

A CASE OF MANIA WITH ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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A business man in his forties was brought to a mental hospital as a case of "manic depressive psychosis, manic phase." In short, he had suffered a stroke from which he had recovered quickly, except for some residua which, for practical life, were unimportant. After this he fell into a state of deep depression for some time, accompanied by suicidal ideas, followed by a state of high excitement. He was now irritable, loud and grandiose, with a tendency to assert himself at all costs and to attack as soon as he felt in the least offended. He was quite unmanageable. Through an attempt to understand the case it became possible to approach the human side of the processes occurring in the man. I shall merely mention, in a sketch, some factors of this case. To put the problem paradoxically, this man became a victim of the concrete clash of two different meanings of the term "equality", living a life exclusively shaped by a world which was determined by one of these meanings.

He was in the oil business, and owned a small independent plant which sold mostly to gasoline stations. Since he had to compete with the large companies he developed a high degree of efficiency in his organization, paying his workers lower wages than did the larger companies, and working them overtime in order to get his trucks on the road before those of his rivals. His men were out in the small hours of the morning in order to reach the stations first. Within his plant he tried to maintain a patriarchal emotional relationship with his workers, and by these methods he obtained good results. He was a very hard worker, and his business was his main interest. In this competitive struggle he had become somewhat ruthless, and was very proud of his independence. He enjoyed maintaining a spacious apartment in one of the best sections of New York, strove to dress well and to see that his family, too, took good care of their outer appearance. There were no particular hobbies or other interests that we know of. He was inclined to have a stubborn one-track mind and a certain lack of imagination and versatility. He was intensely attached to his business and would not easily change his situation. Rather stout, stocky, red-faced and warmblooded, he was also somewhat nervous and highstrung, showing a tendency to suffer from high blood pressure. He liked good food, was jolly, but always somewhat excitable, boisterous and loud, though never unduly so. He was satisfied with his private life. In business he was distinctly the boss, and a go-getter, although not unkind.

The "New Deal" came in. He was invited to sign the code of his industry. In his particular case this meant he would have to pay higher wages and would be restricted in the number of hours he required his men to work. Both changes were insupportable for his kind of business, and to sign the code would mean ruin. He became infuriated and refused to sign. The only alternative he could think of was to fight against the change. He wanted his workers to "stick it out with him," and he appealed to them, explaining the situation as he saw it. He fought the authorities and the unions. He lost the fight, and his business was ruined.

The stroke followed.

During his illness most of his harangue was centered around his business and the NRA. He was utterly infuriated by what he considered the injustice done to him. According to his interpretation of the situation he, an honest worker, and a friend to his workers, was thrown out of business by a bunch of hypocrites who claimed to protect the workers, but actually, as was proved by his own case, helped the large companies against the small and independent man. He felt he was the underdog and deserved sympathy. He worked very hard and deserved the \$ 50.000 which he annually made. He was entitled to the fine life he led. What is life worth if you are out of business and cannot make \$ 50.000 a year? Who is the doctor? He makes perhaps \$ 2.000; he is a poor fellow, a pauper, a contemptible "piece of cheese." Should he, the business man, be expected to associate with and be considerate of the other patients who belonged to a lower social level? He was supposed to be their boss. He wanted his rights. He was ready to fight all of them. The world had wronged him; the world was going to make good. He, the great business man, would take what was due him: money, women, the nurses. He would make a donation to the hospital and kill its inefficient "president" ...

To put the case as he saw it, NRA was unjust; it threw him, one of the few remaining independents, out of business. It was not his fault that the large companies had forced him into an unfair competitive struggle. He did not want to cheat his workers; he was their friend. If he cheated them it was because he was forced to do so in order to live. Everyone's chances are equal. He wanted to use his chance, but the NRA took it away from him. All he wanted was non-interference. NRA denied him his constitutional right to an equal chance.

One can call this the attitude of a rugged individualist. The authorities claimed that this man underpaid his workers and exploited them. In other words, he did not give them their own chance of equality with respect to the recognized minimum standards of life. He denied the rights of his fellowmen. This contention may, roughly, be the point of view of "social consciousness".

This man was apparently not only a business man, but a "nothing-but-business" man. His world was altogether centered around his business, his plant, his own way of making a living. This determined his attitude toward life, and his matter-of-course understanding of the world. To understand such a point of view as was held by the authorities of the New Deal was impossible for him. Within his world such ideas had no place; they did not fit in and lay beyond its limits, beyond the scope of his thoughts. Since he was entirely centered by this world, he was unable to look at such a theory in an objective way. The facts to which this theory pertained, such as the private life of a worker, had no relevant place in his world; instead, he could see such thoughts only in relationships determined by his world. These relationships meant simply: these are unjust disturbances.

His complete fixation on and determination by this world already existed before his illness. It made his whole life the life of a "business man." He wore the clothes of the "business man," rented the apartment appropriate for the "business man," had the manners, the style of the "business man" and his evaluation of other people and other professions was, as a matter of course, the evaluation of the "nothing-but-business" man. In this respect the psychosis only revealed and emphasized what was already there, but essentially did not add anything new.

This closed world was suddenly destroyed. Realities which originated outside his sphere entered and became powerful factors: the laws of the New Deal. The particular reasoning which entered

from the outside did not fit into this world, and could not reasonable be accounted for; it worked simply as a disturbance. It violated the rules, the structure and dynamic laws of this world, and therefore seemed to be a true injustice. Just and unjust were defined in relation to his own system of reference, his business world. He had not done anything unjust. He simply followed the rules of the business world and therefore it was to him an act of wilfulness to punish him because he obeyed the laws of his own system.

The idea of starting anew, of getting a new job, did not occur to him. He was simply distressed; this was the depressed phase. Later he tried to assert himself as he understood himself as a part of this world. This was the manic phase. It was obvious, however, that he was at bottom keenly aware of the precarious situation, aware that actually he was no longer a business man and that this continuation of his world was artificial and in constant jeopardy. His attack was a form of defense and he was hurt and afraid.

Why was he so unable simply to accept the situation, to face it and to try to find some way out? Why was it that he could not find a new world?

It is indeed astounding that an apparantly normal human being can be reduced to nothing but a business man, and his world to nothing but a business world. This appears to be a rather narrow world and a rather poor sort of human being. The process of reduction to this shape, which must have taken place throughout this man's life, appears to have been some sort of psychological amputation, a more or less voluntary crippling. [Crippling here means the inability to perceive facts other than the one-sided way which was determined and centered by the rigid structure of his special world. This is the extreme opposite to open-mindedness. Facts cannot be perceived as they demand to be perceived, objectively and with open-mindedness. This happens very often in normal persons, but in this case it jeopardized the dynamic equilibrium which is an essential factor of sound behaviour.] Such a process seems to be artificial. No one is born to be a mere oil man.