

SOCIOLOGICAL HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION TO ISTVÁN BIBÓ'S ARTICLE

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Elite and the Social Sensitivity is one of István Bibó's early essays. The author (b. Budapest, 1911, d. 1979) had different occupations being a lawyer, professor of political science, librarian, the last legitimate minister of the 1956 revolution, imprisoned for six years, and worked as a librarian again. He did not live in a democracy. His life was spent in authoritarian and totalitarian systems. For a few years he experienced a fluid political state with elements of democracy, but dictatorship stifled them. For a few weeks he experienced the spontaneity of freedom, during the revolution of 1956. His life's goal was to lay the foundations for the free political community of free people as a programme, task and desirable human condition. He became the symbol of an independent, democratic, civilized Hungary for many intellectuals in the eighties and the early nineties in Hungary.¹

His approach implying perfectionist elements was eclectic, empiricist and first of all *contractualist*, based on the method of separating facts and values from each other first, and then of their joint consideration. Given the opportunity he would have played the role of political therapist. His work drew on the interwar literature on the *decadence of Europe*, first of all on Barna Horváth's philosophy of natural law,

1 Cf. Berki, R.N. (1992): The Realism of Moralism. The Political Philosophy of István Bibó. *History of Political Thought*, 13(3): 513–34; Kovács, G. (1999): Can Power be Humanized? The Notions of Elite and Legitimation in István Bibó's Political Philosophy. *Studies in East European Thought*, 51(4): 307–27; Dénes, I.Z.: Three Concepts of Liberty: Isaiah Berlin', Hannah Arendt's and István Bibó's Interpretations. www.hiarpt.org. Detailed monographs: Dénes, I.Z. (1999): *Eltorzult magyar alkat. Bibó István vitája Németh Lászlóval és Szekfű Gyulával*. [Distorted Hungarian Character. István Bibó's Polemics with László Németh and Gyula Szekfű.] Budapest: Osiris; Balog, I. (2004): *Politikai hisztériák Közép- és Kelet-Európában. Bibó fasizmusról, nacionalizmusról, antiszemitizmusról*. [Political Hysterias in Central and Eastern Europe. Bibó on Fascism, Nationalism, anti-Semitism.] Budapest: Argentum Kiadó; Kovács, G. (2004): *Az európai egyensúlytól a kölcsönös szolgáltatások társadalmáig. Bibó István, a politikai gondolkodó*. [From the European Equilibrium to the Society of Mutual Services. István Bibó, the Political Thinker.] Eszmetörténeti Könyvtár [Library of the History of Ideas 2, 3.], Budapest: Bibó István Szellemi Műhely–Argumentum Kiadó. There is a selection of his essays in English: István Bibó (1991): *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writings*. Edited by K. Nagy and translated by A. Boros-Kazai. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Co, Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lake, New York: Columbia University Press. French, German, Italian, Polish, Czech, Croatian and Russian selections are also available and some of them, especially the French and the Italian ones are more appropriate translations than the English ones.

Guglielmo Ferrero's psychologically based interpretation of legitimacy, on Ferenc Erdei's conception and diagnosis of the living conditions and perspectives of the peasantry, István Hajnal's historical theses on the society of mutual services and László Németh's utopia of a classless society of intellectuals. He used and adapted all these sources to his system of values.

His interpretation of liberty was determined by the *political concept of freedom* implying the demand to *modernize the traditional anti-absolutistic liberal guarantees for the division of power*, the republican *ethos of the citizen*, the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, the admittedly valid achievements of liberal democracy, the correction of their distortions, and radical peasant democratic and "petty bourgeois socialist" ideas as well. This approach as a whole does not fit either of the two major and distorted political discourses in today's Hungary: the narratives of "*adopting the European model*" versus "*national self-centeredness*", the self-justification of the *oligarchy* versus a *tyrannical ochlocracy*.