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IN NEED OF A EUROPEAN CRIMINOLOGY

There is an urgent need for a European criminology. I am going to comment on that need with three theses.

First thesis: Criminology has been established in Europe since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But American criminology has led the field in this area worldwide since the twentieth century. This fact is grounded on the following reasons.

   European criminology is fragmented traditionally, disciplinary and linguistically. It is closely attached to an authoritarian and nation-state thinking. The belief in state power and in the violent solution of conflicts is widespread in the European population. Therefore criminal law is held in high esteem. But criminology is an international, interdisciplinary and democratic science in socially developed countries. It tries to settle social and interpersonal conflicts peacefully.

   The theoretical basis of European criminology is too narrow and too restricted. The rational choice theory which was developed in Italy in the eighteenth century favours criminal law one-sidedly. The Italian clinical positivism at the end of the nineteenth century encouraged psychiatric solutions; it leads to a pathologisation of criminological problems. Offenders are not suffering from any disease and their behaviour is not out of their control, as the medical model would imply. The very fruitful French sociological positivism was pursued in European criminology very insufficiently. The critical/radical criminologists of the ‘European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control’ based their thinking all too exclusively on Marxism and the labelling approach. They thereby narrowed criminal-sociological problem solving in an unbearable way.

   The International Society of Criminology which was founded in 1934 by the Italian clinical criminologist Benigno Di Tullio and which organised its first international criminological congress in Rome in 1938, concentrated its work too much on Europe. It was unable to overcome the nation-state thinking and the narrow theoretical basis of European criminology. Criminal law and psychiatry have dominated the European national criminological societies to their own disadvantage up until the present day.
Sociological and psychological schools of criminological thought are excluded to the greatest possible extent.

It is true that American criminology was established on the basis of the thinking of the European criminological founding fathers, and there was and still is a clinical-criminological school of thought in North America. Since 1911 translations of the works of leading European criminologists have been published in the ‘Modern Criminal Science Series’ of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology in Chicago. But as an academic subject of study, criminology was taken over by American sociologists, who wrote the textbooks and offered lecture courses. The reason for this was the fact that sociology in the United States developed a major interest in the study of social problems. Crime and delinquency were conceived as social problems.

A great variety of criminological textbooks written by sociologists appeared during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s: criminological textbooks by Maurice Parmelee (1920), Edwin H. Sutherland (1924), John L. Gillin (1926), Philip A. Parsons (1926), Fred E. Hayes (1930), Nathaniel F. Cantor (1932), Albert Morris (1934) and Walter C. Reckless (1940). This broad basis, the social-structural approach of the Chicago School of Criminology (Clifford R. Shaw, Henry D. McKay) and Sutherland’s differential association theory laid the foundations for the worldwide importance of American criminology which happened after the Second World War. The Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology – which was founded by August Vollmer in 1941 in Berkeley, California – contributed a great deal to this satisfactory development.

During the International Congress of Criminology in Paris in 1950, Thorsten Sellin coined the phrase: “Criminologists are kings without a country”. But Leon Radzinowicz described the United States with regard to criminological research in 1961 as “a vast laboratory”. In 1974, Donald R. Cressey stated: “Criminology is not a science, but criminologists hope it will become a science”. In the presidential plenary: ‘High points and low points in twentieth century criminology’ during the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology in San Francisco (2000), leading American criminologists took the view that criminology became a science in the second half of the twentieth century. An impressive criminological book production, many new journals, the foundation of 60 graduate schools in criminal justice and criminology and the considerable expenditure of public funds by the National Institute of Justice in Washington, DC for the purposes of criminological research, are evidence of the fact that American criminology is at present the market leader in the world.