

POLITICAL EDUCATION IN VIEW OF KARL R. POPPER'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Kurt Salamun

■ Summary

This article shows that Karl Popper's Social Philosophy, which he developed in his famous book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, implies a set of arguments for the critique of anti-democratic, fundamentalist thought-patterns. Those arguments can be relevant in political education for young people to become more resistant against ideological indoctrination and manipulation by terrorists and Jihadists.

Keywords: ideological fundamentalism, political illusions, authoritarian charismatic leadership, enemy-stereotypes, revolution in a given society.

■ I. Introductory Comments

The «war against terrorism» cannot be won by military forces, police actions and economic pressure alone. It must be supported by an offensive critique of fundamentalist thought patterns and belief systems that are to a large extent responsible for the closed-mindedness and the stimulation of fanaticism and hatred in the minds of terrorists, islamists, Jihadists and their supporters. A basic aim of political education in pluralist democratic societies should be to work out offensive arguments against fundamentalist thought-patterns in order to prevent young people becoming admirers and sup-

porters of terrorist opinion leaders and groups.

In social and political philosophy of the 20th century we can find a number of authors who contributed important ideas to democratic political education in connection with the theory of totalitarianism. Some of those authors have been very successful in finding out a considerable set of critical arguments against the totalitarian belief systems of the last century, namely, Nazism and Marxism-Leninism. As proponents of this tradition of critical research into totalitarianism I will mention here only Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Hans Kelsen, Carl Friedrich, Zbigniew

Brzezinski, and Karl R. Popper.¹ In my opinion many critical arguments in the books of those researchers can be important intellectual resources for helping us to oppose the new danger of fundamentalist thought patterns in the minds of youths, who are open for the indoctrination by Terrorists, Islamists and Jihadists.

The term «Fundamentalism» has a variety of meanings. We must not restrict this term to religious islamic belief systems only. Fundamentalism is a type of worldview that can occur also in other religious belief systems as well as in political ideologies. During the nineteen seventieths of the last century in the domain of religion a new religious approach took shape. Expressed in a multitude of ways, this approach advocated moving on from a modernism and secularism that had failed, attributing its setback and dead ends to separation from God. In his book *The Revenge of God. The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, the French sociologist Gilles Kepel has analyzed similarities and divergences of Fundamentalism in the religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity in detail.² Despite all the differences

and divergences in content, cultural, economic and social background, political strategies etc., we can recognize in the belief systems of those anti-modernist movements some common structural elements. In our days these elements become obvious again as motivating forces in the belief-systems of violent groups of terrorists and Jihadists.

As a strict defender of the idea of pluralistic democratic political systems and an open society, Karl R. Popper is well known. His book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*³ is a standard work for justifying and legitimizing this type of political and social order.

My own thesis in this paper is the proof, that Popper must be seen as a modern classic of political education because of his highly valuable insights into dangerous structures of anti-democratic thought-patterns in political or religious world-views and ideologies. The task of my following explanation is:

First, to point out a set of anti-democratic fundamentalist thought-patterns that can be reconstructed of Popper's Social Philosophy. The knowledge of those thought-patterns could help to protect young people of being influenced by ideological indoctrination and manipulation.

In a second step, I shall treat some political illusions, the discussion of them should also be integrated in a democratic political education. Popper warns us of those illusions as dangerous for an Open Society.

¹ Cf. Karl JASPERS, *The Atombomb and the Future of Man*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. (Chicago and London, The Chicago University Press, 1961), pp. 95-117; Hannah ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1951); Carl Joachim FRIEDRICH (ed.), *Totalitarianism*. (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1954); Carl Joachim FRIEDRICH, Zbigniew BRZEZINSKI, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1965); Karl R. POPPER, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. First published in two volumes. (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1945).

² See Gilles KEPÉL: *The Revenge of God. The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*. Translated by Alan Braley.(University

Park, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

³ See Karl R. POPPER: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, (one volume Edition, London, 1995), I shall cite this book further with the capitals OS.