

Liberation from Psychological Exploitation

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These are two excerpts from an unpublished manuscript titled THAT WAY NEVERMORE. They relate my experiences with Psychological Exploitation in the Old Left and the New Left.

Tragic Case One – Old Left:

I have been through it myself for many of the best years of my life. I and many of my generation were victims of such power corruption, absolute and brutal, without being able to realize it ourselves, let alone influence others to see it. We followed our "great" leaders who always knew how to inflame the fires of "Ideology" and "Vision". In the heat of that burning ideological fire no opposition could endure. Opposition factions and individuals were usually branded as deviants and traitors and eliminated from the party's list, if not from the ranks of the living. The party leaders, like the ancient Zeus, hurled Ideology thunderbolts at their followers blasting all who dared to resist. We were equal party members in discussion and persuasion only in the imagined world of ideology, free and equal like sheep following their shepherds. All over the world the political life-experience has become, if not outright totalitarian, as aggressive and empty of rationality as a political campaign jingle. **It is now possible to avoid all of this – NEVERMORE OF THAT.**

I am bringing you one example from my personal experience that after so many years still causes me pain to recall. If you feel you know the experience already, you may well skip reading it; you may use it later as an analyzing exercise of text, according to the Psychological Exploitation Detecting Techniques presented in Chapter 5:

"... Ideological Collectivism is a unity of form and contents, of the ways of its formation and the actual contents of that formation. Its ideological contents is the decisive factor. When the contents is emptied no organizational improvements would be able to help us.. .. The Vision of the pioneering Zionism putting new life into the ways of our nation and people; the Vision of justice and equality, sharing and affinity that makes human loneliness bearable; mutual help in the national, social and individual struggle for survival; creative work, changing the character of people and of the entire nation - all these were sufficient for nurturing the Kibbutz movement a long time, for the maintenance and growth of its creative powers. However as the movement had been growing and the Israeli reality became more complex, intricate and complicated, the Kibbutz movement had no

option but to translate its National and human vision into a language of political and social ideology active in struggle...”

“..Because we do live—and that must be the fundamental premise on which we should continue building the structure of our sociopolitical world view—in an inevitable transition period, whether peaceful or stormy, quick or slow—from the Capitalist to the Socialist system.” – J. Hazan (1968), 50 years a leader of the Israeli “United Workers Party”.

Try to argue with a leader who professes "inevitable" transition from Capitalism to Socialism and you'd get the feeling. Many people in my generation were victims of that kind of power corruption, the power of institutionalized dogma personified in charismatic leaders, totally impervious to doubt, questioning and dissent. Our leaders, as any public opinion leaders to this day, had always known to construct with their tongues ideological structures that were impossible to change by shared exchange of ideas. They could be only inhabited, deserted, or destroyed from outside. My former political life experience as a believer in the ideological way of a party that in its own mind and in my mind was “revolutionary” and "humanistic", contributed much to my seeking and finding the roots of failure in our vulnerability in face of Psychological Exploitation. I am now convinced, that if we do not become better immunized against exploitation of people by people who use strong phrases and symbols with no correspondence or no clear correspondence to reality - - we had not learned the lesson. Sending idealistic believers to the never-never land of Ideology and Vision without equipping them with anti-Psychological Exploitation equipment is like sending people to traverse deserts barefooted and without water. Most would stop walking and sit in a nearest comfortable shade. The most devoted will dehydrate and perish. No one will reach the destination.

Tragic Case Two: New Left

As stated in Part One, demolishing the power-pyramid is a necessary pre-condition for humanistic politics but it is not sufficient. The other condition is a commitment to avoid Psychological Exploitation and our ability to stand by it. If we won't be able to be liberated of Psychological Exploitation our fate could be like that of the Kibbutz movement which ideologically belonged to the “Old Left”, or like the “New Left” in the 1960's and 1970's. One group of the New Left in the United States will serve us now as an example substantiating that prognosis and bringing the evidence closer to the reader in 21st century.

In the 1970's, as I studied in the U. S., I was interested in finding out whether there are political groups there that are organized differently, more along the lines suggested in Part One. Looking for organizational models that could replace a political party I studied Applied Behavioral Science (Organization Development - OD), that was a predominantly American branch of science, and I naturally wanted to know whether it has been applied anywhere in a political organization.

And indeed, I found one such group that, judging by its written materials, appeared humanistic, sane, and realistic more than any political organization I had known or had ever heard of. It was called Movement for a New Society (MNS). They were writing, that they were committed to actualize among themselves, here-and-now, the values of the new society they visualized in the future. The term "here-and-now" belonged to the terminology of OD and the experience of T-groups, groups for experiential learning of group dynamics. There were more indications of the influence of OD on that movement, like the value they saw in an open resolution of conflicts and in conscious regard for people's feelings, the terms "personal growth" and "a climate of trust". They had written down the idea that I so firmly believed and still do: *"There can be no radical change without radically changing our own behavior"*.

A quarter of a century later I still don't know of any political party or movement the members of which would not feel threatened by that idea, *"There can be no radical change without radically changing our own behavior"*. MNS was genuinely radical, different. Organizationally it constituted of some small groups around some big universities. The organization was decentralized and made of self-directed groups, as I thought it should be. I took part, as an observer, in one of their meetings that was about formulation of a position-paper, or as it is called in party politics a "Platform". Here is an excerpt from the draft they discussed:

"we believe that the present exploitative economic system - Capitalism - is a major barrier toward creating a just society capable of meeting human needs."... "We believe that a democratic socialistic society is crucial to ridding ourselves of the irrationality and dehumanization of Capitalism."

The discussion was heavy. Tension, controlled anger, impatience, could be felt in the tone and the body-language of the participating people. However the discussion dragged on, on the high abstraction level of the big words: socialism, capitalism, democracy. People behaved themselves very well and made efforts to listen more than I had ever seen in party meetings before. They worked very hard, some of the speakers were "heavies" and bored others, as they sunk into the world of their terms and ideas without being sensitive to what was going around "here-and-now".

However, to me, the most obvious thing in the meeting was that nobody asked practical questions such as why they needed to formulate and agree on those formulations? Why did they need to decide “here-and-now” whether or not capitalism is a “major barrier” toward creating a “just society”, what was that for them and what they were going to do about it tomorrow and in the following month or so, and how exactly and when they meant to “rid themselves” of the irrationality and dehumanization of “Capitalism”, etc.

They behaved like sleepwalkers, enveloped in the web of their verbal images without questioning it and without, apparently, considering neither its appropriateness nor some alternatives for spending their time together. Other parts of the draft they discussed contained the same very high level of abstraction. The section ended with the following text on which quick consensus was reached:

“The terms racism, sexism, classicism, heterosexism, and ageism should be available in some form in our literature for those who are struggling with these terms.”

The above is a “classical” example of the intellectual fault that enables Psychological Exploitation work by over-abstraction. People invent terms (words, verbal or other symbols) for designating something in reality (racial relations, economic relations, etc.). Then they are “struggling with terms”, not with something they sense directly in their reality but with the terms they borrowed or invented to represent it.

The Movement for a New Society did not take off, the ideological fire died down with no energy to feed it. Human energy needs the fuel of succeeding in reaching one’s goals and that could be achieved only in working together in reality, “here and now”. The MNS people knew that “*There can be no radical change without radically changing our own behavior*”, however their “ideological” behavior in the crucial area of perceiving, conceptualizing, and acting in reality, was not different than that of their good-intentioned predecessors who burned to ashes in their ideological flames. In the interconnected reality of themselves, social reality, and the concepts they used to give meaning to their reality, the New Left was not different from the Old Left and **that was its undoing**, not anything external by any force.

This book offers insights and practical means for avoiding such experiences and such results in the future; *That Way Nevermore*. The Movement for New Society has been an example of a soft and not deadly slide down the slope of Psychological Exploitation which in their case was internalized and accompanied by a feeling of personal freedom and security, culture, intelligence, high education, limitless abstraction powers and good intentions. In the reality of party politics, where power positions, power

interests, and charismatic leaders set the tone, the slide down from the road paved with good intentions could be a veritable fall into hell.