Book 11

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Library of Political Knowledge

G. Smirnov

The Individual in Socialist Society

Progress Publishers

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Г. Смирнов

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Dear Reader,

Have you ever given thought to the paradox that in our crowded and tense world fraught with the catastrophe of war, a world where gigantic social forces—social systems, states and classes—are acutely hostile to one another, and where human relations are poisoned by religious hate and racial prejudice—that in this world, all this notwithstanding, the theme of the rights, freedom and dignity of the individual sounds loud and clear? Individual or personality is what we hear over the radio and see on our TV screen, what screams at us from magazines and newspapers, and what is shown to us in endless variants in motion pictures. On one side, a real desire to preserve peace, to remove the threat of a nuclear catastrophe, to provide hundreds of millions of people with food, to find new sources of fuel and power, and, on the other side, the problem of personality! On one side, the fate of nations, continents, of all humanity, and, on the other side, the rights and the dignity—just think! — of every single person out of the 4,000 million living on our planet.

What is it? Are opposing doctrines and political forces in conflict with one another? Yes, of course, but concern for the lot of the masses and of individuals is often shown by opposing ideologies and political parties.

The interest in personality, they say, is an old, yet ever new phenomenon. True, of course. At least as regards those points in history when great changes took

place, when the mass of the people entered the historical arena and thus, inevitably, the role of some individuals was greatly enhanced, especially of those at the head of political movements that expressed the interests and hopes of the masses, and formulated programmes and slogans meeting their interests.

Still, never more than now had the question of personality excited such passions. Naturally, the threat of a nuclear war, of a world disaster, and the ever greater domination of monopoly capital, arouse sharp protest and the desire to protect the rights of the individual. But that is only part of the answer.

The main thing is that existing socialism has asserted a new approach to the problem of personality in marked contrast to the capitalist solution, securing a new place for the personality in society and forming a new personality. This goes counter to the mercenary interests of capitalism, and its economic, political and moral principles.

Indeed, if a new way of life has arisen under socialism, if society directs all its riches to develop men's aptitudes, and if the new man under socialism is really brought up to possess lofty ideals and morals, then Communists, the Marxists-Leninists, have the right theory. And this proves more convincingly than any document that the capitalist order has outlived itself and is up for revolutionary change.

In short, socialism and capitalism offer directly opposite approaches to resolving the problems of personality, and this is the main reason for the sharp ideological and theoretical struggle over personality problems, for the keen attention they tend to attract.

In this pamphlet, the author rivets attention to the place of personality in socialist society and the system of social relations, to the activity and way of life of the individual, and to his rights and freedoms, education and self-education.

1. WHAT IS PERSONALITY?

There are many definitions of the concept of personality. It changed over the ages and reflects the various positions of philosophical and religious systems. Before we touch upon these distinctions, let us try to answer a more elementary question: is every person a personality, or can we apply the word only to one who possesses some particular qualities? Without having answered this question it would be difficult to discuss this subject.

Some Soviet scholars recognise as personalities only those persons who possess distinctive characteristics. Another point of view is that every psychically normal adult is a personality.

Let us consider these viewpoints. A person is an individual but is bound to society and people with an infinite number of threads. He grows up in a family which belongs to a social group, and is attached to it by common economic interests, accepts its traditions, ideology and ethics. He belongs to a definite nation, and this nation's language and cultural values are likewise his. A person earns his living either by his own labour, or by exploiting the labour of others. When working, he performs a definite role in the system of social labour and accordingly associates with other workers. A person lives in a state and is obliged to observe its laws. He may be a member of a party, and therefore has a certain relationship with it. As a member of his family, he is either a parent, son,

daughter, brother, sister, grandson, etc. In sum, from birth and until death, a person is in close association with other people, a collective, society, and has many diverse relationships with them.

A person's living conditions, and his relation to different people, collectives and communities, create a permanent though mobile set of factors which determine his activity and conduct: the people with whom a person has daily contacts, the things which surround him and, finally, the culture which he absorbs. The environment, its richness or poverty, is the immediate source from which a person draws his knowledge, experience, thoughts, and sentiments, and therefore the motivations for his various actions.

Finally, it is the living conditions, work and contacts which form a person's more or less stable views, values and aims, his notions of how to behave—in other words, his world outlook, moral convictions, culture, and consciousness. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being.[1] The person responds actively and selectively to external conditions, to their influence. To put it more precisely, the influence of these conditions is assimilated by a person depending on the place he holds in the system of social relations and the character and measure of his own activity. "The real intellectual wealth of the individual," as Marx and Engels said, "depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections."[2]

Association and dissociation, therefore, are two inalienable aspects of human life. Because of his physical and temporal limitations a person can assimilate only some part of the knowledge, norms and achievements of the surrounding world. He learns selectively,

[1] See K. Marx, F. Engels, "The German Ideology", Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 5, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 36.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

and adapts what he has learned to the standpoints he has arrived at earlier or to the interests formed by his connection to a social group, or under the influence of some other group upon which he is oriented. In other words, the objective world, learned by a person in the ever unique process of cognition and experience, is transformed into his own, specific blend of knowledge, experience, views and habits, which characterise him as a personality, a particular individual.

Here the temptation arises to acknowledge as personalities only those who possess extraordinary characteristics. After all, our attention is, as a rule, attracted by striking and exceptional traits, a person's originality and uniqueness, talent and ability to carry himself, his kindness, fairness, independence and dignity. And though it is not always easy to get along with such a person, everyone will say—yes, he is a personality. Though the uniqueness and exclusiveness of a person are an indication of personality, the person is nevertheless formed, as we have already shown, under the influence of and by society and its social-economic peculiarities.

Every person is a product of specific social conditions, of the general inherent in the life of, first and foremost, that group to which a person belongs. Needs and interests, feelings and thoughts make up a world peculiar to every man, characterise him, on the one hand, as a particle of society and show what he has in common with many; on the other, this world characterises his particular image, and distinguishes him as something self-contained and exceptional.

Every person is a unity of the general, the special and the unique. The general is expressed through the individual, is personalised, and sets the person apart as a personality. An individual's traits serve as a measure of his relation to society.

The origin of the word "personality" speaks in

favour of this interpretation of personality. In the theatres of Ancient Greece the word "phersu" meant the mask worn by the actor performing on the stage. Later, it was applied to the actor and the role he played. What is important, however, is that the mask portrayed some type of character taken from life. By means of the mask, the theatre sought to portray significant, well-known traits common to many people. That is precisely why the tragedies of Ancient Greece reached to the hearts of the audience. We can therefore conclude that the concept personality arose as an answer to a need, developed over a length of time, to designate something typical and socially significant in the image and behaviour of people. Traits common to many are not the privilege of a chosen few, but a natural attribute, even though they may be expressed in peculiar, more or less distinct, ways.

Finally, if we considered that personality is a phenomenon relating to only some individuals, we would be faced with the impossible task of determining the criteria of personality. Some people will think a person possesses unique features, hence is a personality, while others will deny his uniqueness, and hence his claim to being a personality. In short, we would enter a realm of subjectivism and lawlessness.

If the concept personality appeared as a response to the necessity to designate the typical as manifested in an individual form, then the later history of scientific knowledge, and particularly of artistic creativity, has greatly extended the notions of human characters and types, and has affirmed the idea that personality is a distinctive expression of socially significant characteristics, a combination of socially significant traits, an individual form of social relationships, the social world of a person. As a person learns more of the world around him, his individual features become more pronounced, and his personality becomes more

meaningful. Conversely, the richer and more complicated the inner world of a person, the more emphatically does he express the essence of social relations, the stronger is his influence on those around him, and the more significant is his activity generally. The general and the distinctive are indissolubly linked aspects of the concept personality. Personality as a concept can be a measure of sociality, that is, of the general, only if it remains a peculiar phenomenon, since the purpose of measuring consists in registering the distinctions in the general.

A person is not born a personality, he becomes one. And he begins to become one in early childhood. His childhood, adolescence and youth usually make him what he becomes: shaping his aims and ideals, his knowledge and aptitudes, his attitude to the rules of society, and to other people.

Every person cherishes for all time his first, most exciting memories. The most cherished impressions of the author, for example, were those of late twilight, the purple of evening glow, and silence; and from time to time the croaking of frogs in the river, the chirping of insects in the night, the uneasy growling of dogs; supper in the yard, rye-bread and black cherries in a bowl; all those sitting here are kind to one another, and one feels it; but for some reason their talk is hushed and it makes one afraid, and one moves closer to mother. One's family, those dear to one, home—one feels this so clearly when one feels it the first time. Nothing special—still it is not just a picture from the past, but something etched in one's memory, the feeling of belonging to one's place of birth, one's country—all this until death.

Much can happen later: the first fairy-tale, the first caress, a slap one remembers, the first heartache, one's first friend, a home task. Then study, work, love, suffering. Many stories told by grown-ups about

grown-up life, a great many impressions. Children keeping close and listening to their elders are inquisitive. They remember much of what they hear and take it into their future. That is when personality is conceived. As soon as a person more or less consciously comes into contact with life, with something socially important–spiritual, and above all moral, and as soon as he accepts this socially important as his own, his character begins to acquire shape, his personality begins to develop, and so does his credo. He will often encounter different, sometimes conflicting standpoints: "Be good and it will be reciprocated", "money does not mean happiness", "if you have money, you are king, if you don't, you are nothing", "man is to man a brother", "man is to man a wolf", "godless you are nobody", "each for himself, God alone for all", "one for all, all for one", and so on. Out of this lot, a person must choose his own maxims. Or should one use all of them depending on circumstances? That, too, is a possibility. One's choice forms one's personality. Life runs on, and a person inevitably becomes a personality. The question remains–what kind of personality?

Personality is inevitably formed through contacts and social activity. And whether good or bad, genius or ordinary human being, he is always an individuality that has absorbed surrounding life, and hence a personality. What sort of personality–judge that as much as you care to.

It follows that personality is a social feature of every person, expressed by concrete, individual characteristics. A person's traits may be different–more or less brilliant, profound, or original, but their presence is unavoidable in every person because of his inclusion in the system of social relations. The individuality of a person's social being is reflected in every personality: "The essence of a 'particular personality' is not its

beard, its blood, its abstract physical character, but its *social quality*."[1] In short, personality is a social concept or, to be more precise, a socio-historical and complex, many-sided concept. Naturally, not one but many sciences study personality: philosophy, psychology, sociology, law, ethics, aesthetics, and so on.

[1] K. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 3, 1975, p. 21.

2. HOW MARXISM-LENINISM RELATES TO HUMANISM AND THE PERSONALITY

This question calls for a special examination. Not only because without doing so it is not possible to understand the main subject of this book, but also because we hear much too often that Marx and Lenin had underrated the problem of personality.

It is sometimes maintained that Marxists have no personality theory, ignore the problems of humanism and the personality on the philosophical plane; Marxists, it is alleged, recognise nothing except material needs. They have no use for the inner life of people, the meaning of passions, moods, the feelings shown in behaviour, or for freedom of intellectual activity, freedom of the individual.

It can be easily noted that such assertions are in glaring contradiction with elementary facts. The ideas of liberation and humanisation of the personality are present in all of Marx's and Engels's works. They are formulated most precisely in the Communists' first programme document, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Here, Marx and Engels produced a classical formula: "...In the place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[1]

[1] K. Marx and F. Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, 1976, p. 506.

It is clearly stated in *Capital* that "development of human energy" will be "an end in itself"[1] in communist society. However, the point is not in quoting isolated statements. Here they are but landmarks in the purposeful and consistent elaboration by Marx and Engels of a revolutionary theory on the development of society—historical materialism—and the related scientific conception of personality.

Lenin, like Marx and Engels, saw the aim of the revolution, the building of communism, in the all-sided development of the working man, and said so repeatedly. Preparing for the revolution, creating a party of revolutionaries, Lenin studied the question both in theory and practice, and determined the qualities that should characterise a revolutionary. Lenin saw in a party member a conscious revolutionary, accepting the party's programme and supporting it both financially and by personal involvement in one of the party organisations. From the very first steps taken by the Soviet government, Lenin, who headed both the defence of the country and its economic construction, systematically examined the question of the education of the new man. In his works he showed in great detail the content of communist morality, formulated the principles of political education and party propaganda, worked out the fundamentals of polytechnical education in schools, etc.

The notion that Marx and Engels were humanists only in their youth, and that they had moved away from the ideas of humanism on becoming proletarian revolutionaries, is widespread among bourgeois sociologists and philosophers.

The question of humanism is closely connected with the problem of personality. Marx and Engels

[1] K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 820.

set out on their revolutionary road as humanists and democrats. Their true affection for people, and concern for the working man prompted them to study the process of social development, and to search for effective, realistic ways of solving the age-old problem of liberating the individual. During their entire life ideas of humanism inspired their creative search, and spurred their activity. Certainly, they adopted the ideas of liberty and the all-sided development of the personality, defence of its dignity, and of humane social relations from the humanistic trends of the past. But, being a thinker of genius, a fearless researcher and revolutionary, Marx could not confine himself to abstract moralising on good and evil, and turned to a scientific analysis of the socio-historical process.

Marxism-Leninism never negated the best that mankind had created in the past—neither in science and culture, nor in social relations. On the contrary, Lenin wrote, Marx's doctrine "emerged as the direct and immediate *continuation* of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism".[1]

Communist ideology fully accepts such lofty evidence of humanism as constructive labour, the achievements of science and technology, such noble manifestations of humanity as love, honour, and dignity. Communism fully accepts the masterpieces of literature and art. Moreover, it can be said that the communist ideology would hardly have arisen if mankind had not created beauty, for which one must fight against the destructive forces of the moribund system, and if society had not been strong enough to fight

[1] V. I. Lenin, "Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 23.