

CIVIL SERVANTS INSTEAD OF A CLASS OF BUREAUCRATS

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He has authored the book 'Occupational groups structure in post-Soviet Russia' (M., 2008), in which he justifies the concept of Russia as a resource state

RJ Dear Mr. Kordonsky, in your opinion, is the bureaucracy in Russia a real social stratum, different, on the one hand, from business, and, on the other hand, from the intellectual class? Can bureaucracy, in any of its parts, be identified with the middle class?

In modern Russia there is no bureaucracy in the classical sense, in the sense once determined by Max Weber. However, there are many groups participating in the distribution of resources, the existence of which is determined by the state. These occupational groups were created mainly to ensure the preservation of social justice during distribution. These are state and civil officials, the military, law enforcers, the

judges, the deputies, and many others.

Class-specific division of people according to their position in either the highest, middle, and lowest classes occurs in the market. But occupational group differentiation is either made by the state or exists by tradition. Occupational group division is one phenomenon, and class-specific division is a totally different notion. Hence, attempts at identifying the domestic bureaucracy with the middle class are unjustified from a methodological point of view.

There are the rich and the poor in a class-based society. In a society based on occupational groups such a distinction is simply not valid. There are occupational groups that are well provided with resources, and there are occupational groups poorly provided with resources. Outward resemblance of the poor to those who are poorly provided with resources, for example, pushes naive observers to identify these two groups as one single group. Outward resemblance of representatives of the middle class in a class-based society to those who are well provided with resources in a society based on occupational groups produces the same effect.

Poverty in a class-based society is most often explained by people's unsuccessful risks in the labour market. On the other hand, poor provision with resources in the society based on occupational groups is usually explained by unfair distribution. Overall, efforts of a socially just state and the occupational groups structure are aimed at achieving justice, at the distribution of resources in proportion to the importance of different occupational groups to the state and to the personal status in the given occupational group.

In the occupational groups arrangement, like in Russia, the risk on the market (leading to class splitting) is substituted by a risk in relations with the state. In the occupa-

tional groups society there are no businessmen in the same sense as they exist in the class arrangement, but rather there are entrepreneurs taking risks in their relations with the state when it comes to obtaining and executing state orders.

We do not have a bureaucracy in a traditional sense of the word, as well as we do not have a business or intellectual elite. However, we have officials, entrepreneurs, and professional people who service the interests of other officials and businessmen.

The conceptual mechanism, developed in the course of the analysis of the class society, is not applicable to Russia. It is another matter that, inside occupational groups, people have different access to resources and, accordingly, there arise differences in the levels of consumption, which can be interpreted as class differences. But they are not class differences as such.

RJ In your opinion, which of the occupational groups of civil servants has the most significant political weight and the majority of resources in the whole system?

In principle, there is no room for politics in the occupational groups system. Politics mean achieving ideologically important goals. There are some basic goals in the occupational groups system (for example, 'Orthodoxy, monarchy, nation,' or 'For the Motherland, for Stalin'), which are shaped into a national idea. Social integration is then performed within the framework of achieving the great goal, and not in terms of politics.

Politics emerge in the class society in the course of accommodating the interests of the rich and poor (in the most simple case). That's when parties and parliaments are created. However, convocation assemblies (*sobors*) should be the bodies for this accommodation of interests, as has always been the case in Russia. Party assemblies of different sorts, from primary party organisations to the

CPSU Congresses, were the bodies for accommodation of interests under the Soviets. **Such forms of accommodation of interests have been missing in the Russian occupational groups system since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.**

RJ Can we say that the most widely spread type of consciousness among state civil servants is the bureaucratic consciousness? Even the Russian liberals, who often criticise the bureaucratic consciousness, are themselves its bearers, which, in particular, is manifested in their aspiration to implement modernisation and to carry out innovations only through the state apparatus.

It is one thing when the state apparatus functions in a traditional state, where the economy is separated from politics, where there is a market and a political system, and they engage in certain relations with each other. This, for example, might be called democracy. In our system the market is not separated from the state, and neither is the economy.

We have neither a class, nor a bureaucratic consciousness. There is nothing but an overwhelming resource consciousness. Efforts of representatives of all occupational groups are aimed at creating an impression of resource scarcity with the state in order to justify their need to obtain ‘what they deserve.’ This is not bureaucratic consciousness, it is a corporate one.

RJ At what stage of development is this corporate consciousness?

It is in some sort of a ‘boggy’ state. It looks like occupational groups have been determined by the state, that laws have been issued, and that groups have been specified, but the occupational groups’ consciousness, a required component of the occupational group order, has been badly shaped and poorly presented. But it does exist. Just remember the recent court rulings, according to which insulting a representative of the ‘militia occupational group’ was legally qualified as kindling hostilities between occupational groups.

Modern domestic occupational groups are separated from each other and they are not transparent.

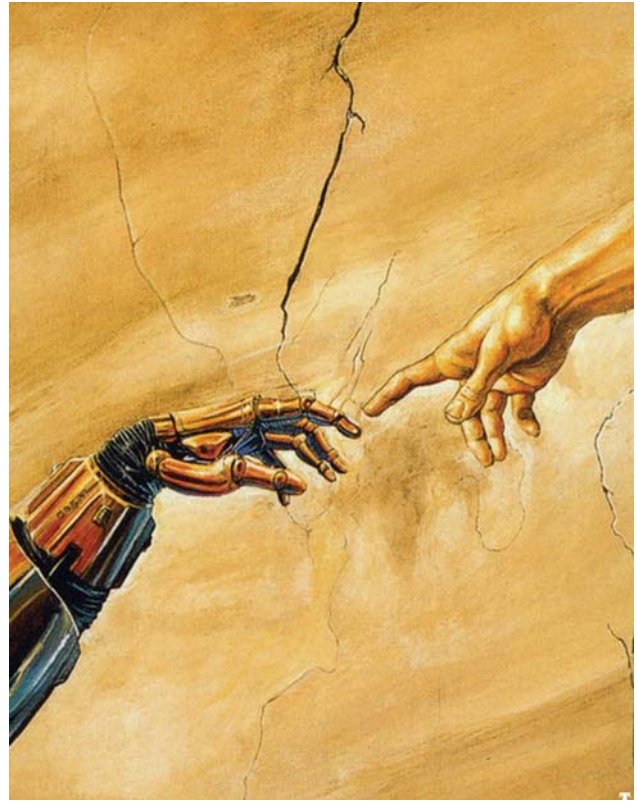
For instance, representatives of other occupational groups do not have information about what is going on in the militia. Hence any ‘leaks,’ such as Dymovsky’s revelations, are perceived as exposure, i.e. as gossip rather than credible information. As of now, the militia corporate consciousness manifests itself only in conflicts with other occupational groups.

There are informational flows in the class society and in the political system, but instead we have flows of rumours and gossip created by one occupational group about another. They are usually about one group having more resources than it is entitled to. Each group, according to all others, seems to ‘take not according to their rank.’

RJ How do bureaucracy and mediocrity relate to each other? Can we say that they are system-based opponents?

There can be no mediocrity if there is no bureaucracy. There is an occupational groups system, and one of its elements are professional people, who are viewed here as mass media employees. But I mentioned earlier that information in the occupational groups society is substituted by rumours and by gossip. What is called the mass media in Russia is a certain generator and producer of images not divided into informational and emotional components.

I would like to emphasise once again that this conceptual machine, which you are trying to impose by the very way you formulate questions, is not applicable to our reality. **We do not have a bureaucracy, we do not have procedures for processing documentation, we do not have procedures for orderly decision-making,**



and there is no proper procedure for the execution of taken decisions. A conceptual net is thrown on the country and on the state, the net that was created in a totally different social reality. Sometimes this net catches something, but this something is not interpreted. A dissonance occurs: it looks like a bureaucracy, but it does not seem as such. It looks like a conflict of interests, but it does not seem as such.

All occupational groups are engaged in the same activity – they create a feeling of a deficit of resources and of an imminent catastrophe as a result. Mass media employees are no different. Above all, carving up resources is the main function of regulators. Everyone is participating in this activity and, as a result, deficit of resources occurs. Everyone is saying that there is a lack of financial resources, though there is a lot of money in the country. They say there is a lack of raw materials. However, our country is rich in these resources. What we lack is a strong resource of authority – it looks like we have a stable system, yet we still feel a deficit of power because necessary decisions are not duly taken. ■

Simon Kordonsky was speaking with Liubov Ulianova