

## Social Engineering. Between a Totalitarian Utopia and Partial Pragmatism

In April 2012, an exhibition arranged by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* – DFG) and entitled: *Research – Planning – Expulsion: The National Socialists' General Plan East* was presented in Warsaw. The opening was accompanied by an international academic conference, co-organised by the Department of German Studies of the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Remembrance Institute, alongside the German Historical Institute in Warsaw.

The conference focused on two key areas. The first concerned the involvement of German scientists in the population policy of the Third Reich, including the disgraceful role played by Professor Konrad Meyer and the second, their participation in the drawing up of a large project which, in accordance with the National Socialist plans, was to affect the occupied Polish territories in particular. The General Plan East (*Generalplan Ost*) was to crown the National Socialist population policy in Central and East Europe. It was an extensive plan for changing the 'racial' map of Europe and shifting the border of 'German' settlement eastward. 'German' settlers were to take the place of the Jewish inhabitants of those lands who had already been exterminated, as well as of the primarily Slavic nations, the Balts and the Finno-Ugric peoples, who were being exterminated or expelled. The surviving inhabitants were to be ejected to Siberia or transformed into modern helots. Apart from that, *Generalplan Ost* had direct, practical implications for the policy being put into effect in the Polish territories occupied by the Third Reich, since action was undertaken in the Reich's Warthegau district, the Warta River Land, with a view to testing the possibility of implementing it.

The idea that the conference was intended to serve was to connect the two aforementioned perspectives, namely the role of the expert-scholars in the murderous policy of the Third Reich and in the *Generalplan Ost*, in order to attain at a wider look at the issues of population policy in the 20th century.

Bearing in mind that the Third Reich's population policy had its unique features but was, at the same time, set in the long-term, pan-European historical processes, social engineering provides the right framework needed for understanding it. The point here is not the meaning of the term frequently referred, where it is narrowed down to a sociotechnique, but a wide spectrum of planned actions undertaken since the 19th century, aimed at shaping societies and states in a specific form, actions consisting in an ever stronger interference with citizens' lives and the functioning of a society. Social engineering meant a departure from liberal concepts and exerting an ever stronger influence on the political culture and the sphere of values. The notion of social engineering is wider than that the scope of it which is of interest to us here, because it encompasses a great many processes related to modernisation and the emergence of modern societies. Modernisation means the processes of destroying the structures of an agricultural society and those leading to the emergence, in the economic spheres, as well as the social and cultural, of a capitalist society and the forming of nations and nation-states in the shape known at present in the Western world. It encompasses changes in such areas as demography, social structure, the political system, education, family, the value system, attitudes and personality.

Social engineering has an immense cognitive potential, which may be used in an analysis of 20th century history. The research perspective it provides is, however, difficult; the very concept is far from being clear, there are few scholarly works devoted to it and there is not even an unambiguous definition of it. At the same time, it covers a very wide area related to the perception of societies as an uniform whole, with such disciplines as eugenics, anthropology (racial hygiene) and statistics. We are interested in that part of social engineering which is related to exclusion on the basis of a distinction between a valuable live and one without value. Our considerations are concerned both with exclusion within the framework of the inner structure of societies, such as people recognised as asocial, unproductive or displaying criminal tendencies, as well as that related to the forming of modern nations and states, primarily groups belonging to different nationalities, but also 'class enemies'. In practice, making a clear distinction between these two, closely intertwined areas is difficult.

Translated by *Mariusz Kukliński*