

## THE VIEW OF AN AMERICAN HISTORIAN ON ROMANIAN SOCIOLOGY

Michael M Cernea

Over the past half century, Professor Mihai Pop has contributed to the development of Romanian social anthropology, sociology and ethnography, both as a field researcher himself and as an able organizer of research teams and institutions. In addition, he has continuously endeavored, sometimes under adverse circumstances, to expand the communication between Romanian and American social scientists. I feel it therefore appropriate, as an homage to his dedicated efforts, to recall in this brief paper one little-known episode in the relationship between social sciences in the US and Romania.

This episode refers to a report on the status of the social sciences in the Balkans written some fifty years ago by an American historian, Professor Robert J. Kerner, *The Social Sciences in the Balkans and Turkey*, and published by the University of California Press in 1930. I “discovered” this report myself in 1980, while I spent a sabbatical year as a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Wassenaar.

Indeed, while reading Kerner’s book today, one is surprised to realize how some of the traditional constraints and limitations on social science in Romania are still present, and even aggravated and multiplied by more recent developments. Certainly, the current suffocation of Romanian sociology and its unhappy subservience to political impositions is not rooted in the situation of the 20s and 30s, but rather in profound present-day political, ideological and economic causes. But the historical record does help illuminate the plight of Romanian sociologists across time and social systems. This makes a reexamination of Kerner’s book quite interesting.

The historians of Romanian sociology (cf. Constantinescu, Badina and Gall, 1974) have meticulously collected and commented upon various analyses and descriptions of “The Romanian Sociological School” which were made by a number of American scholars in the late 1930’s. These early articles (cf. Mosley, n.d.) described how the empirical investigations in Romanian villages carried out by this school took off on a large scale. They are currently regarded as evidence of an early international recognition of the development of Romanian