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N O T B Y O R G A N I Z A T I O N A L O N E

[by Karl Polanyi]

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NOT BY ORGANIZATION ALONE

I

A Russian novel about an inventor and an American sociological study of its middle class "which has left home" would not on the face of it, be likely to have a great deal in common. The wide gulfs of separate life patterns and values, interest and response would, one might guess, portray the landscapes of two separate planets.

Many different questions are raised in both volumes, but it may be however, that they share one question in common, and that is the possibility of ultimate freedom in an industrial society.

Not By Bread Alone¹ is a recent Russian novel of an inventor's herculean struggle with the state bureaucracy to have adopted his superior invention for cast-iron pipe. In the seven year epic which ensues, Lopatkin, the inventor is vilified, subjected to intrigue, part of his invention stolen, offered bribes and imprisoned. The prestige and vested interests of the state monopoly in charge of iron pipe, and of Avdiyev its chief, would be threatened by such an outsider's invention and this is the basis of the struggle. In the end, ^{Lopatkin} he wins through with the aid of a few friends and another sympathetic state monopoly.

¹ Not By Bread Alone, Vladimir Dudintsev, Trans by Dr. Edith Bone, Hutchinson of London.

The Organization Man² describes the omnipresent Organization which in school, corporation, research lab and hospital (and informally in suburbia) weigh heavily on the middle-class American at each turn and decision of his life. Moreover this process is accompanied by a "social ethic", that "rationalizes the organization's demands for fealty and gives those who offer it whole heartedly a sense of dedication in doing so".

The intellectual roots of the social ethic are deep, beginning with the education of the child through school and college, through his place of work, leisure, literature, and the communities where he lives.

Dudintsev's hero Lopatkin is reminiscent of a biblical figure in his selfless dedication, his humanity and devotion to the task of carrying a "lighted torch" into the darkness. He is a "stone-hard fulfiller of a duty", - to hand over "what had to be handed over".

Galitski, the party man, who ultimately arranges for his own collective^{to} build Lopatkin's machine says "you ask why I took up your case? Because you did everything that one man could do".

"I don't say that we have got communism yet", ^{Lopatkin} he maintains, "but I would like to have it now, not in order to get things for myself, but in order that I might give without being prevented". Of his fellow men he says, "I will look for kindness and fidelity in them to the end".

²The Organization Man, by William H. Whyte Jr., Simon and Schuster New York, 1956.

"All normal people are born with creative impulses" he maintains. Also, those lighted torches "cannot be carried away to deserts or to caves... they are inextinguishable!... they will go on burning and make people glad!"

Lopatkin holds that "Human beings consist of two parts: the physical shell, which disappears, and the work of creation which can live on for ever."

He tells another supporter who brings him drawing paper "you are giving me more than life... In order to stay alive, one needs bread. But however hungry I might be, I should always be ready to exchange my bread for a spark of belief".

Lopatkin is 'everyman' for the author, for his friend Arakhevski tells him "Every man is an inventor, who is creating something new in his own sphere. Inventors can be anywhere...".

In one of his few moments of doubt Lopatkin meditates on continuing his project and focusses his struggle on his "individualism": "Why not go back to school-mastering in some cosy corner and be a normal human being, like these other people, sitting on the benches. Throw all the correspondence, all the drawings, all this 'individualism' into the fire!... What is it that prevents me?"

Curiously enough, Whyte sums up his own view of the central issue of his book in the same word "individualism" by which he means "following one's destiny as one's own conscience directs".

He elaborates as follows:

"To control one's destiny and not be controlled by it; to know which way the path will fork and to make the turning oneself; to have some index of achievement that no one can dispute - concrete and tangible for all to see, not dependent on the attitudes of others. It is an independence he will never have in full measure but he must forever seek it."

It is not a question of teaching how "to shake hands with other people; society will attend to this lesson. They have to be taught to reach".

The portrait of man common to both authors, it seems, is that of a creative independent creature who fulfills his destiny by following the dictates of his ~~inner~~ conscience.

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II

There is an immoveable ponderous obstruction to this self-realization of the individual's inner demands, which forms the backdrop of the society in which he lives.

Dudintsev's designation of those who obstruct him is as follows: "It's a monopoly. They do not allow any leaps forward, only a gradual, scarcely perceptible ascent. And they strike at everyone who thinks differently". Moreover "they spin cocoons for themselves". Elsewhere one of their number Shutikov, the deputy-minister, says "they built themselves a sort of Scythian fortress, surrounded by a wall, divided the duties up between themselves, and now live according to Malthus, limiting fresh births. The fortress may not be visible, but all the same it exists!" He indicates that "Alone, you cannot get even the most ideal project through". Further, "the scientists... are an iceberg that has sunk many a Titanic". These are the "fortress-dwellers", the "invisible empire of bureaucracy" and to its members ~~and~~ it gives not fulfillment, but if one were to "look into its soul, one would find a boundless solitude whistling through it like the wind over the open steppe."

Whyte describes the (organizational) environment ^{of} ~~for~~ the American middle-class as a "dehumanized collective", a "bureaucratization of society", an "organization life" where "most of the decisions that affect one's destiny are made by others, and that only rarely will one have the opportunity to wrest control into

his own hands". It appears that "The group is a jealous master... and the better integrated with it a member becomes the less free he is to express himself in other ways".

Both environments would seem to reject individual creative contributions. Drozdov, the self-seeking bureaucratic ideologue in Dudintsev's novel calls them: "the primitive passions that jolt the economic routine". "You are a truly tragic figure", he tells Lopatkin... embodying... a whole epoch, which by now is irretrievably past and gone". "We can do without your invention", Drozdov tells him, "even if it is a genuine, a great discovery... without suffering any loss, because of our accurate calculations and the planning which ensures a steady advance". It appears that "collective research always leads to the quickest and best solution of any problem. The collective is superior to any individual genius".

Whyte points to an identical attitude in America: "Among Americans there is today a widespread conviction that science has evolved to a point where the lone man engaged in fundamental inquiry is anachronistic". He also tells us that "there is an overriding faith that we are on the brink of superseding discovery", and that there is a belief that "science has proved the group is superior to the individual".

Nevertheless, in spite of this belief, in Dudintsev's novel, the scientists and bureaucrats "are still riding along on the technical methods of the day before yesterday", and it is Lopatkin's

machine that is eventually the great technical advance.

Likewise in the United States, Whyte tells us that "In the great slough of mediocrity that is most corporation research, what two laboratories are conspicuous exceptions in the rate of discovery? They are General Electric's research department and Bell Labs: exactly the two laboratories most famous for their encouragement of individualism - the most tolerant of individual differences, the most patient with off-tangent ideas, the least given to the immediate, closely supervised team project".

But the collectivists and organization men also have their ideologies. Nadia tells us that the bureaucrat Drozdov "would tear himself to pieces to justify himself". He tells her: "I belong to the producers of material values. The main spiritual value of our time is the ability to work well, to create the greatest possible quantity of necessary things".

Lopatkin on the other hand has "a contemptuous hatred of handsome curtains, expensive inkstands and white carpets with blue-and-red designs".

However, it is not the classic question of selflessness versus individual gain, for material production and efficiency have become social values of a disreputable priority.

Moreover, the 'material' question may mask something else. One doubts for example that had Lopatkin been a musician or even a writer instead of an inventor, that he would have had an easier time

with the respective state organizations.

The essential dilemma that Dudintsev poses one feels is the individual's self-realization in the face of the group, while the fact that the group should espouse material values and the individual reject them is separate from the main question, but nevertheless of great importance. The issue is not "bread" so much as "monopoly" or "collective".

A more general statement of the ideological position is given by Drozdov's colleague Tepikin: "Your nature, dear comrade, is selfish. You are a lone wolf. Before I met you I would have said that in our country it was impossible to fight alone. I still say it is difficult. The collective helps you, defends you, takes care of you and gives you material support at the right time." (The note of benevolence is striking).

Whyte's organization man is also in search of an ideology, "a philosophy which tells him it is right to be that way". Whyte designates this ideology as the "social ethic" (a "sense of moral imperative") and explains as follows: "By social ethic I mean that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual. Its major propositions are three: a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in belongingness as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness".

Whyte suggests the word "collective" might be an appropriate designation: "The word collective most of them can't bring themselves to use - except to describe foreign countries or organizations

they don't work for - but they are keenly aware of how much more deeply beholden they are to organization than were their elders". Whyte continues "Between themselves and organization they see an ultimate harmony and... they are building an ideology that will vouchsafe this trust".

What position do both authors take in the face of this ideology and these developments?

Dudintsev rejects the particular forms this environment has taken and distinguishes between a monopoly which makes "a mess of everything it undertakes" and a "genuine collective". The aim of those in the monopoly "is to stay put in their easy chairs, and to go on getting richer". This indifference is "a survival from capitalist times".

He looks, on the other hand to the "genuine collective" which, one presumes is the embodiment of "a new world in which there is no injustice", of which the author speaks in his epilogue.

Dudintsev most closely identifies the Communist Party with these principles, e.g., "A genuine party man cannot tolerate an injustice. He can sense it however carefully it is hidden. And he cannot tolerate it!" Or again, Lopatkin's most powerful ally is Galitski (in charge of a factory for another collective), who explains "I did what any decent person would have done, and still more, any Communist".

Whyte is less sanguine about the general promise of organization. There are no ideal solutions and we must prepare to do

battle: "It is wretched, dispiriting advice to hold before him the dream that ideally there need be no conflict between him and society. There always is; there always must be". Whyte does not believe that "the ends of organization and morality coincide".

Perfect harmony between the individual and the group is neither possible nor desirable: "We must remember that if every member simply wants to do what the group wants to do, then the group is not going to do anything". Also "To preach... the skills of getting along isolated from why and to what end the getting along is for, does not produce maturity. It produces a sort of permanent prematurity... People don't co-operate just to co-operate; they co-operate for substantive reasons, to achieve certain goals...".

The author quite rightly avoids a tirade against the superficial symbols of conformity in U.S. life ("Nonconformity is an empty goal" and the author has never met a "Mass Man").

"The fault", Whyte thinks, "is not in the pressures of industrial society - an agrarian society has pressures as powerful - but in the stance we assume before these pressures". These are problems apparently that "stem from a bureaucratization of society that has affected every Western country".

The author's message is to resist the organization, to shun the "vain quest for a utopian equilibrium", the "spurious peace of mind", the benevolence of organization life where the individual is "imprisoned in brotherhood". He cautions against the moral illusionism of "using the language of individualism to describe

the collective", points up the problem of determining "when adjustment is selflessness, or surrender".

Dudintsev has faith in the general outcome: "It is impossible to destroy those who think differently - they are needed, just as a conscience is needed!" The process snowballs: "An idealist here, an idealist there, and in a third place, lo and behold, another so-called idealist!... once the lantern burns, helpers flock to it like moths!"

Whyte is likewise optimistic: "For the purposes of this book I write with the optimistic premise that individualism is as possible in our times as in others". This possibility turns on projects such as "outward obeisances... that disarm society", and "How to cheat on personality tests", as the price of being an individual.

III

The attempt to rationalize some prior and durable harmony as the essential relation between the individual and his society is certainly spurious. The rewards of the frictionless group and pressured camaraderie are flat and strangely unsatisfying. The extinction of a meaningful existence may result from a total adjustment to society. (Whyte mentions 1984).

But at the root our dilemma is an abiding new landscape which faces the individual in an industrial society, regardless of the particular form of its socio-economic organization.

This landscape consists of vast enclaves of power stemming from the organizations and institutions of his daily life. These include the vast network of the division of labor, centralized utilities and mass communications media which are uniquely characteristic of an industrial society. Power is not a new phenomenon in human history, but its aggregate presence in our society poses a unique situation.

Western man as we have known him lives in a condition of having to vindicate the dictates of his inner life, or conscience. This alone will assure his salvation or the meaningfulness of his existence. Ultimate freedom is the recognition of his condition. It is the mainspring of Western man which both Whyte and Dudintsev accept.

On the one hand it is the inordinate (inner) pressures and

compulsions of an industrial society to mold man's opinion and shape his destiny that limit his ultimate freedom. (As Whyte says: "His area of maneuver seems so small".)

In turn the existence of these power enclaves derives ultimately from the wishes and ideals of society, in which each of us shares. We must therefore share in the responsibility for their irrevocable effects and involuntary consequences. The dimensions of our existence are now outside of our reach.

It is both our subjection to and necessary participation in power and compulsion which puts an end to our ultimate freedom in a complex society. This moral recognition of the reality of society supersedes our freedom. The knowledge of an abiding unchangeable reality which limits us in the terrible presence we all share. The Christian ideal of refusing to participate in power and compulsion because it is evil is not possible in an industrial society.

What remains? Dudintsev suggests facing the loss of freedom in reality by a renewal of ever more absolute and impossible ideals of perfect reason and justice. He thus loses the promise of the possible as well, which is to set up a counter-framework of inviolable safeguards and institutionalized civic liberties in the name of such freedom as remains to the individual.

It is a disconcerting feature of his novel that the bureaucrats survive their crisis with impunity and are even promoted. This situation gives expression to our sense of the abiding permanence of the reality of society. It is the quest for absolute ideals that

masks a tenacious and uncritical commitment as well as a premature capitulation to the reality of society.

One justification that is offered is the permanent emergency which is supposedly faced by Russian society, in the name of which freedom may be suspended: "We are engaged in a race with the capitalist world. First one must build the house and then one can hang up the pictures".

The post-sputnik era marks the end of any presumed emergency.

Whyte on the other hand, suggests a moral underground to fight a few furtive battles for freedom in the twilight of The Organization's jurisdiction such as the personality test. "Outward obeisances" will beguile the enemy.

But the freedom we can have is precarious if it rests only on surreptitious deception. Again inviolable safeguards and civil liberties extended in practice into the heart of The Organization are a much more certain and moral course than the lone surreptitious deception.

America offers great beneficence and less massive emergencies as well as a wide hive of civic liberties. But the latter ~~of these~~ cannot be taken for granted. They are the fortifications of our situation. They may demand a price in terms of efficient production and rational administration.

But the existence of a systematic morality of everyday life may depend on an attitude of safeguarding the possible and rejecting irrelevant idealism.

Neither underground sniping, premature capitulation, nor a smoke-screen idealism will ensure the freedom we can have. A reform of society to its limits to ensure the right, the just and the demands of love is the only course our conscience can permit. Only then can we resign ourselves to the reality of society. While this course offers maturity, we cannot be sanguine about the prospects of ultimate freedom.

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