

CHAPTER 1

ON PROMOTING INDIVIDUALISM

I WAS talking to a group of deplorers. There is no dearth of them these days, what with the national passion for pushing power on the government. This group, however, was most concerned with the spread of collectivistic bilge in our schools and colleges. Of a certainty, what we are getting in the way of legislation and propaganda is the result of what has been learned and is being taught. It follows that any change in the direction of both legislation and public thought must begin with education. Something had to be done about it.

One man suggested the establishment of a College of Individualism, as a sort of intellectual powerhouse to feed ideas to other disseminators. Innocently, I asked the question: what is individualism? I was aiming at a curriculum.

There was a good deal of floundering, as I had anticipated. In politics—we were sure of that—individualism is a negative point of view: cut government to the bone. But, what is the allowable minimum? The downright anarchist was for abolishing all government, on the premise that people would improve morally by its absence; the majority allowed that a traffic cop is a social need.

In economics, all of us accepted the general line of thought laid down by Adam Smith, though one man declared Smith's ideas on free trade impractical under present world conditions, and that brought on a heated argument. A theologian in the group insisted that individualism is primarily a spiritual concept, and if that were set straight the rest of the curriculum would take care of itself.

The curriculum, one bold voice suggested, is of minor importance; the faculty is the thing. Whatever subject an individualist handles, he maintained, he cannot help but bring his values to bear upon it; just as a collectivist, teaching biology, cannot refrain from comparing the innards of a frog with the organization of the State. The thing to do, then, is to pack the faculty with dyed-in-the-wool individualists and let each formulate his own course. The students would get a full dose of individualism whatever they studied.

This idea posed a new question: what is an individualist? Is he born or made? Socialism laughs at the theory of innate characteristics and insists that we come into this world without temperamental shape; men can be turned by environment, including education, this way or that. Yet, the constant recurrence of the rebel is an historical refutation of this Socialistic thesis, and every mother of more than one child will bear witness against it. Some of us conform easily, others find it necessary to question every existing convention. Perhaps psychology could furnish us with an explanation of the individualist; or, of the socialist.

If individualism is not an acquired characteristic, but is grounded in one's personality, what can education do about it? Nothing more than to give articulation to what the student already feels. For instance, if he instinctively finds regulation repugnant, he will be helped no end by an understanding of the doctrine of natural rights; conversely, if he is a regimenter at heart, he will rationalize that doctrine into a myth. The purpose of teaching individualism, then, is not to make individualists but to find them. Rather, to help them find themselves. If a student takes readily to such values as the primacy of the individual, the free market place, or the immorality of taxation, he is an individualist; if he swallows hard, he must be counted a recruit for the other side.

At this point, someone brought up a current phenomenon: the increasing number of deserters from the Communist camp. If these recanters came to Communism by natural selection, how could they throw it off? Or, did they? Is an intellectual conversion capable of purging an innate inclination?

The books written by these "exes" give a clue to the answer. One does not get from their confessions of sin, or exposés of Soviet skulduggery, the idea that the authors are done with collectivism. Their sneering references to capitalism indicate that they are of the same opinion still. Communism, they will admit, is Socialism gone hog-wild, but they do not seem capable of recognizing this as an inevitable consequence. Their hatred of Communism does not make them individualists.

This is not to question the sincerity of those who have hit the sawdust trail. Far from it. The individualist, who accepts as basic the right of every man to make a fool of himself—provided he does not infringe the equal rights of others—is quick to accept the repentance at face value. But, repent-

ance is not conversion; there is reason to believe that conversion is impossible.

The "right-wing" socialist is another case in point. The hatred he harbors for Communism is intense, but only because he looks upon it as treason. He condemns Stalin and his crowd because they have, forsooth, betrayed the Marxist ideal. In the hands of good and true Socialists—right-wingers, of course—the Russian "experiment" of 1918 would by now have come up with a shining demonstration of the Socialist promise. No amount of logic can convince him that the only possible result of Marxism in practice is Russia, as is.

Coming to the garden variety of collectivist—the do-gooder, who differs from the socialist only in that he substitutes sentimental clichés for "scientific" Socialism—he too seems psychologically incapable of letting people alone. He too is inexorably bent on hammering out the Good Society on the political anvil. He too has the perfect recipe, an ingredient of which is his own capacity for improving others. It is endemic.

All the evidence points to the collectivist as a breed, not a product. Which is also true of the individualist. The main characteristic of the one is an urge to ride herd on mankind, while the other is inclined to give mankind a wide berth. The collectivist idealizes group behavior because he feels an inadequacy in himself; he must be part of a mob and therefore he organizes and joins. The individualist abhors labels.

The volume of sound generated by the organized collectivist gives him undue prominence. He seems to be the majority. Yet, if nature is as impartial in the distribution of temperaments as she is in the apportionment of sexes, there should be as many individualists around as the other kind. Nor can we overlook the possibility that all of us have a penchant both ways, being part individualist and part col-

lectivist, in differing degrees; one could adduce evidence in favor of that thesis.

Only education can give the right answer; for the function of education is to bring to the surface what nature has implanted in the person. If the educational machinery of the country had not been overrun by the collectivists (operating under cover of "academic freedom"), if individualism were given a fair share of the curriculum, we could easily find out how many of us prefer freedom, how many of us are destined to be mob material.

Returning to our group of deplorers, we got around to the need of stirring up an interest in the individualistic philosophy on the college campus. To be sure, we knew that the younger children were being subjected to the cacophony of collectivism, and a thorough job of saving must include the lower grades, even the kindergarten. But, immediacy suggested throwing a lifeline to adolescent individualists, those who will have a hand in shaping the world directly ahead.

As a *modus operandi*, we thought of encouraging the formation of what we called Adam Smith Clubs. This would have to be an extracurricular activity, for two reasons: one, the monopolization of the classroom by the faculty collectivists is too solid to permit penetration; two, these clubs would pick up, by a process of self-selection, the element susceptible of help.

Suppose it were noised about that at the next meeting of the club, a speaker would hold forth on the iniquity of the income tax, or would expose the fraud of social security; those who instinctively rejected the textbook apotheoses of these two institutions would attend, while the energumens of collective action would stay away, especially if they had once felt the uncongenial atmosphere. Every Adam Smith Club would be a campus "educable elite."

On the face of it, an Adam Smith Club would be an evidence of a dissident voice on the campus and, considering the vogue of Keynesianism and pragmatism in our colleges, it would be looked upon with disfavor by the vested collectivists and campus conformists. All the better. Any explicit or implicit opposition to the Club would convince the membership that they had got hold of an important truth. It is a known fact that the learning one acquires outside the lecture hall sticks closer to the ribs, especially if that learning is officially declared off limits.

It would be a pity if the Adam Smith Clubs achieved respectability; that would destroy their purpose. Their purpose should be not only to find and help the submerged individualist, but also to set him in opposition to the collectivism being ladled out by the professors. A compromise is impossible; it is a fight to the finish. The agenda of the meetings should include the preparation of refutations of textbook propaganda, to be fired in classroom, with the intent of stirring up latent individualists. If the Adam Smith Clubs are to be really educational, they must be radical in character.

For, it must be kept in mind that individualism is the modern radicalism. In the true sense of the word, individualism is always radical, for it rests its case on root ideas; it delves into the nature of things for basic causes; it rejects the idea that man is best served by a series of expedients.

In the political sense, individualism is the current radicalism because it is the ideology of the minority. The ultimate purpose of the Adam Smith Clubs should be to loosen the grip of Statism on the mass mind, to re-arouse in America an awareness of self-importance and self-reliance, to teach people that no social good can come out of politics.

There are, as a matter of fact, incipient Adam Smith Clubs on some campuses. The individualist simply cannot be eradicated. In every period of history when the machinery of the

State, including education, was set against him, he made his spirit felt. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear of the spontaneous gathering of anti-collectivists at various colleges. These boys and girls should be given encouragement and help. And that would be the purpose of a College of Individualism.