical arrangement, but rather as a disposition of town development. Although it was the Social Democratic Party which initiated the program, the determining factors of its execution were the financial support of the government and other towns as exemplaries. This proves that the program did not handle the actual social and housing problems, rather it prevented social conflicts.

8.

The reason for the lack of sociopolitical dispositions and initiations was the unique systemic nature of industry in Pécs. Essentially, handicraft played a very important role until the 1910s and very few industries owned a larger rate of plants. In the handicraft, a patriarchal relationship dominated between employers and employees at the turn of the century, which proves that the establishment of state cover for industry workers in 1891 and in 1907 had been present before the forms of patriarchal care - at least in the countryside - were eliminated for good. In such circumstances, the expansion of poor subsidize were only needed in the times of crisis - as at the turn of the century - but these periods did not force out steps of modernisation. The sociopolitical dispositions of the town - as the opening of nursery homes in the 1880s and the building of flats for workers in the early 1910s - did not aim to ease social tensions, rather, moral fears towards lower social classes were expressed in them and gave their dynamics.