

occasionally insipid. When some of the New York intellectuals censure the exhibitionism and immorality of the 1960's, he concludes: "It would be hard to find a clearer expression of the state which every generation comes to—that of being set in its ways, of preferring the old habits to the new experience." A bold suggestion that the sixties may have *deserved* the reproof, or that the reaction amounted to anything more than Old Fogeyism, might have made this study more "hard-hitting." Webster promises us a sequel, which will take up, among others, the critics dissected by Graff, so no real comparison between the two present volumes is practicable. Webster is apt to be a shade more friendly to the deconstructionists than Graff, and I suppose one should not look for polemics in an encyclopedist. But one must wait and see. After all, Webster has spent a great deal of time now on modern critics for whom, quite obviously, language and literature is more than the inconsequent chatter of lip-clicks. Not even an encyclopedist, surely, could write with equal admiration of the Tory Formalists and the New Nihilists.

Reviewed by R.D. STOCK

Special Psychiatric Hospital

Punitive Medicine, by Alexander Podrabinek, *Ann Arbor, Michigan: Karoma Publishers, 1980. xiii + 192 pp. \$8.95.*

FOR WESTERNERS, *Punitive Medicine* is more than itself: its subject—the use of psychiatric theory, treatment, and drugs to silence political offenders in the Soviet Union—is powerful in itself, but gains more power for us when applied to conditions in the West. Alexander Podrabinek is no Solzhenitsyn. The tone of the writing is matter-of-fact, and for Westerners ac-

customed to dissident literature that not only transcends documentary but approaches poetry, the prose is flat. But the subject of psychiatric treatment for dissidents is horrifying enough to make this book overcome its stylistic defects. It has special meaning for Americans as a warning.

The fact of the matter is that Solzhenitsyn could not have written this book (as he himself has stated). Having been destined for labor camps, he never experienced the special psychiatric hospital (SPH). Under trying (not to mention dangerous) circumstances, Podrabinek has gathered information about each hospital, many doctors, and many patients. The "medical" procedures in the SPH are too brutal and gruesome to describe, yet he describes them. Podrabinek confirms one's worst suspicions about the inhumanity of the Soviet system. At the end of the book he names names: a White List, of patients, and a Black List, of doctors.

Podrabinek describes the process by which a prisoner of conscience will come to be incarcerated—for such is the case: one is in *prison*, Podrabinek carefully explains, in a special hospital. Accusation is carried out on the basis of carefully prepared manuals (included as appendices to this book) delineating the process of "forensic psychiatry," as it is called. The rules, which completely deny rights that Westerners regard as fundamental, are set out as though they were the embodiment of rectitude. In fact, these manuals simply codify the ultimate power of the state. This is perfectly illustrated in the instructional paper "Forensic Psychiatric Examination in the U.S.S.R." which contains a chapter headed "Rights and Duties of Psychiatric Examiners," but no chapter even pretending to be concerned with the rights of the accused.

This is the ironic reality Podrabinek depicts in *Punitive Medicine*: that there is only the most half-hearted and lazy attempt to pay any attention to these pompous codes. Anyone, at any time, may be arrested in the name of "forensic psychiatry," and although they have

instructions to refer to their manuals, the accusers only occasionally make use of them: "These psychiatrists are so unscrupulous that they do not even take the trouble to look for generally accepted diagnosis. They designate what they deem abnormal according to their unprofessional pseudo-standards: 'mania of justice-seeking,' 'Marxismomania,' and the like."

Apparently such mumbo-jumbo is accepted and the processing of dissidents continues undisturbed. Why bother, then, with codes and instructions? Who is being fooled? Obviously the Soviet regime is powerful enough to maintain a completely arbitrary system of incarceration—this dissident going off to labor camp, that one to the mental hospital. The one sent to the hospital may go this year for Marxismomania, next year for socialist paranoia. What purpose is served by these lame subterfuges of codes and instructions other than to confirm the Westerner in his suspicion that the Soviet Union is utterly cynical?

Although Podrabinek acknowledges this cynicism, through which the Soviets maintain the status quo with the appearance of methodology, he himself succumbs to the myth (so lackadaisically built up by the Soviets) of a recourse to justice. Throughout the book, while admitting the *de facto* absence of standards, justice, or methodology, he calls for better psychiatric theory and stricter enforcement of the codes. While realizing that "the conscience of an SPH physician has been replaced with the cynicism of a Chekist," and knowing that the chief physician of a hospital unit "is almost always an officer ranking from lieutenant to major," i.e., "accountable to the KGB," he places what seems to be hopelessly naive trust in reform through the penal codes. I write "seems" because one must remember that in writing this accusation, Podrabinek was in great danger; indeed he is now in internal exile. Without being too Straussian, therefore, one might attribute Podrabinek's baffling trust in methodology to "secret writing"—an attempt to throw off hostile readers. On the other hand, elsewhere in the book he is

quite outspoken against the Soviet regime.

For the Westerner these questions loom. But after we have been thoroughly chilled by the horrors recounted in this book, it would be a terrible mistake to go away without having heard a warning for our own society. The awful maltreatment and indeed incarceration without recourse to justice might cease to be a purely Soviet phenomenon. It would be difficult to imagine a Gulag system springing up in America; thanks to the survivors of death camps elsewhere, we are quite alert to that danger. Indeed our newspaper editors are likely to see prison camps as the logical next stage of any program with which they disagree. But how many criminals in this country are given psychiatric treatment rather than jail sentences?

The psychiatric hospital whose purpose is to "treat" criminals is already a reality in our society. Of course our aim is not to punish these people; they are not political prisoners, and our methods do not approach the brutality of the Soviets'. But as to the treatment, its methodology is not much less murky than that in the Soviet system, and it has seldom been scrutinized by Americans anxious to uphold freedom of conscience. For the criminally insane, powerful drugs—perhaps drugs similar to those described by Podrabinek—are the main means of control.

It simply cannot be maintained that psychiatric methods are used solely for rehabilitation. By its very nature the institution houses extremely violent people who will not willingly submit to rehabilitation. Nor can it be maintained that all these inmates are truly insane; the concept of responsibility for one's own actions is obfuscated in the current judicial practice.

Surely freedom of conscience is the one freedom that we should never take away from anyone—not even a rapist or murderer. But psychiatric drugs can strip a convict of even that freedom. And what if he has been convicted unjustly? Even an innocent man, who might otherwise have the solace of his clear conscience, can be drugged, electroshocked, or even lobotomized out of his only means of communication

with his God. If we sever this last line of hope (and those who think I am exaggerating are referred to the sad story of Cardinal Mindszenty), we sever our own claim to justice. Justice is based on the axiom that even the most lowly Judas may at the last moment receive mercy from his Creator. But we Westerners have allowed our system to follow its own ill-conceived, positivist logic to the point where we can barely discern the principles of justice from which we began.

The message of *Punitive Medicine* is not only that we must pray for the prisoners in the U.S.S.R., but also that we must examine ourselves for symptoms of the ideology that leads to that horror. The philosophy that allows the Soviets to embrace evil as justice is powerful here too: the belief that the state makes no mistakes; that it could not condemn an innocent man; that a man, once condemned, has no nook or cranny in his mind or spirit that is sacred; that the state may meddle at will.

I do not believe that there are political prisoners in America. If there were any, they would not be treated with the torture and sadism that the Soviets routinely practice. In fact, ironically (in view of the situation in the U.S.S.R.), if there *is* a political prisoner here, his conscience is fully respected, whereas murderers are subjected to mental mistreatment. It may not always remain that way, however. The system of psychiatric treatment for those who are seemingly in control of their action is already here. Its methodology is extremely nebulous. (Indeed, many criminals are persuaded that the mental institution is preferable to jail, and so plead insanity—not a clear-cut psychiatric principle, that.) Those who safeguard liberty do not seem to be interested in sweeping away the accumulated specious reasoning that obscures the truth. If there should ever come a time when those same champions of liberty are punished for their beliefs, they will never be sent to a prison camp, unless it be called a special psychiatric hospital.

Reviewed by LEILA MARIE LAWLER