

T.Panfilova

The socio-psychological content of the world history of today

Interrelation of our world and interdependence of its parts have been reflected in the majority of the modern doctrines, the "world - system analysis" by I.Wallerstein is one of the most well known among them. Agreeing as a whole with the idea by Wallerstein that the modern world represents "capitalist world - economy", I consider important not to stop on it, and to pay attention to the historical tendencies, caused by integrity of the world and connected with the development of a personality and with his socio-psychological condition. If Wallerstein has borrowed K.Marx's idea of the universality of capitalist production and the ability of capitalism to capture the whole world by its relations, the area of my interests is connected closer to other part of Marx's doctrine - to his notion of the united world history which develops on the basis of capitalist manufacture, and is characterised by universal communication, promoting formation of the world-historical subject.

Shifting stress from economic basis of the world-historical process to its subjective aspect we get a chance to find out the human content of the world history. Speaking on the human content of the world history I mean that the world-historical process requires a developing person for its further movement. In other words, the development of personality is the tendency of the united world history.

This article deals with socio-psychological characteristics of the modern person as a participant of the world-historical process. It seems to me, that due to the universalization of communication the tendency to the common socio-psychological content of the world history is outlined.



A person assumes universal essence in the course of his embracing by the universal world-historical relations. In my view, Marx's thesis that the essence of man is a set of all public relations expresses the kernel of what occurs to a person within the framework of the united world history, i.e. this thesis concerns that fragment of history, on which the capitalist economic system forms and develops up to the condition of world - economy. Including to the united system of world-economic connections, a person becomes a carrier of the universal tendencies in contrast to representatives of other social structures, who usually live in societies with rigid hierarchy, belong strictly to a certain public stratum or group and carry a limited circle of the public relations.

Having universal essence a person acquires an ability to act not only in accordance with any external parameters, but also to turn himself into the purpose of his own development in order to develop himself according to his internal necessity. Realization of this opportunity means that a person develops freely, as according to Spinoza's definition of freedom, such thing is called free which exists on the only necessity of its own nature and is determined to act only by itself. Having agreed in this point with Spinoza, I propose to name free such type of personal development, and to name humanistic the tendency to realize the universal person on his own basis. I propose to call the opposite tendency alienating, in Marx's tradition, because it is connected with inclusion of the universal person in social systems with his subsequent submission to the laws of these systems, different from the laws of the person's self-development.

To be understood properly I'd like to mention that I disagree with the common concept of humanism as a good respective attitude to man and an observance of his rights. Although these moments are in fact significant for humanism I consider them



not to be sufficient. I emphasize two points in the definition of humanism: first, man ought to be always regarded as a purpose and never as a means according to Kant's practical imperative; second, since humanism bases on free development of the personality man is considered to be an independent subject of his own actions and as such to be responsible for them. So humanism appears as a double-sided thing: for one side it means of course a good and respectful attitude to men; for the other side it supposes a severe attitude to men, thus their responsibility and self-criticism

To sum up everything just said about humanism I propose to define humanism as a historically conditioned system of views considering man as a self-contained value, an independent subject of his actions whose development on the laws of his own activity is admitted as the necessary condition of social development

So the humanistic tendency of the world history is connected with full self-development of the personality on his own basis while the opposite alienating tendency means that personal development is subordinated to social laws - especially economic ones - strange and hostile to man. In this case personal development is directed to maintain social functioning and it is restricted by this goal whereas a society may function in favour of man's development or against it. Contradictory as they are, both tendencies are rooted in the same process - universalizing of man.

Having got into the system of universal historical ties new to him, man finds characteristics unusual to him in previous historical times. If previously his peculiarity merged essentially only with peculiarities of his social group or layer, now, becoming universal, he finds universal essence, and together with it socio-psychological uniformity, expressed in the appropriate social character. The more universal the essence of man, the higher the probability of formation of the common socio-psychological content of



the world history and the probability of making the uniform social character for all participants of the world-historical process.

Thus, the major socio-psychological tendency of the world history, in my opinion, is the tendency to manufacture the uniform social character for all participants of the world-historical process, - the tendency arising in the course of the universalization of man.

Social character: specifications to definition.

E.Fromm's contribution to the development of social character is no doubt enormous. This concept was of great importance for him. With the term of "social character" he designated in <The Sane Society> " *the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture in contradistinction to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other* ". And Fromm emphasized that he didn't mean a simple set of the most frequent features of character. The content of social character becomes apparent only through its public function. As he pointed out in the same book, "... it is the social character's function to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society." Public reproduction is reached by the fact that a society induces a person to act in the interests of the system, providing him to feel satisfied with his activity. Social character, in Fromm's opinion, takes the intermediate place between economic basis and ideological superstructure and provides their interrelation, creating thus the impression, as if a man works by his own will and according to his own interests.

So it turns out that social character has dual meaning for a person: on the one hand, it helps an individual to enter the social structure and to become its full member;



on the other hand, due to social character an individual is managed to be adjusted to the requirements of the society differing the requirements of the personal self-development. Thus a social character appears to be the public tool, which assists to turn a man into a means of effective functioning of the society. If one pursues the notion of humanism as the attitude to a person as always an aim and never a means, one must admit that a social character looks antihumanistic as a manifestation of the alienating tendency.

I have never met such a conclusion in Fromm's works, however, following his ideas and adhering to his humanistic spirit, I suppose we may complete Fromm's concept of social character till its logic end.

Agreeing with Fromm's definition of social character as a whole, I propose to specify it by emphasizing that the social character as a mediator between economic basis and ideological superstructure arises only when a person essentially becomes a set of all public relations, i.e. when the universal system of public relations comes into being with a person formed on its bases under the influence of the alienating tendency. In other words social character, in my view, is to ensure reproduction of the universal relations of the alienated society and represents the socio-psychological mechanism helping the members of the public system to join organically its reproduction activity, remaining thus alienated from their society, from each other, and even from themselves. The definition of social character formally corrected looks a little bit vague without such specification, because in such formulation it can be referred to any culture, which does not correspond to the content of the quoted book by Fromm.

In view of the specification suggested above the definition of social character will be as follows: social character is a socio-psychological tool, ensuring the transformation of a man into a means of effective society functioning which is alienated from him and



representing the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same alienated socio-cultural system. I am sure that Fromm would have agreed with this specification. The fact that the section about social character is placed into the chapter devoted to a situation of man in capitalist society testifies it. It means I suppose that Fromm anticipated that this concept was applicable only to the socio-psychological characteristic of capitalism.

Apropos the concepts "economic basis" and "ideological superstructure" borrowed by Fromm from Marx in order to describe a place of social character in a society are suitable only within the framework of the universal system of public relations characterizing capitalism. In precapitalistic structures there was no precise differentiation between economic basis and ideological superstructure because of social heterogeneity expressed in social hierarchy, in a number of rigidly fixed social layers or estates. However, in some structures there was no economic basis in the political economy sense of the word at all, as the basis of a traditional society may be made for example by the direct reproduction of community members together with necessary conditions of their existence instead of the reproduction of commodity-money relations themselves regardless to needs of the people engaged in them.

So the social character is a link between economic basis and ideological superstructure only if the universal system of public relations exists, and that is characteristic for the formation of the united world history with the alienating tendency manifesting in it.

"Marketing" orientation.

If the personal development was the purpose of social production, social character would not be needed, and the problems connected with the social character



would not also arise. One can assume that if sometimes the development of human being becomes the determining aspect of social development these problems will disappear by themselves together with the social character. But on the present level of the formation of the united world history due to social character the society has an opportunity to direct human energy on the abstract purposes which are not directly connected with the development of the personality if not contradict it. While the social contradiction between man and society takes place and expresses itself in discrepancy or even in conflict of their interests the contradictory nature of the universal human essence comes to light because the universal human essence is capable to ensure both the universal opportunity of all-round and infinite development of man on his own basis, and an opportunity of man's alienation from his essential forces, that is an opportunity of his depersonalization and standardization.

One would think there is nothing terrible in it, as within the framework of the united world history the standards are developed in line with their carriers and cannot impose the restrictions unusual for them. The reality has proved to be more complicated and contradictory than one would anticipate. Discrepancy of the real situation comes to light in the orientation of social character called by Fromm "marketing" orientation which prevails nowadays.

Fromm regarded the marketing orientation in connection with profound psychological changes of a modern man and defined it as the man's attitude both to himself and to other people as to the goods, the value of which is determined in exchange value. I can't help agreeing with the proposed name because it expresses precisely both the subjective spirit of its carrier ("all for sale", "everything is sold and is bought"), and the objective peculiarity of the world-economy ties making the basis of



the united world history and requiring an appropriate social character for their reproduction.

The marketing orientation bases on the universalization of man and corresponds to the tendency of the united world history while other orientations described by Fromm characterize rather separate parts of the modern society than a society as a whole though in the past they might prevail in some public systems. It is no coincidence that Fromm considered just the marketing orientation to be a product of our epoch whereas the exploitory orientation for example he attributed to pirates and feudals of the past although their customs may survive till the moment.

Unfortunately, the marketing orientation embodies the only aspect of the universal person that is his social mobility, his relative independence of any social layer and his ability to act on measures which are eventually dictated by the faceless and potentially universal economic relationship supported with the market. Characterizing the marketing orientation Fromm stressed that its essence consisted of absence of any specification and constant attitude. The only constant feature of this type of orientation is just extreme variability of any attitudes. So the dominant feature in person's character of such orientation is emptiness to be quickly filled with any of required qualities at the moment. In other words man is provided with "freedom from..." through the marketing character. At the same time the marketing orientation does not promote carrying into life of another aspect of the universal person - his ability to make his own development the purpose of his activity, i.e. to realize "freedom for..." that is freedom in Spinoza's sense. As a result a human being turns into a market function without finding the purely human content. It looks as if no adjustment to a common standard has taken place at least there is no obvious restriction to human development. Actually the orientation to the market relations depersonalize worse than any external



restrictions, - the fact that was brightly described in Fromm's works. That's why he numbered the marketing orientation among nonproductive ones.

Problem of productive orientation.

Fromm supposed that the transition to productive orientation was connected with switching human activity over to man himself, i.e. with realization of the humanistic tendency and elimination of alienation. In other words Fromm considered only productive orientation to be genuinely humanistic one. Nothing can be said against it. In order to develop Fromm's concept I suggest that a person of productive orientation should be henceforth called "humanistic person".

Domination of the humanistic tendency would relieve society from the necessity to support social character as the socio-psychological mechanism between basis and superstructure. Strengthening of humanism in practice would mean transformation of the person's self-development laws into the laws of society functioning when there is no need in mediating links. Hence, prevalence of productive orientation assumes disappearance of social character as the socio-psychological phenomenon with these functions. If there is some sense in keeping this term, that is for formal describing as a nucleus of character structure, common to the main representatives of the same culture.

Did Fromm believe the transition to productive orientation to be real? In his book " The Revolution of Hope ", written at the end of 60's, Fromm declared, that mankind - or, at least, that part of mankind, that lived in the industrially advanced countries - was on a cross-road, one road leading to a completely mechanized society with a human being to be a helpless cog of a machine, if only not to perish in thermoneuclear war; another one - to the society where technic is on a man's service. Fromm connected the second road with the revival of humanism and hope. In other



words, Fromm expressed a cautious hope that events would develop on the humanistic script, at the same time warning the mankind against the dangers threatening him if the other variant of development would realize.

Before discussing the probability of prevailing of the humanistic tendency, I'd like to make a passing remark. Fromm's statement about the revival of humanism can be understood so as if he recognizes, that humanism had once dominated in practice, and then for some reasons moved off to the background, if it had not been eradicated at all; that's why Fromm offers to revive it now. I am afraid that in this case a loose expression is committed. Fromm probably meant in this case not humanism as the relation between self-developing and self-valuable persons carried out in practice, i.e. subject-subject relation, but only the humanistic tendency which was breaking a trail in the world history for a long time and which was so far fixed at the philosophical doctrines long ago, although this fact does not ensure the practical realization of the humanistic tendency in full. So if there is some sense in speaking today about "the revival of humanism", it means only the increase of the urgency and the importance of the humanistic tendency both in practice, and in theory, but it does not mean its unconditional prevalence in reality. The appeals of such sort cause sympathy, but they themselves change a little because the humanistic approach to a human being is stimulated by the historical demand for practical realization of humanism. The attitude towards a human being is determined in the large scale by his real position in the society structure and by the valid public incentive in the "humanistic person", and not by the reflections some humanistic theorists have on this occasion.

Coming back to the issue on the consolidation of humanism, I must note, that the probability of such development of events is still doubtful. For years after Fromm's quoted books had appeared, no resolute socio-psychological changes in reorientation of



a person to the productivity has taken place. The nonproductive orientations still dominate. The market orientation does not hand over its positions. On the contrary, the sphere of its action extends at the expense of the new participants of the world-historical process. Market values involve in the sphere of their action not only countries with advanced market economy, but also developing countries, recently taken the path of the capitalist development. The problems of market orientation, described by Fromm, are the most urgent today for the last group of countries, including Russia. As far as industrially advanced countries are concerned, the other socio-psychological problems put into the foreground because of their greater economic advance which hardly makes us to cherish: it doesn't seem that their socio-psychological development coincides with consolidation of humanism.

Formation of the "information" character.

Estimating the modern technological society Fromm correctly noticed that humanism was sacrificed in it to the economic efficiency narrowly understood, that is efficiency determined by cost criteria. The emphasis is made on its increase by all means, even if it is contrary to person's development. The preference is given to the means of achievement of higher economic showings in comparison with that what for one should strive for them. Fromm's idea that computers can be used by diametrically opposite ways sounds especially urgent. Fromm stressed that we had a choice between humane and unhumane use of machines. The computer can serve the improvement of man's life in many aspects. At the same time it can replace the person's life. Fromm called pathologic the idea of the replacing a man with a machine. Thus he pointed the danger fully realizing nowadays.



Fromm was quite right in admitting that the achievements of science and engineering were themselves neither good nor evil. Everything depends on how we use them. The computers, in his opinion, should become means for realization of the purposes established by person's reason and will. They must promote his activity and not destroy his life. In fact the reception and mastering of the information are the important means of the personal development. New ways of the information processing and transferring through computers are the great achievements of human reason. But these achievements are as ambiguous as many others: they can serve the perfection of the personality and assist in consolidating of humanism, at the same time they can strengthen the alienating tendency subordinating a person to a new social force.

Today we can surely assert that Fromm's hopes haven't come true and machines or computers haven't become the means for realization of the reasonable purposes. On the contrary, the practice testifies that the information technologies put into the foreground, subordinating their carriers to themselves and creating the basis for the "information society", that is the society serving information flows, instead of putting them to man's service. However the society's reorientation to the information processes does not mean the domination of spiritual over material, as it can seem on the first sight. The change in management takes place but the initial contradictions concerning the person's development and characteristic for the period of the domination of the economic relations in traditional political economy sense still preserve.

I'll remark to the point that though I agree with the ideologists of "information society" that the nearest prospect of mankind is connected just to it, I do not share their optimism at all. In my view, the settlement or the smoothing of some existing social contradictions in the "information society" will be accompanied by occurrence of new



ones or by intensification of those available especially connected with prevalence of the alienating tendency.

The changes in the basis of the society cannot help effecting on its socio-psychological content. During the process of the comprehensive informatization of the society a new type of social character will probably come up to take market character's place. The skill to receive, to process and to transfer the information regardless to its content will become the basic value of this character type. The value of the information will depend on a degree and correctness of its processing and also on the skill of its exact transferring as much as on its content.

In order to develop Fromm's conception on social character and taking into account the social changes occurring now, I offer a new concept of "information character" to express a new social character which only starts to form. Similarly to market orientation, "information character" is based on the universalization of man carried to an absurdity. If the distinctive feature of the market character was emptiness, according to Fromm's definition, an "information man" needs the emptiness twice. If not so the man's capacity to conceive the information will appear restricted and will create obstacles on the way of its transferring. And what is more if interpersonal contacts were still inevitable in the society with market orientation, as Fromm marked, although people in the market system cannot be the personality in full sense as an internal integrity of the socially significant traits but a set of roles or masks replacing each other, the relations mediated by the computer do not require even such contact. The "information man" attitudes to the world and other people with the help of computer losing a need, and then an ability to contact directly.

In the light of what is said I rank the "information character" among the characters of nonproductive orientation. I express deep regret with the fact that



Fromm's hope concerning the fast replacement of the nonproductive orientation characters by the productive one hasn't yet come true. Probably he expected the market orientation to be the utmost alienation and believed that a next step would mean either the transition of mankind to productivity or the wreck of "humanity", i.e. the human content of history. It looks as if life presents us with one more unpleasant surprise and shows that we have one more way to develop alienation because the alienating tendency is not yet exhausted.

So the prospective change of the socio-psychological type is a double-sided process. On the one hand, the new type of social character testifies that there is still an opportunity to develop the personality further because it engages the communication abilities of man which he hasn't used yet. On the other hand, it means a new coil of person's alienation from his fellow men and finally from himself, for information technologies of the "information society" will appear to be the intermediary not only in the person's attitude to other people, but also in his attitude to himself. In other words, the formation of the "information person" would mean a progress of the alienating tendency without qualitative transition to the person's development on his own basis. The humanistic tendency will still remain in the background, if not disappear at all as a non-realized historical chance.

The idea that the strengthening of the history unity with the help of information communications can subsequently stimulate the qualitative shift from the "social human being" to the "humane society", based on free person's development inspires some optimism. In such case the forming subject-subject relation between people might triumph so, that they will determine the man's attitude to a machine. Then the computer might become a real partner and assistant of a man. If the personality forms in constant dialogue with the computer just as in constant personal contacts and if he is



aware that his health and comfort are provided by some technological systems he'll be able to establish the subject-subject relations with his artificial environment just as he'll do it with people.

As far as the socio-psychological aspect concerns such reorganization of the public relations would mean the elimination of the necessary link between economic basis and ideological superstructure, hence the social character would die off. But there is no practical evidence in the world history that such changes have already begun. And the intolerant attitude to the artificial environment is frequently explained, to my mind, by the feeling of man's powerlessness in front of the danger of the approaching enslavement by "clever" machines. However, it is hardly a sufficient justification for a human being. It is his ability and duty, not machine's, to perfect human relations including the relations between man and his environment.

