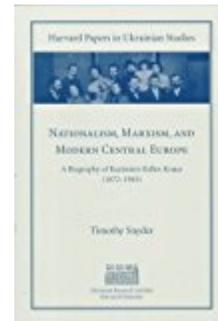




Timothy Snyder. *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872-1905).* Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1997. xxv + 321 pp. \$18.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-916458-84-3.



Reviewed by Kai Struve (Freie Universität Berlin)

Published on HABSBUrg (February, 1998)

Marxism and Nationalism Reconciled? The Polish Marxist Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz

Though Marxists have come to be somewhat out of fashion in recent years, Timothy Snyder devoted his dissertation to Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, a Marxist and the most important political theorist of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in its early years. But in the case of Kelles-Krauz the drawback of his Marxism seems to be outweighed by the fact that in the centre of his political writings was the emergence of modern nations and nationalism in central Europe during the nineteenth century, a subject that has attracted much attention in academe and the public since the fall of communism.

Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz was born in Russian-ruled Poland in 1872. He descended from an old Livonian noble family, which lived since the seventeenth or eighteenth century in Lithuania. The family's estate had been confiscated as punishment for the participation of Kazimierz's father in the Polish uprising of 1863/64. The father then worked in excise offices in different places in Russian Poland, until the family finally settled in Radom in 1882. Kazimierz stayed in Radom until 1891, when he finished school, and left for Paris after being denied admission to the Russian university in Warsaw. In 1901 he moved from Paris to Vienna, where he stayed until his early death from tuberculosis in 1905 at the age of 33.

Kelles-Krauz was the only Marxist among the leaders of the PPS, and he defended the PPS's goal of reestablishing the Polish state from a Marxist point of view. On this subject, he became the main ideological antagonist of Rosa Luxemburg, who regarded the aim of Polish independence as harmful to the cause of the working class. She attacked the PPS because of its "social patriotic" politics and program.

Snyder defines two main tasks for this biography: to portray in the life of Kelles-Krauz the typical traits of the Polish intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century, and to acquaint the English language reader with his works. Kelles-Krauz has remained, in contrast to Rosa Luxemburg, rather unknown outside Poland. Before Snyder's book appeared, there existed in English only a small chapter on him in Leszek Kolakowski's *Main Currents in Marxism*, and a short article about his view of the "Jewish question." [1]

Much has been published in Poland on this Polish Marxist since the 1960s, when with the end of the Stalin era a positive evaluation of Kelles-Krauz became possible. [2] Today the Polish post-Communist party, the *Socjaldemokracja Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, has named one of

its foundations after him. Research has been facilitated by the edition of his *Selected Works* and his letters. Snyder has complemented these basic sources with many further publications not included in the *Selected Works*. He also studied the published memoirs and letters of people who knew Kelles-Krauz or corresponded with him, and consulted the archives in Warsaw, Wrocław, Paris, and at the Hoover Institution. At the Hoover Institution, materials from the Paris branch of the Russian *Okhrana* provided the author with information about the politician's life as an emigre and about Polish socialist groups in Paris.

In the first chapter Snyder describes the emergence of new political tendencies among the "children of 1863" (Władysław Studnicki) during the 1880. The politics of positivism and "organic work," born out of the failure of the uprising of 1863, became more and more unsatisfying for a new generation of educated young Poles who experienced the increasing pressure for Russification, the rapid industrialization in certain regions of Russian Poland, the growing social injustice, and who saw that positivist politics would not lead to national independence. For them a more active political strategy aiming at revolutionary changes became an option again. Often they were influenced by Russian *narodnichestvo* and were responsive to socialist ideas. During his years in school in Radom, Kelles-Krauz grew up with these new political and intellectual currents. Like many of his generation, he took part in conspiratorial circles, where he became a socialist.

In 1894 Kelles-Krauz joined the Paris section of the Union of Polish Socialists Abroad, the foreign organization of the PPS, and quickly became its leading activist in Paris and member of its London based *Centralizacja*. During his years in Paris, he mainly studied sociology, which at that time was still a young discipline and had not yet been established at the universities. The main result of his theoretical work during these years was the theory of "revolutionary retrospection." Kelles-Krauz found that in general revolutionaries derive the model for the future society which they strive to achieve from the past. The model for the socialists, for example, was "primeval communalism." Consequently, for Kelles-Krauz Marxism was not a doctrine or a set of statements about the nature of capitalism and the future development of society, but the most appropriate research approach for the study of society. For him, Marxism was the proper form of sociology, and correctly conceived sociology was only another name for Marxism. Marxism could not provide the revolutionaries with the norms for their actions, which they received by "revolutionary ret-

rospection," but could show by scientific research the best way to achieve their aims.

Marxism, as Kelles-Krauz understood it, was characterized by the assumption that the economy was the decisive factor for the development of society. But for this assumption he created something that is rather unusual for a Marxist, a social theory that is a theory of action. The primacy of the economic sphere is based on the anthropological fact that human beings try to satisfy their needs as efficiently as possible. Kelles-Krauz supposed that social reality is formed by the simultaneous action of multiple factors. Terms like "economy," "law," or "art" are only abstractions that the sociologist can use as tools for research. Snyder compares this concept of Kelles-Krauz with the "ideal types" of Max Weber.

The subject of Kelles-Krauz' theoretical works, and the political activity to which Snyder gives the most space, is nationalism and the question of Polish independence. Already in his first major text, "Klasowosc naszego programu," published in Paris in 1894, Kelles-Krauz began a controversy with Rosa Luxemburg and her party "Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland" (SDKP) about whether independence for Poland was a necessary step toward socialism, as Kelles-Krauz and the PPS saw it, or whether Polish independence would be an obstacle for socialism: because it would divert the proletariat from the fight for it and because of the "organic integration" of the economy of the Kingdom of Poland with Russia. Luxemburg concluded that the Polish socialists should fight for their aims together with their Russian comrades within the Russian state.

The conflict about national independence between the two wings of Polish socialism continued at the London congress of the Second International in July and August 1896. Snyder broadly presents the negotiations and discussions about a resolution in favor of Polish independence, proposed by the PPS and criticized by the SDKP, in the months before the congress between the member parties of the Second International in which Kelles-Krauz was very much engaged. He shows how a strange combination of internationalist convictions, tactical considerations, nationalistic attitudes (especially among German and Russian socialists), and simple ignorance among west European comrades about the conditions in eastern Europe led to the failure of the PPS's aims.

Kelles-Krauz moved to Vienna in 1901 because he regarded it as a way-station to Galicia. A return to Russian Poland was impossible for him because he was known to the Russian police as a member of the PPS. During his

years in Vienna Kelles-Krauz more deeply explored the “national question.” He supplemented his advocacy of Polish independence and national liberation as a step toward socialism with a theory about the relations between capitalism, the unification of language, national culture, and the emergence of modern nationalities. This theory he developed first in an article about the “Jewish question,” published in 1904.[3] Kelles-Krauz wrote it in connection with attempts he undertook to achieve a closer cooperation between the PPS and the Jewish “Bund.”[4]

The PPS and the “Bund,” founded in 1897, were on bad terms because the “Bund” declared itself against the aim of an independent Polish state and preferred in the first years of its existence a close cooperation with Russian socialists. The PPS regarded Yiddish culture as backward and reactionary, and held the opinion that assimilation of the Jews was inevitable. Kelles-Krauz argued now for regarding the “Bund” and the Zionist movement as an expression of the transformation of the Jewish community into a modern nationality. He considered the formation of the Jewish nationality to be a process similar to the emergence of other modern nationalities in the nineteenth century: the spread of national consciousness among the Germans, Italians, and also Poles, Hungarians, and “the nationalities which, one might say, no one expected”: the Czechs, the Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Croatia-Slovenes, and other Slavic nationalities (p. 198). Kelles-Krauz tried to convince the “Bund” that it would be in the interest of the Jewish workers to support the aim of Polish independence. He declared that the future Polish state should guarantee national rights and a national autonomy for its Jewish citizens.

These modern nationalities were characterized by the belief that they were of equal worth to all other nations, and that they should decide for themselves about their fate. Kelles-Krauz regarded the emergence of modern nationalities as a result of the transformation of estate society into a class society, and in this sense as a product of capitalism. In the centre of Kelles-Krauz’ advocacy of the nation state stood his conviction that it was a necessary precondition for democracy. He thought that democracy could only work within the framework of a nation, i.e. a group with a common language. Only then would the decisions of the majority be accepted by the minority. He considered the creation of common national languages to be a result of the need for intensified communication that capitalism produced. The revolutionary change he intended was the creation of a Polish nation state. Within this state reforms leading toward a socialist society should be introduced in a democratic

way. He tried also to undermine Rosa Luxemburg’s argument for “organic incorporation,” and argued for the nation state as the best framework for economic development.[5]

Because Kelles-Krauz thought capitalism would lead to nation states, he expected the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy and criticized the Austrian social democrats’ nationality program and the concept of Karl Renner for the cultural autonomy of the Habsburg monarchy’s nationalities. He considered this concept too centralistic and thereby reflecting German interests. He did not believe, as many of the Austrian social democrats did, that a further democratization of the monarchy would reduce national tensions, but seemed to have expected rather an increase.[6]

In the concluding chapter Snyder compares the works of Kelles-Krauz with Max Weber’s theory of social science and Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness*[7] to put Kelles-Krauz in the broader history of Marxism and social thought.

Snyder considers Kelles-Krauz’s thoughts about the formation of modern nations to represent a theoretical level that would be reached again only in the 1980s with the works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm.[8] Especially here, Snyder shows a tendency to exaggerate the stature of his hero. A comparison with other contemporary publications about the nationality question would have revealed that the concepts of Kelles-Krauz were not as unusual for that time as Snyder seems to assume. Another shortcoming is the lack of a more critical evaluation of Kelles-Krauz’ theory of modern nationalities and nation states. Snyder seems to overlook the fact that many questions and contradictions are left unresolved. One must ask how his thesis of the unifying effect of capitalism and the emergence of a Jewish nationality fit together, how his advocacy of a monolingual nation state and the guarantee of rights for national minorities should be reconciled, and what to make of his thesis, especially provocative from a modern point of view, that democracy can only work within an ethnically homogeneous territorial state.

In a book published in the series “Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies,” many readers will probably expect a discussion of Kelles-Krauz’ opinions about the relationship of a future Polish state with the eastern territories of the Polish Commonwealth with its Lithuanian, Belorussian and Ukrainian majorities and whether Kelles-Krauz was an adherent of a federalist concept or of an ethnic Poland. Snyder gives only a brief hint in the preface that

Kelles-Krauz defended the right of these nations to their own states.

Excepting these rather small shortcomings, Snyder has presented a well written biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz that not only tells his life story but also explores his political and sociological thought. He effectively puts the life and the writings of Kelles-Krauz into the context of the living conditions and mentality of the Polish socialist intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century, and he also presents well the debates among Polish and European socialists in which Kelles-Krauz participated.

The reader gains an insight into the thinking of this Marxist who was the main Polish antagonist of Rosa Luxemburg, and also into important aspects of Polish intellectual and social history in a transitional period leading to modern twentieth century Poland. In addition, the controversies about Polish independence between the west European socialists and the PPS make it clear that for the nations of east central Europe nationalism was still a liberating force in national and social respects, while in western Europe the national discourse tended to be dominated by the political right and was used against the socialists. The writings and the political experiences of Kelles-Krauz also reflect a different meaning of the nation in eastern Europe, still ruled by the three eastern empires of Prussia, Russia, and the Habsburgs, and the established nation states in western Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.

Notes:

[1]. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Michael Sobelman. "Polish Socialism and Jewish Nationality. The Views of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz", in *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 20, 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 47-55.

[2]. The most important publications are an edition of

"Selected Works": *Pisma wybrane*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1962), an edition of Kelles-Krauz's letters: *Listy*, 2 vols., ed. by Feliks Tych et al. (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 1984), and a biography by Wiesław Bienkowski: *Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz. Życie i dzieło* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 1969).

[3]. "W kwestii narodowości żydowskiej", in *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2, pp. 318-41.

[4]. *Allgemeiner Idisher Arbeyterbund in Lita, Poylen un Rusland* (General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia).

[5]. Kelles-Krauz developed his arguments about the nation state most extensively in "Niepodległość Polski a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów", in *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2, pp. 370-394.

[6]. See his "Program narodowościowy Socjalnej Demokracji Austriackiej a program PPS", in *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2, 275-296.

[7]. György Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1923).

[8]. "He anticipated Anderson's idea of the imagined community, Hobsbawm's connection of modern nationalism to the process of inventing traditions, and Gellner's argument that nationalism is a function of economic and social modernization. What is more, he united all three of these threads in a single body of work, eighty years before the publication of these three books in 1983." (p. 251)

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the reviewer and to HABSBUrg. For other permission, please contact <reviews@h-net.msu.edu> and <habsburg@ttacs6.ttu.edu>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

Citation: Kai Struve. Review of Snyder, Timothy, *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872-1905)*. HABSBUrg, H-Net Reviews. February, 1998.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1716>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for

nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.