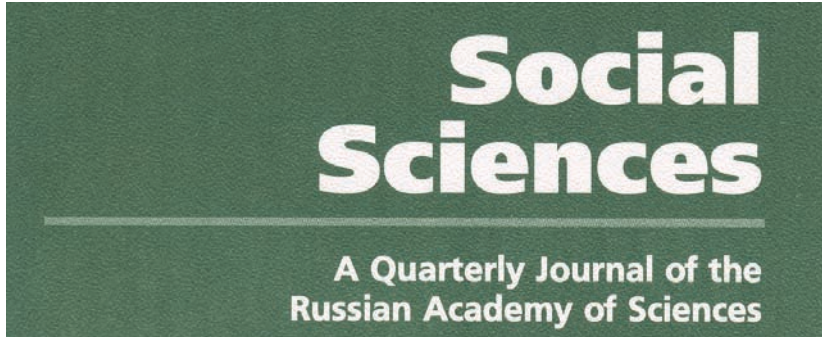


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THE INDIVIDUAL IN POST-SOVIET SOCIUM

Author: German Diligensky, D. Sc. (History), Professor, Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodniye otnoshenia* (MEMO). In Russian the article was published in the journal *Polis*, No 3, 1999.

Do we observe in common Russians any qualitative changes in mass consciousness, in the system of social concepts and tenets, motives and values which have been born in the post-Soviet period of Russian history? Or do their reactions to new reality reflect primarily features of Soviet mentality, which had been shaped by the experience of several generations? This article suggests one of the several possible approaches to this subject.

Socialist Collectivism and Adaptive Individualism

It is customary to define the society of “real socialism” with its institutional, cultural; and socio-psychological specifics as “collectivist”. Many have been writing about the collectivist character of the Soviet socium—both critics and apologists of socialism. In recent years, however, a tendency has been gaining momentum to interpret Russian collectivism not as a heritage of socialism but as an inherent and stable feature of the national character and culture and to describe it, correspondingly, not by “foreign” (Marxist) terms but by words borrowed from the archaic Russian vocabulary such as *obshchina* (commune), *sobornost* (conciliarism...), etc. Not only national-patriotic and communist ideologists, but also the authors of some academic treatises see the *obshchina* principle as the fundamental constant of Russian mentality, which makes it incompatible with the individualist values and way of life of Western “market” society.¹ In modern political and cultural discourse, juxtaposition of “individualist” (Western) and “collectivist” (socialist or, generally, “Eastern”) societies has acquired the status of a quasi-axiomatic truth.

At the same time, in modern sociological literature this hackneyed juxtaposition of collectivism and individualism as basic characteristics of social and cultural systems

has been under much fire. In this light, worthy of attention is the thesis proposed by the prominent American sociologist Francis Fukuyama in his latest book *The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. “American democracy and the American economy were successful not because of individualism or communitarianism alone but because of the interaction of these two opposing tendencies”² It may prove very fruitful to analyze historical types of culture in order to elicit those forms in which individual autonomy of people is combined and interacts with their integration into the socium (social environment).

If we adopt such an approach in the investigation of Soviet socium, socialist collectivism and its connection with the traditional *obshchina* principle, as well as its determining role in the mentality and social behavior of Soviet man will prove to be not at all so obvious and incontestable as it is often presented. To be sure, in Soviet society collectivism was the basis of official ideology and a means of legitimizing and implementing totalitarian power. But its cultural and socio-psychological significance changed in different periods of Soviet history. During the “construction of socialism”, collectivist values, which demanded subordination of the interests of the individual to the interests of a class, a collective, society and the bright communist future, were a real phenomenon of mass psychology. They were nurtured by faith in the communist utopia, the enthusiasm of building a new life, the very atmosphere of “mobilized society”. But in the post-war decades, particularly during the stagnation years, the situation underwent a cardinal change.

Industrialization, urbanization, a growing social mobility, individualization of consumption, elevation of the educational level of the population have been destroying in Russia (as elsewhere in the world) the stable bonds between individuals within the traditional (local or professional) social groups and environments, which constituted the social and psychological foundation of collectivist or *obshchina*'s (communitarian) culture and behavior. With the transition of “real socialism” into the stagnation stage and the increased discrediting of the communist utopia, the collectivist ideology lost its roots among the masses.

Formally, socialist collectivism still remained the official ideologem, the institutional norm of relations among people, imposed by the power which still clung to its ideocratic claims. But, like the other official values, it continued to exist more for show: *homo sovieticus* demonstrated his collectivist orientation (largely in situations when he was under institutional control), rather than accepted it as a personal value. Collectivism has lost the mobilizing and motivating power that it possessed in the “heroic time” of socialist construction. But this does not mean that it has ceased to play a role of some importance in mass and individual psychology.

In the first place, in the situation of stagnating Soviet society, collectivism continued to regulate the relations among people within the framework of formal organizations (an industrial enterprise, a shop, a primary Party cell, a collective farm or a state institution) ensuring social control and mutual censorship, which were in keeping with the bureaucratic principles of organization of economic and social life. Let me remind you that in this kind of social organization the status of every individual is guaranteed by show of submission to bureaucratic power and the formal or informal rules it had imposed. Since Soviet man psychologically interiorized this submission as a condition of his safety, he often felt threatened when somebody in his environment began

to behave or think “not like the others”. A saying widespread in Soviet times, “initiative is punishable” reflected this equality in submission, which was an essential aspect of socialist collectivism.

In the second place, collectivist values, as all conventional values of socialism, satisfied the natural human need in psychological integration into a socium; after all many Soviet people did not have any other symbolic means capable of expressing their societal identity. Possibly, such a situation is, in principle, natural for societies based on ideological monopoly.

In the third place, collectivist values constituted an integral part of that system of orientation which is most typical of Soviet mentality and which can be defined as state-paternalist syndrome. Since socialist collective represented the primary link of the pyramid of power, integration in this link appeared to be a necessary condition of social defense, which was granted by the all-powerful Father-State.

Soviet collectivism had very little in common with workers’ (“proletarian”) collectivism in capitalist countries, whose name it appropriated. Its norms precluded both true solidarity and independent defense of collective interests: a socialist collective was in no way an autonomous social subject, or actor, for in Soviet society independent public activities, free from control of the power apparatus, was practically impossible. As noted by Russian sociologists, it was not a matter of “internally differentiated community united by values, aims, and bonds of organic solidarity. A ‘collective’ in our conditions was a horizontal structure of citizens equally dependent on state power and united by these power relationships.”³

The impossibility of defending, changing or improving his position through social action, strengthened the Soviet man’s dependence on bureaucratic hierarchy, on the one hand, and, on the other, encouraged the resort, in practical life, to the individualist strategy, or, if you like, to thoroughly individual adaptation to the system. Therefore, the study of the problem of interaction between collectivism and individualism in the social reference points of homo sovieticus is extremely important for understanding his mentality and the corresponding cultural models of behavior.

There are reasons to assert that Soviet individualism is, in a sense, more “total”, than the kind fostered by “individualist” societies of the West, where it is limited and balanced by the culture of associations and communitarianism, by the values and the practice of social solidarity. Soviet collectivism may control or forbid certain manifestations of individualism, but it is not in a position to resist its domination in personal motivation and behavior, since it does not impart to the individual any social aims or values which are capable of motivating his activities. At the same time, Soviet individualism is careful and timid in nature, excluding such individual initiative as would lead to changes in social reality. It is fully oriented on a quest for an optimal niche in the system of statuses supported by the bureaucratic state or some chinks (“pores”) in this system (for example by making use of the shadow economy).

I would describe this individualist strategy as adaptive individualism. A Soviet individualist pursues his own aims, adapting himself to the rules of the game imposed by the system or ingeniously by-passing them. But, whatever the situation, he will always make an ostentatious show of his devotion to these rules - thereby masking his personal aims and positions.

We have found this type of mentality in the course of an empirical investigation: in-depth interviews and psychological testing carried out in late 1997 among groups of residents of Moscow and Saratov. One of our respondents (a forty-year old Moscow engineer) exhibited, in answering general questions of socio-political problems, consistent conformism, which is not at all typical for present-day Russians. Being highly dissatisfied with his standard of living, he gave quite a high evaluation (80 points out of 100) of the democratism of modern social order in Russia and even (70 points) of the state's fulfillment of its obligations towards the citizens. One could feel that this respondent, through force of habit instilled in him during the Soviet regime, found it expedient, in the course of public intercourse (for he regarded his talk with the interviewer as such) to say "what was right", which was "expected of him" and presented such an image of society which, in his opinion, should please power structures. It is no contradiction to this conclusion that, in answering other "general" questions, he stood up not for today's, but "collectivist" Soviet values, such as priority of common interests over personal ones, of "selfless" over material ones. But as soon as the question was formulated differently and he was asked to "range" personal values ("Which are more important for you?") it was found out that he gave priority to the respect for his own rights, identifying them in his mind with his own material interests, and placed the "respect for the rights (interests) of other citizens" much lower. In other words, the normative "collectivist" convictions of this respondent divorced from his individualist personal motivation.⁴

This Soviet double-thinking is not always equivalent to hypocrisy or conscious disguise. It appears likely that our engineer has embraced the collectivist norms as his own sincere convictions. They conceal his individualism not only from others, but also from himself. Essentially, it is forced individualism of a socially weak man. In this particular case, he is so weak that does not even dare to criticize the social and political procedures which he obviously disapproves of. Homo sovieticus is really a "collectivist" in that he needs the support and help of the socium, but he is an individualist in his attitude to this socium. For the given engineer the priority of "common interests" that he declares is, in fact, but a guarantee of protection of his personal interests. This position can be qualified as infantile egocentrism: a child expects help from the grown-ups, but is unable to share their cares.

Deinstitutionalization and Individualism

The collapse of the former economic and political system in Russia has placed the bulk of the country's population into a radically new situation, which is characterized by extreme instability and the absence of material and social guarantees. The first to be destroyed or weakened were the paternal mechanisms of social protection. Guaranteed employment, comparative stability of prices and living standards disappeared. Savings made in Soviet times evaporated, many social services which used to be free or cheap (for example, organized holidays for children and grown-ups) were now inaccessible, inequality became rampant in the spheres of health protection, education and housing distribution. Formerly unheard of phenomena came into being, such as non-working factories or months-long delays in the payment of the wages.

But the most acutely felt social and psychological consequences proceeded from the absence of new rules of economic and social life (or ignorance of these rules on the part of many who would like to obey them). Liberal Russian reformers displayed neither desire nor ability to explain to the population their policy, the new principles and aims that were now called upon to determine social behavior. The only normative concept that could be elicited from the reformers' discourse was the principle of competition between individuals, and the most approved quality in a citizen - private initiative.

A major factor that determined the social and psychological evolution of the post-Soviet society in Russia was cognitive vacuum, an extreme deficit of social information. I am not referring to information "about anything at all", but to essential information that would enable people to understand what is happening in the country, to orient themselves in the processes of economic and social life that concern every Russian. This ignorance made impossible the formation of new culture that would be capable of replacing the crumbling paternalist "collectivism": Russian society found itself deprived of values and norms that could form the foundation of such new culture.

In a matter of several years, yesterday's Soviet man found himself displaced from a rigidly organized hierarchical society to a kingdom of disorder - a chaotic deinstitutionalized socium lacking any clear and obligatory "rules of the game". In essence, this man was offered the single rule: the principle of individual survival and success. This principle, which was openly proclaimed by many proponents of liberal reforms, was propagandized by the media and advertising. After the collapse of state paternalism, when "collectivist" values and practice ceased to serve individuals as psychological and moral props, individualism irrevocably became an almost inevitable life strategy.

Post-Soviet society provided conditions for the development of several variants of this strategy. On the one hand, it afforded people opportunities, unheard of in Soviet times, for achieving individual success, enrichment and social advancement, and sometimes for self-realization of the personality. On the other hand, it doomed the broad masses of the population to economic and social degradation, the premises of which were rooted in the structures of Soviet economy.

In this situation, deep differences in individual destinies began to depend on a variety of factors, including physiological, psychological and intellectual traits of individuals, their age, state of health, level of education and culture, family position, professional training, place of residence and, finally, their "social capital" - that is, connections they had made under socialism, the "network" of relationships in which they were included. Possession of such connections facilitated the process of adaptation to the new conditions for representatives of the former administrative bosses and those who in the Soviet times were active in the shadow economy.

Reactions of Russians to the post-Soviet situation were schematically divided into three principal types:

The distinctive feature of the first type is passivity and attentism. People who incline to this type of reaction are often distinguished by psychological preparedness for patience, which is quite typical for Russian traditional mentality.⁵ Characteristic of such people is the condition of foreboding, sometimes hopelessness, or a vague hope for some "objective" improvement in the future, as well as clearly expressed nostalgia for the past, the deeply seated state-paternalistic syndrome and the feeling of social helplessness. The

inertia of “collectivist” values, which is peculiar to this category of people, affects their social concepts: forced by the circumstances to strive for individual survival, they perceive this situation as depressing loneliness.

According to the data of sociological polls conducted by the All-Russia Central Institute of Public Opinion (ARCIPO), more than 80 percent of all Russians describe their present condition by such formulas as “life is hard, but bearable” or “it is no longer possible to bear our miserable condition” (though in practice they do bear it). It can safely be assumed that those who orient themselves on patience and passive adaptation account for the larger share of the Russian population. This share includes, primarily, older age categories, mothers with little children, those who subsist primarily on the wage paid (or not paid) by the state, and rank-and-file workers in “critical” industries and enterprises.

The second type of reaction to the post-Soviet situation may be defined as active adaptation. The striking feature here is active search for opportunities for survival or even success in the new social and economic conditions. It may take the form of changing the profession, transferring to the private sector of the economy with comparatively higher earnings, or simply acquiring a supplementary job (often on the basis of non-formal “shadow” employment.) The most vivid example of active adaptation is presented by the chelnoks (people who purchase cheap consumer goods abroad, bring them to Russia and sell at a profit). Concrete forms of active adaptation are highly varied.

Out of our small test group of 20, one person, a diplomaed engineer in his 29 years had tried several trades and at the time of the interview was employed as a house painter in a small furniture-making firm. Another, his coeval, a car mechanic by trade who was officially employed by a municipal establishment, received the larger share of his earnings from work for private customers. The third, a graduate of the Librarians’ Institute (28 years) first had a job in a realtors’ firm, then became the manager of a firm engaged in wholesale trade of fast-frosted foodstuffs and also learned another two professions (designer and psychoanalyst) to obtain a chance of finding a better paid job. The latter two respondents were optimistically-minded and quite pleased with their life.

The third type of reaction may be defined as orientation on maximum individual economic and social success. This category includes the so-called “New Russians”, legitimate and criminal entrepreneurs, career men in the management of big firms, the bureaucratic apparatus, in the press or public politics. This type of orientation is typical of young people - from college students training for lucrative professions to those engaged in criminal activities.

Enhancement of individualism is the obvious result of the development of all three types of reactions. It applies in a greater degree to the second and third types, but “the patient and passive” kind are gradually taught by objective circumstances to rely largely on their own resources. This does not mean that psychological adaptation to the need for individual survival has already been effected. The inertia of the state-paternalist syndrome is still very strong.

According to the data of the ARCIPO, in 1997, 72 percent of Russians believed that the majority of Russia’s population would not be able to survive without constant assistance from the state.⁶ The same principle is reflected in economic orientations: the majority of our countrymen support nationalization of big industries and state ownership of land.⁷ However, censure of individualist values and attachment to “collectivist”, or etatist, principles, which reflect the protest against the instability of personal situations,

cannot prevent individualist practices together with appropriate behavioral habits from striking root.

Combination in one and the same person of opposite orientations is a characteristic feature of post-Soviet individualism. Like its predecessor, adaptive individualism, it is most often individualism of a weak person. This is why it does not correlate with a high level of aspirations, with motivation for achievement. As noted by the sociologist B. Dubin, even among young Russians, who, on the whole, are more individualistically-minded than people of middle and old age, “the values of success have primary importance only for a quarter of the respondents”.⁸

According to the poll conducted by the Public Opinion Fund (POF) in 1997, more than a third of the respondents in the 18-33 age group prefer the principle of “avoiding the worst” to the energetic “striving for the best”.⁹ Nonetheless, it would be wrong to interpret this as a sign of simple reproduction of Soviet adaptive individualism. Even active people (the second type) exhibit more courage, initiative and adventurism than was usual in homo sovieticus. As for those oriented on success (the third type), they are often absolutely free of all complexes of social dependence and weakness, from “collectivist” morals and the fear of powers that be.

To be sure, few real individuals represent the types “in a pure form”. Russians’ mentality and behavior are more complex and changeable and form a continuum, at one extreme point of which we find the timid traditional collectivism, and at the other - cynically frank aggressive individualism of New Russians. But in this continuum we also discover a “gap”, a “rupture of continuity” which corresponds to the borderline between generations.

In the “children of the perestroika”, people under the age of 30, we really discover new individualism, which has little in common with what we could observe in homo sovieticus. This by no means signifies that all people of this age are bearers of this individualism, or that it is completely absent in the older generations. This new individualism can be detected in the deeper-lying levels of personal psychology.

As far as our empirical investigation permits to judge, there exists a type of young Russian characterized by a high level of autonomy as regards the socium and social institutions. As distinct from the Soviet individualist, he does not appeal to society and its norms; being obliged to reckon with them. He opposes to them his own rules; he has no profoundly emotional social connections outside his family and circle of friends. Everything social, institutionalized, the generalized “neighbor” are for him parts of the external environment, indifferent or sometimes inimical to him. Below I quote several of our respondents.

“My final aim is independence... My personal interests are above everything else... I observe the accepted proprieties so as not to be conspicuous” (house painter, 29 years).

“We are used to depending on the Government, expecting it to hand us everything on a platter. I think it is time to stop counting on the government and to start acting” (sales-girl, 24 years).

(The most important right of man) “is freedom... the rest does not matter... The principal thing is to know myself, the purpose of my existence... Practically everybody strives only for the sake of himself... There are no duties (of citizens) (car mechanic, 28 years).

“I am not a very social person: I believe mainly in myself, I believe in individuality, and this I feel to be the norm... (The main values) are the feeling of freedom, assurance, belief in myself... One must rely only on his own abilities... It is rather silly to count on the state (woman-manager 28 years).

The young men and women whom I have quoted have entered the life of grown-ups, have undergone the process of socialization (at least partially) in the conditions of a disintegrating institutional system. Let me remind you that, according to theoretical sociology, institutions “are ‘crystallized’, more or less stable modes of acting, feeling and thinking... ensembles of rules or normative systems.”¹⁰ If society is not capable of offering all this to individuals, the latter themselves develop rules necessary for life in the socium.. This is exactly what is happening to young Russians, who, in adapting to the post-socialist world, refuse to assimilate the norms of the older generations. The new conditions dictate them the principle of individual survival, which has become the mainstay of their normative system. So we are authorized to describe their individualism as “normative”.

Freedom and Free Will

Adaptive Soviet individualism was not normative in character, rather, it was a form of spontaneous behavior, born of atomization of society and prohibition of free collective activities. But for individualists of the new type, who have appeared in post-socialist Russia, independence and personal autonomy is precisely the norm. Some of them perceive this norm as the need to rely solely on themselves, to get on as best they can and to shoulder the entire responsibility for themselves and their families. Others, with stronger individualist leanings, valorize it and transform into conviction. But even they desist from calling individualism by name, for in the post-Soviet socium this word has preserved the traditional negative meaning and is regarded as a synonym to egoism. The highest value for post-Soviet individualists - conscious and verbalized -is freedom. According to the data of A.B. Zubov, a third of Russians among whom a poll was conducted in 1997, agree to the following individualist interpretation of “freedom”: “responsibility for one’s actions solely to oneself”.¹¹

Here we must elucidate the content of the concept of freedom in modern Russian mentality, especially since Russian public opinion, while disapproving of the post-socialist economic, social and political reality, is inclined to admit the actual enhancement of freedom. Thus, between 1995 and 1997, the share of respondents who feel more or less free in Russian society grew from 29 to 36 percent.¹²

The fact that a man who is aware of himself as a free person has been born on the ruins of totalitarian socialism is, possibly, one of the greatest cultural and psychological changes wrought since the beginning of the perestroika.

At the same time, one cannot help noting that this perceived freedom has little in common with liberalism of Western society. Rather, it smacks of the traditional Russian volya (one’s own free will). In Western culture, freedom is not only a value, but also an institutionalized phenomenon, the principle of organization of the social order, and, as such, presupposes certain obligations on the part of the individual towards the socium, towards other people. Volya, the Russian variant of “freedom” (the Russians used this particular word, rather than svoboda to express the concept of “freedom” up till the 19th

century) is devoid of institutionalized social content; it only refers to a particular person and does not constitute a normative social attitude.

For centuries, institutionalized freedom was understood in Russia as something unthinkable, and “liberation” was interpreted as an individual’s flight from the existing order and, in its extreme manifestations, as denial of all order. To quote the philosopher G. Fedotov, “volya is, first and foremost, the possibility to live, at least for a time, according to one’s own will, disregarding all social restrictions, and not only literal chains. Volya is constrained by even equals, it is constrained by the entire world... volya is always for oneself. The ideal of Moscow-type volya is the highwayman.”¹³

It is easy to understand that the deinstitutionalization of the Russian socium has awakened this archetype of the national mentality. Some of our respondents openly contraposed the freedom they enjoyed to its Western model. “Take whoever you like,” said a young worker from Moscow, “for example, the Germans: they are conscientious. They work diligently - but this is not for us./ Our nature is against it. Again, take America - is it democratic? You can’t do this, you can’t do that.” One cannot but agree with B. Kapustin and I. Klyamkin who defined post-soviet individualism as “non-liberal”.¹⁴

Another possible definition of both post-Soviet and soviet individualism is asocial. In both cases the combination of individualist and social (“collectivist”) tendencies in a personality is such as to let the latter manifest themselves only within narrow mutual social and psychological relations between people. That is, in relations that presuppose help and trust and form the “social capital” of the individual. In Russia, this “capital” consists only of the family, relations and friends. In October, 1997, in replying to the question: “Who are the people with whom you have common interests and among whom you have close friends?” 64 percent of the respondents named friends and good acquaintances, and only 34 percent included neighbors, 33 percent - colleagues, 18 percent - people of the same profession and 16 percent - residents of the same town or village.¹⁵ It is highly indicative that a similar phenomenon is observed in other post-socialist societies, whereas in Western societies psychological bonds between members, say, of local communities are much closer.¹⁶

The chaotic condition of the institutes of power in post-Soviet Russia is interconnected with the ascent of asocial individualism. We have already discussed one aspect of this interconnection, to wit, the influence of the disintegration of state paternalism on individualization. Another aspect is asocial behavior of political and economic “elites”.

A great proportion (perhaps even the majority) of political leaders, deputies to elective bodies, functionaries, regional administrators, managers of enterprises and big entrepreneurs are psychologically unable to represent and defend the social interests either of the society as a whole or of specific strata of the population - even in that small measure that is necessary for the normal functioning of the respective institutes. As often as not, they are even incapable of setting up associations of a broader kind than non-formal “teams” (or mafias) based on personal ties. One sometimes gets the impression that their only motive is unmitigated thirst for money and power, which they desire to obtain now, immediately, often acting irrationally and contrary to their own long-term interests. Such mentality of the “elites” sharpens the economic, social and political crisis, provides the soil for corruption, and is the major cause of illusory and unsubstantial character of most Russian parties.

Yet another aspect of the above-mentioned interconnection concerns social and political behavior of the population. Asocial individualism deprives people of the ability to unite for the solution of common problems. According to the data of the ARCIPO, only 13-16 percent of the respondents are prepared, in the case of local authorities acting against their interests, to organize “a group of interested persons to solve this problem in one way or another”, while the majority rejects all collective action.¹⁷

Of course, under the socialist order, when even collective complaints were forbidden, people lost the knack for independent collective action, and they have not yet got it back in the course of the last decade. This, undoubtedly, hinders the development of social movements and civic society, thereby enhancing authoritarian tendencies and opening the door to arbitrary actions on the part of the authorities, especially on regional and local levels. But besides these objective factors social weakness of the post-Soviet man is also conditioned by asocial individualism. Even if a person is able to mobilize his individual potential and cherishes his freedom, he still remains helpless in the face of power, big capital and criminal groups. Isolated and unable to find support among his like, he often yields, through inertia, to the temptation of seeking this help from the patron-state, even if he knows that such state no longer exists. Amazingly, our young respondents, after expressing their conviction of the priority of individual freedom, practically in the same breath supported replacement of “democratic chaos” with authoritarian order.

What we find here is antinomy, characteristic of post-Soviet mentality, which seeks to preserve both freedom and forms of safety and social protection that are incompatible with it. Another expression of the same antinomy, which was revealed in the study of V. Lapkin and V. Pantin, is that the ideal as envisaged by a great proportion of Russians is “the absurd combination of economic coercion and political freedom”¹⁸. Appellation to the state is stimulated by the inability of people to unite for self-defense as social actors. In this way, the socio-psychological atomization of society prepares the soil for authoritarian rule.

As the numerous public opinion polls demonstrate, restoration of order in society is the priority demand of Russians. Its prominence is a natural reaction to the crisis of the institutes of power and law, to the corruption rife in the bureaucratic apparatus and the law enforcement bodies, to all manifestations of deinstitutionalization. But this demand is addressed exclusively to the supreme authority; few envisage any action from themselves or members of their circle.

Here we are confronted with yet another archetypal (but preserved to this day) antinomy of Russian mentality. Its bearer would like to live in conditions of law and order, but he does not think this is his own concern: of course, order is a necessary thing, but it is granted from above, as it were, it is external in regard to the individual, not interiorized by him as a personal norm. It is submitted to through coercion rather than by one’s free will (as an “internal” moral imperative), and every attempt is made to circumvent it. According to the poll conducted by ACIPO in 1995, 40 percent of the Russian population considered it permissible to circumvent the law, without outright breaking it”.¹⁹ Highly indicative in this respect is the reasoning of one particular respondent, a 50-year old highly qualified worker, who began by quoting his father: “The law is like a stone pillar - you cannot push it away, but you can go round it,” and then went on to say: “I have to...observe the law. I must demand from the state... that it

should guarantee me all that the law prescribes,” and ended by speaking against strengthening the role of the law: “If you strengthen it, the next in the line is dictatorship- if you stick to the law from ‘a’ to ‘z’.” Identification of the power of law with dictatorship is in the spirit of that implicit vision of the world which distinguishes the traditional Russian mentality. In the words of the philosopher B.N.Vysheslavtsev, “elemental freedom is perceived by every Russian as the essence of the Russian soul, the Russian character, even Russian nature, something which foreigners cannot understand and which cannot be explained to them.”²⁰ For the Russian mentality, the ideal of man’s life in society is spontaneity, “elemental freedom”, rather than observance of laws.²¹

Today’s post-Soviet disorder may seem to be the embodiment of this ideal. People are tired of lawlessness and lack of order, but few are attracted by life according to the laws either. This double attitude enhances public apathy, which, as the historical experience shows, brings grist to the mill of energetic “leaders” who seek to restore the traditional police authoritarianism.

At the same time it would be an over-simplification to characterize the condition of public consciousness in modern Russia exclusively on the basis of the phenomena described above. There are also other tendencies in post-Soviet Russian society, which it is necessary to detect and study. In this connection, I would like to mention yet another form of individualism that is observed in young Russians (before 30), especially among managers and employees in enterprises of the private sector, the form which was discovered in our and other researchers’ investigations.²²

Its bearers are paid rather high salaries and evince a clearly expressed achievement motivation, that is, they want to earn more and make a successful career. Their system of values is typically individualist: they believe that the state should leave its citizens alone, permit them to do everything within the limits of the law, that it should not either forbid or command. Their attitude towards “the generalized other person” is distanced: from their point of view, people should not interfere with each other. At the same time, as distinct from bearers of asocial individualism, they are not indifferent to problems of other people. On the contrary, these well-to-do young people have strong convictions about problems of social justice and solidarity. (The investigations quoted from here were conducted before the crisis of August 1998.) They believe that the state must help the old and the weak, and that the well-to-do citizens like themselves should pay for medical service and education of their children, while for poorer people these services must be free and guaranteed by society. While espousing the “equal chance” principle, they are prepared to part with a share of their profits to support their less fortunate fellow-citizens.

This system of attitudes includes recognition of the individual’s social responsibility, differing thereby from asocial or “non-liberal” individualism. It can be defined as normative individualism, leaning towards social liberalism. It was the bearers of these or similar views that Karl. Popper probably had in mind when he wrote: “an individualist can at the same time be an altruist; he can be ready to make sacrifices in order to help other individuals”.²³

In our investigations this type of individualist mentality was observed in people whose well-being and career depended on a responsible attitude to work, on knowledge and ability recognized and rewarded by a legitimate formal organization, and also on his

ability to get along with his colleagues, partners and clients, in short, on behavior that conforms to the norms of this organization and profession.

Another important tendency is demonstrated by groups and associations, the activity and values of which represent an alternative to asocial individualism. I have in mind, particularly, ecological groups and consumers' societies, as well as the movement in defense of the rights of man, which has branches in dozens of Russian cities and towns. Organizations of this kind testify to the appearance of rudiments of civic culture and activities, which were practically absent in this country in the 70 years of its Soviet history.

To be sure, these tendencies are only manifest in groups that are, statistically, insignificant social minorities. But historical experience demonstrates that such minorities, especially active minorities, often pave the way for major cultural, social and political changes.

NOTES

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