

An Introduction to the Soviet Political System

On November 7, 1917, Vladimir I. Lenin led the Bolshevik Party takeover of power in Russia, setting in motion the creation of the first socialist state, The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union. The Party's expressed goal was to achieve the communist utopia that Karl Marx and Frederick Engels envisioned in their *Communist Manifesto* more than half a century earlier. Lenin's triumphant return from exile following the fall of the Tsarist regime and the ascendance of the Bolsheviks heralded a new era that promised the liberation of oppressed workers and peasants as well as equality, advancement, peace, and social justice for all. The actual political system that emerged, of course, diverged radically from that utopian dream. What materialized instead was one of the most closed, repressive, and unequal—not to mention violent—regimes the world has ever known. Politically and economically, Russia's communist system dominated, often violently, both its own people and those of the empire that it controlled. It ultimately served as a model for all communist regimes that arose around the world during the twentieth century.

For a half century after World War Two, the Soviet Union and the United States occupied opposing positions in a bipolar international system: two superpowers balancing power in a cold war, which if it had turned hot, would likely have had terrifying global consequences. And then, suddenly and shockingly, both the Soviet Empire and the Soviet Union itself disintegrated, and communism dissolved as a meaningful ideal for other revolutionary leaders.¹

If we wish to understand the difficulty that postcommunist leaders had in trying to achieve their goals after the fall of communism, we must first grasp the essential impact that the Soviet system had and how its legacy continues to affect

the politics and the people of Russia. Soviet political development was a standard course in undergraduate and graduate political science programs for much of the 20th century, and textbooks and readers abound that reflect divergent ways of understanding the Soviet Union. In the most general sense, the Western view of the Soviet Union is split in half. Until the late 1950s, the vast majority of studies described the Soviet Union as a rigid monolith, a violent totalitarian state lacking in dynamism and flexibility.² By the 1960s, a shift began with increasing portrayals of the Soviet Union as responsive, flexible and inclusive.³ The reality, of course, lay somewhere in between. There can be no doubt whatsoever that, upon Stalin's death in 1952, the level of internal violence decreased, terror eased, and the quiet stability of bureaucratic rule accurately described the day-to-day political atmosphere.⁴ Yet, this in no way negates the fact that the gulag prison system, rule by fear, and the arbitrary application of that rule all remained as central features of Soviet power.

As a general overview, Soviet political history from 1917 to 1991 may safely be categorized into distinct periods. The early years of 1917 to 1921 was the revolutionary period, when the new Bolshevik regime, headed by Lenin, was focused on securing Communist Party control over the vast Russian territory while defeating counterrevolutionary movements during the Civil War. At the same time, the new radicals in power experimented with the rapid introduction of some of their most utopian ideas during this period of "War Communism," including abolishing money, mostly with disastrous results. The result was chaos; some areas were plagued by famine, others by virtual anarchy, while others felt the first hints of a crushingly oppressive dictatorship that would eventually consume the entire country.

The wreckage of War Communism led to what historians consider a tactical retreat by Lenin and the Party in a pragmatic series of policies designed to restore stability and growth. These were known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). The backtracking from radical Marxist ideas in these years, which provided the ideological basis for a future period of reform in the late 1980s, encouraged entrepreneurial innovation in an effort to jump-start economic growth and development. The NEP lasted only a few years, however.

Lenin's untimely death in 1924 sparked a violent internal leadership struggle during which Stalin engineered a series of purges, first against the left wing of the Party and then against the right wing, ultimately leaving himself at the top of the Party and state as the unchallenged, supreme leader. While one can identify various policy initiatives, such as revolution from above, collectivization and industrialization (1927–1932), the Great Terror (1932–1938), World War II (1939–1945), and late Stalinism (1945–1953), it is fair to refer to the entire period from 1927 to 1953 as Stalinism. As McAuley summarizes, Stalinism featured the institution of

an enormous and overlapping party–state bureaucratic apparatus, a command economy, a pervasive secret police, and a personality cult around the supreme leader overseeing arbitrary rule. The *mature* Stalinist system was an administrative-command structure encompassing all of these features consolidated during Stalin’s rule, and it remained fairly stable through the early 1980s.⁵

However, the system underwent important changes from the perspective of the Soviet people both inside and outside the Communist Party apparatus. Nikita Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in 1956, which exposed and denounced many of the crimes committed under Stalin, opened a thaw in Soviet internal politics, prompting a period of de-Stalinization and relaxing of terror. While there were swings between openness and retreat, innovation and conservatism, the period from Khrushchev’s ascension to Brezhnev’s death was a period of stability under the administrative-command system of the Soviet socialist state, which political scientist Seweryn Bialer has masterfully detailed. It was also a period of great technological advancement with the advent of the space age, the emergence of the global reach of Soviet power, and the height of the Cold War.

Even during periods of relative openness, however, it is a reasonable characterization that, at least from Stalin’s consolidation of power in the late 1920s through the mid-1980s, the party–state apparatus tolerated no opposition to or deviation from the “correct line” as established by the Party leadership on any given issue at any given time. Through its Central Committee organizations and approved by the apex of power in the Politburo, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) dictated the “truth” that was compulsory for all.⁶ From economic output parameters established in the central plans to the maintenance of tight censorship of a wide range of subjects in all media, the Soviet Union was, in many aspects, an inflexible and highly controlled society in which a pervasive secret police enforced adherence to the directives from on high. A rigid, vertical power structure culminating with the General Secretary of the Communist Party yielded clear lines of authority, and those above wielded myriad sources of power over those at levels below in enforcing order. Fear pervaded society from arbitrary application of those rules, which could change at any time. An atomized society was the result.

It is these general aspects that support the totalitarian image of the nature of Soviet power from at least Stalin’s consolidation of power until the very last years of the regime. It was not, however, the only image of the USSR in the scholarly community.⁷ From roughly the time of the internal political thaw under Nikita S. Khrushchev in the late 1950s, a contending image saw the post-Stalin Soviet Union as a modern political system, striving to meet the needs of a people while maintaining internal stability in the context of the Cold War competition. Such approaches emphasized the degree to which the regime was flexible, allowed for

upward mobility and opportunity, and met the needs of the people. It focused on achievements from the dramatic, as in the first explosion of a hydrogen bomb and winning the race to outer space, to the mundane, as in the expansion of availability of and improvements in quality of consumer goods, or to put it differently, in the degree to which it was able to put food on the table.

Much of the basis for these judgments about the internal stability and strength of the Soviet Union, we now know, relied heavily upon Soviet economic data, which in fact, proved to be wildly unreliable. Party and state functionaries had enormous incentives to “cook the books” in ways that suggested growth and efficiency, thereby masking gross inefficiencies and flaws in the command economy. Nevertheless, it is absolutely the case that few scholars saw deep-seated instability and fragility in the regime in the mid-1980s. Most were impressed with the sources of stability, to use Bialer’s phrase, as evidenced by these military, scientific, and other achievements.

Regardless of the lens through which scholars viewed the regime, all described an overlapping party–state bureaucracy with duplication in every sphere. Where there was a government ministry for agriculture, there was a Party Central Committee Department for the same. Indeed, for every sector of activity, whether mining, forestry, heavy and light industry, etc., in the economy or the press, youth, the arts, etc., in social affairs, there existed a CPSU department and a government ministry to establish and implement the correct line at all times. At every factory, publishing house, theater, etc., the KGB “Fourth Department” officer monitored compliance and behavior—cast the shadow of fear that ensured order throughout society. Such was the design of the mature Stalinist system that long outlived its namesake and was replicated in every Soviet client state as well. It set the rules and maintained compliance over the vast majority of activities affecting the vast majority of individuals in the vast majority of circumstances. And, lest we forget, it was the system that cast so much fear over the West for its perceived successes and achievements, indeed its perceived superiority, in terms of internal stability, economic growth, and scientific and military advancement.

The Soviet Union was a serious challenger ideologically, politically, militarily, and economically to the democratic–capitalist West throughout most of the 20th century. It projected power globally, with aspirations for expansion that were every bit as universal as those of the United States and a conviction every bit as strong that the system was ideal for people everywhere. The system was built on lofty revolutionary ideals, and the implementation of those ideals was understood as an experiment whose success would generate emulation, much as the founders of the United States understood their project in the late eighteenth century.

The selections that follow provide a brief overview of Soviet political history, of the system of fear that so uniquely characterized the political system, and of the nature of Soviet stability, which most scholars saw in the 1980s, that made the collapse at the end of that decade such a shock to many. The chapter by Mary McAuley is the introduction to her masterfully concise synopsis of Soviet political history. Anyone wishing to have a basic knowledge of that empire ought to read her *Soviet Politics 1917–1991*, which consists of her lectures in her Introduction to Soviet Politics course at Oxford. The introduction included here elaborates on the periods suggested above, with more background. The second selection is from Merle Fainsod's classic, *How Russia is Ruled*. His student, Jerry Hough, in the 1980s, transformed this book, preserving his mentor as coauthor, in *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*. The difference in approach was fundamental; it was truly a different book. Fainsod's was the most widely read and the most thorough approach to Soviet politics in the totalitarian school. Any number of sections would have served to convey the essence of that approach. His chapter on terror, however, serves best to demonstrate both how the political system was constructed and how fear played such an essential role to its operation both within the Party and throughout society. Fear was the backbone, and in describing the backbone, Fainsod also portrays the body. The reader will need to read between the lines a bit to get the full picture or get ahold of Fainsod's book and read more. Finally, Bialer's chapter on Soviet stability details how the political system functioned through the two decades prior to Gorbachev's introduced fundamental reforms. Fear remained, but terror was gone, and the system settled in. Even those who anticipated change with a new generation of leaders were compelled, as was Bialer, by the resilience, the success, and the future stability of the Soviet political system. His was the dominant view in the mid-1980s, and reading his chapter today is essential to understanding the effect Gorbachev had and in evaluating Gorbachev as a leader. One must conclude that the Soviet collapse was hardly preordained!

For Further Reference

Books

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NOTES

1. The best, and most concise, political history of the Soviet Union remains Mary McAuley's *Soviet Politics 1917–1991* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

2. As a leading example, see Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Harvard University Press, 1963). Also Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (The Rand Corporation, 1952); T. H. Rigby, "Politics in the Mono-Organizational Society," in *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe* (University of California Berkeley, 1976); and Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Praeger, 1961).

3. Jerry Hough rewrote and retitled Fainsod's account, though preserving him as a coauthor, in *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Harvard University Press, 1979). Also see Sewereyn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

4. Ken Jowitt describes this *routinization* in *New World Disorder* (University of California Press, 1992).

5. See Bialer, "The Mature Stalinist System," in *Stalin's Successors*.

6. I still find the best explication of the correct line and its role in Soviet rule to be Jowitt, *New World Disorder*, pp. 8–11.

7. George Breslauer has published a thought-provoking postmortem on the field of sovietology, laying out the main trends and the strengths and weakness of those trends. See his "In Defense of Sovietology," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (October–December 1992), pp. 197–238.

Introduction

Mary McCauley

~~In reply to~~ 9 January 1917 the Russian Empire stretched from Vladivostok in the east to Poland in the west, from the frozen Arctic Circle down to the arid lands of Central Asia. A population of roughly 125 million inhabited the huge continent, a population whose dominant group of Slavs, centred in Russia and the Ukraine, had spread out east and southwards to all parts of the Empire. More than 100 different nationalities—Armenians, Innuits, Germans, and Kazakhs, to name but a few—lived within its boundaries and, in terms of religion, Orthodox Russians were joined by Muslims in the south, Lutherans and Catholics in the west. Eighty per cent of the population were peasants, and illiterate. By the turn of the century, however, and certainly by January 1917, industry had made its appearance; the railways had spread their network across the country, large industrial centres and huge shipyards employed both skilled and raw unskilled labour, and modern technology was operating alongside wheelbarrows. The country was ruled by Tsar Nicholas II, whose brutal autocratic regime was supported by an aristocracy happier speaking French than Russian, by the army with its smart officer corps, and by the Russian Orthodox Church. Rule was carried out through the state bureaucracy centred in St Petersburg, the capital of the Empire, and in the provinces governors ruled with the help of the army, and new local government institutions.

In February 1917 Tsarism collapsed, brought down when the soldiers joined the women protesting in the bread queues. Nine months of turmoil followed. Revolution gathered speed as social and economic conflict deepened; an attempt to replace the old Tsarist autocratic regime with constitutional rule ended with the Bolsheviks taking power in the capital, and the revolution spread across the country. The Bolsheviks, a working-class party with a small group of intellectuals among its leadership, came to power in the major industrial centres with the support of the rank and file soldiers and the industrial workers. They, as a socialist party, were committed to replacing private ownership with social ownership, and to a society of equality run by workers and peasants, a society without coercion and without a legal system because crime would be no more. Freedom, creativity, and science would be its hallmarks, religion would fade away, and new forms of

Source: Mary McCauley, "Introduction," *Soviet Politics, 1917-1991*. Oxford University Press, 1992. 1-11.

art and culture would emerge. A new international morality would inform the socialist world order from which war would disappear.

In Western eyes Russia in January 1917 was a primitive sleeping giant, a force to be reckoned with, a Great Power with whom alliances should be made, but a sadly illiberal regime who, it was hoped, might one day move towards a more enlightened form of government. With the coming to power of the Bolsheviks, Western opinion divided. The established governments were fearful: if Bolshevik aims were realized, it was the end of the system of power, privilege, and wealth which existed in Western society. This was a time when the upper classes were looking nervously over their shoulders at their own working classes as they too, began to claim their rights. In England wealthy members of society put their jewels in strong-boxes in Brighton so that they could move across the Channel to safer places should the revolution occur in London, Liverpool, or Manchester. The Western press portrayed the Bolsheviks as inhuman monsters, and stressed the Jewish origins of their leaders, and their unnatural ideas. But if unnatural, then came the argument that the ideals were unrealizable, and that here was a hopeless experiment bound to fail. This view was held initially by members of the old order inside Russia too. Very different was the response from the labour movement in the West, a response which resulted in a split within its ranks. Some saw the Bolsheviks as the standard-bearers of socialism and thereafter gave their support to the (Bolshevik) Communist Party in the Soviet Union; others were far more sceptical or hostile.

Let us now jump twenty years to November 1937. What did Russia look like in 1937 and what of the aims and hopes of 1917? A new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had replaced the original Russian Empire, but it was still a single socialist state, ringed by a circle of hostile capitalist countries. Private ownership had gone. Whether we are talking of industry, now under nationalized state ownership, of retail trade and services, or of agriculture where collective (co-operative) and state farms had replaced family farms, private ownership of productive assets was no more. But far from withering away, the state had grown: a huge centralized state machine, consisting of commissariats (as the ministries were called)—for heavy industry, defence, education, justice—operated out of the new capital, Moscow. In place of that dream of popular participation, of an end to bureaucracy and hierarchy, there were state institutions, run on a hierarchical basis, issuing orders and instructions to the industrial enterprises and the institutions which themselves were organized on the basis of one-man management. The soviets, the councils elected by workers and peasants and soldiers, although they existed in name, had long ceased to be active bodies running local affairs. In 1935 a new Constitution was announced which gave pride of place to a legislature called the Supreme Soviet. On paper its provisions looked remarkably like those of a Western constitution: a federal system of eleven republics (each based on a key

language group), with direct elections of deputies to the Supreme Soviet on the basis of universal suffrage. But the elections were not envisaged as elections between competing parties; rather the electorate turned out to cast their votes for a single candidate in each constituency, thus reaffirming their support for the order in which they were living, and the federal arrangements masked a system in which all key decisions, both on policy and personnel, were made in Moscow.

The key political institution in 1937 was the Communist Party and in particular its apparatus, an inner core of full-time party functionaries, directed from Moscow, and controlling all the republics. They were the ones with an authoritative voice, with the power to issue orders which were obligatory for all. By 1937, however, the party apparatus was under threat from the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the secret police. The year 1937 saw the height of the Great Purges—terror, show trials, arrests of old Bolsheviks, of new commissars, members of the new élite, and of the general public. The Gulag, a network of labour camps, stretched across the country. And, standing above the Communist Party apparatus, the large state bureaucracy, and the NKVD, was the figure of Stalin, cloaked in an extraordinary cult of the wise leader—Stalin to whom hymns were sung, Stalin whose light burned in the little Kremlin window so that the citizens of Moscow would know that the great leader was always awake, always thinking and caring about them.

What though of society in 1937? Here the picture is a confusing one. On the one hand there was rapid social mobility: hundreds of thousands, even millions of peasants and industrial workers, of society's poor, had obtained an education and moved up to office-work, to positions of authority, and management. By 1937 there were factory directors who in 1917 had been apprentices, there were women who had escaped from the drudgery of home and sweat-shop, and become engineers, architects, doctors, and NKVD officials. This mobility, however, had been accompanied by a gradual reimposition, the reintroduction of hierarchy and privilege. By 1937 an élite had emerged with access to scarce goods, new apartments, and special shops. But this was only part of the picture. The campaign to collectivize the countryside from 1929 to 1932 had resulted in the deaths of millions of peasants, and millions more of the urban population were now in the camps. For some the 1930s meant achievement, a life their parents could never have dreamed of; for others, the old intellectuals, it was a time of confusion and anxiety; and for many of all strata it brought death in the labour camps.

Western attitudes were still divided between those who now saw the Soviet Union as the promised land and those who were more sceptical. For some everything that took place in Soviet Russia was good, a new civilization had taken root. But even their conservative opponents were much more positive than they had been twenty years earlier. The quality press referred approvingly to 'the sensible Mr. Stalin', who was perceived as greatly preferable to such heady and

foolish Bolsheviks as Lenin and Trotsky. Mr Stalin had introduced a Constitution, brought Russia into the League of Nations, and, probably the most important factor, Russia was a potential bulwark against Fascism, and Hitler's Germany.

Forty years later takes us to 1977. In the intervening period the Second World War had devastated the western part of the country, and 20 million had died. From 1917 through to 1945 the whole period was one of trauma, of death, of tragedy, turmoil, and headlong speed. It was followed by an unprecedented period of peace, and social calm. By 1977 there were still 100 nationalities, speaking different languages, in a population of more than 260 million, of whom more than half now lived in towns. The old peasant society had yielded to an industrial one. In the previous twenty years, from 1957 to 1977, huge strides in education, in health, and housing had been made, and in the standard of living in general. Those years saw a rapid improvement in the provision of consumer durables and also in the food supply. But the pattern of provision did not reflect that found, even twenty years earlier, in the industrialized West. The Soviet Union still had a very large agricultural sector and a very inefficient one, short on skill and technology. Lacking a transport system, lacking storage facilities, even a good harvest did not guarantee food in the shops. There were no supermarkets, few cars, no shopping centres of the kind which dotted Europe and North America. It was still a society in which one sent jam made from berries picked in the forest through the post to relatives in other parts of the country who might not have any sugar in the winter. Industry had its advanced sectors, particularly in the military sphere, but also a pool of poorly qualified, unskilled labour, and by 1977 the technology gap with the West was no longer closing. This meant, for example, that a Soviet fridge might need seven times as much electricity to run as its Western counterpart, that a pair of spectacles was twice as heavy to wear. In terms of quality, new products, and technological performance, Soviet industry by 1977 was falling behind. The catching up process was slowing down. Militarily, however, by 1977 the Soviet Union had obtained parity with the United States: it was one of two superpowers. And not only that. It was now the dominant figure in the world Communist-movement, flanked to the east by the Communist Party states of Eastern Europe, to the west by the Chinese republic (albeit a difficult socialist relation), and courted by Third World countries.

What kind of a political system existed in 1977? Political authority rested with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: the single political Party that was allowed, as stated in the new Constitution of 1977, to be the leading political organization in society. The General Secretary of the party, and also head of state, was Leonid Brezhnev, a cautious politician, who had made the Politburo, the leading party organ, into the cabinet of the system. This small body of leading party officials and ministers, chaired by the General Secretary, and staffed by

the party Secretariat, took the key policy decisions. Thereafter the party apparatus of full-time officials, stretching from the Secretariat down to the localities, was responsible for ensuring that the appropriate state institutions executed the decisions emanating from the centre. The mass membership of the party now stood at approximately 16 million; many of its members' views were indistinguishable from those of non-members but they were obliged to carry out the instructions and decisions taken by the higher party organizations. Many worked, in different capacities, in the huge state apparatus which was growing visibly year by year, as ever more institutions, ministries, and state committees encrusted the overblown centre of the empire. Coercion was still there, but in the background rather than to the fore. The KGB was still responsible for surveillance and control but it was no longer operating a system of terror, of arbitrary arrest and repression. By 1977 citizens knew what was and was not permissible.

We are talking then of a highly centralized system of political control over all major activities, the economy, the media, and social activities. The key values of the system, by 1977, had become those of patriotism, stability, and order. As an example, let us take the initiation ceremony at which 9-year-old children joined the Young Pioneers, the youth organization. They would be given their red ties, their little badges of Lenin, and, during the ceremony, introduced to individuals who represented the heroes of Soviet society, past and present. The person they would have wished most of all to have present was, of course, Lenin. By then he was a sacred figure, the father figure, the person who had made the revolution and made life ever better for children not only in the Soviet Union but throughout the world. Given this was impossible, it was desirable to find an old Bolshevik, someone who had known Lenin, preferably someone who had touched him, at the least someone who had seen him and would be able to tell the children what he or she had thought and felt on hearing Lenin speak. A second individual would be a veteran of the Second World War, someone who had defended the motherland and who could talk of the fight against the fascists, and a third would be a hero of socialist labour, a worker with an outstanding production record. Ideally he or she would be a *young* hero of socialist labour whose father or mother and grandparents before that had worked in the same factory—the representative of a labour dynasty. Here then were three figures signifying the system: Lenin—the revolution; the war veteran—patriotism; and a hero of socialist labour—the working class.

Western attitudes were by now far more ambivalent, both those of the establishment and those within the labour movement. The Soviet Union had been an ally in the Second World War, but then came the Cold War, and the spread of Communism throughout the world. In the 1950s the American public could still be swayed by anti-Communist hysteria, while Communist candidates won elections in Europe. But Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's dictatorship in 1956,

the Soviet government's use of force in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the United States' inability to portray, even to itself, the Vietnam war as a fight for freedom, made the old convictions less secure. The 1970s saw *détente* and new co-operation between the world's two great nuclear powers, but civil rights still-dogged the agenda. As ideological passion gave way to cautious conservatism in the Soviet Union, so in the West defenders and critics voiced their convictions less stridently. The European Communist parties began to distance themselves from Moscow and when, in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan tried to re-create 'the evil empire' the theme had little resonance, even in the United States.

In 1988, as Reagan left the White House, the Soviet Union had an energetic new Communist Party leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, who was speaking out on the need for economic and political reform, but no major changes had yet taken place. Brezhnev, who died in 1982, would have disapproved of many of Gorbachev's statements, and counselled against such rash adventurism, but he would have recognized the system as the one he knew. By the end of 1991, within the space of three years, both his and Gorbachev's world had gone for ever, with momentous and unpredictable consequences not only for the peoples of the Soviet Union but for the world as a whole.

It was not simply that what had appeared to be a stable, authoritarian regime in an increasingly conservative society found itself forced to adapt to unexpected pressures for change, but that the political system fell apart, the empire disintegrated, and the economy collapsed. Even arrangements that had pre-dated the revolution of 1917 bit the dust. It was not just that the countries of Eastern Europe gained their independence, and the Baltic states which had been incorporated into the Soviet Union at the time of the Second World War became sovereign states, but that, on the territory of the, original Russian Empire which had formed the basis for the subsequent Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a new Commonwealth of sovereign states was announced. When the heir to the Tsarist throne, Grand Duke Vladimir, flew in from Paris in November 1991 for the celebrations to mark the renaming of Leningrad as St Petersburg, he arrived in a Russia which no longer ruled the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and those lands of Central Asia which had belonged to his forefathers. These new sovereign states now had popularly elected parliaments or presidents, some of whom, such as Yeltsin in Russia and Kravchuk in the Ukraine were old Communist Party politicians, while others, such as Gamsakhurdia in Georgia (shortly to be ousted by force) or Landsbergis in Lithuania, were 'dissidents' or newcomers to politics. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union had been dissolved, and its republican organizations banned in most republics.

As political authority had slipped away, during 1990 and 1991, from the central institutions to the republics, and the Communist Party lost its power and position,

the centre had grown weaker and weaker. By August 1991 there was a black hole: a President with the power to issue decrees that were not implemented, left only with control over the still centralized means of coercion, the military, KGB, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, although the degree of central control over the latter two was already in doubt. An attempted coup by some of Gorbachev's ministers sought to reimpose some kind of control over a territory, the old Empire, in which central political authority had evaporated. With its failure the republican governments began, in keeping with their political autonomy, to claim the responsibility for the defence of their territories. The nakedness of the Presidency became all too apparent: the existence of the nuclear arsenal its only remaining rationale. By December 1991 both the Presidency and other central institutions had been wound up, and the question of who should control the armed forces came to the fore.

The breakneck political change was not accompanied by economic reform and, as the centrally planned economy broke down and failed to provide the goods, the central government printed more money and raised wages, while the economy spiralled ever downwards. With the abolition of the centre, the new republican governments became responsible for those resources that traditionally came under the jurisdiction of the central ministries, and for the worsening economic situation. All that had been agreed by the end of 1991, and to varying degrees by the different republican governments, was that state ownership and central planning must be replaced by some kind of a private-ownership market system if their economies were ever going to compete with the advanced industrial countries of east and west.

The key resources of the media were no longer centrally controlled, indeed they were hardly controlled at all. In liberal democratic systems the degree of state control and censorship varies, as does the control over editorial policy by those who own radio, television companies, and the press. But in the Soviet Union, as central government control began to slip, an extraordinary situation developed in which those who spoke for the media became responsible to no one but themselves. They still drew their salaries because the bureaucratic state machine still trundled on; the constraints were those of the availability of paper and of equipment, and the whims of producers, the journalists themselves, and, for local media, the local authorities. Soviet television became perhaps the freest medium in the world.

If 1917 saw a revolution that changed the face of the world for the next fifty years, 1989–91 witnessed a phenomenon of equal significance: the disintegration, in the space of three years, of probably the most powerful empire the world has known. The world Communist movement, the movement whose aim had been to bury capitalism, was no more. It is too early even to guess the repercussions. We suggested earlier that Western reactions to 1917, to Stalinism, and to the

Soviet Union under Brezhnev had varied, and were strongly influenced by factors in the home environment. The reader might like to pause, and consider why the press and the politicians of the late 1980s adopted the positions they did towards the reform process, and the collapse of Communist Party rule. Are Western perceptions in 1990 any better informed than those of 1917, and what are the interests involved? A concern for democracy and human rights, or for strategic weapons and the balance of power in the world, fear of the repercussions of economic chaos, or the chance to plunder the rich resources of a huge continent? How will a future generation assess the West's reaction to the end of Communist Party rule? One thing is for certain: the collapse owed nothing to the politics of Western powers (technological progress was perhaps a different matter), but the continued support for the Gorbachev leadership may have accentuated the economic crisis and therefore contributed to the subsequent political instability.

Our aim is to try to make sense of the developments since 1985: to show how and why the system fell apart. This requires an understanding of the historical context of the drama, and of the Soviet political system, and also of the way in which, more generally, political change occurs. What is the relationship between economic development (or stagnation) and political change, if any? Do social change or cultural traditions influence political outcomes? Why *does* political change occur? Do key individuals play a part under some circumstances, and, if so, which? Explanations differ, sometimes dramatically.

How then should we begin? We want to arrive at a position from which we can analyse and understand recent and current political developments in what was the Soviet Union. It will help if we bear in mind certain key factors that are relevant to the establishment and maintenance of political regimes in the modern world. Politics, it is often said, is about the exercise of power within society. But such a statement is too broad: there are many kinds of power we would not want to describe as political. It is better to think in terms of a particular type of power: that associated with *ruling*, with the ability to determine the rules for a society, and to back up their implementation with force, if need be. Authority and control of the means of coercion are the key attributes of rulers. That does not mean that there are not instances when those in control possess nothing but their weapons, but this is an unstable basis for rule because the *right* to rule, the authority of those in power, is not recognized. Hence rulers are anxious to acquire authority, which may rest on different bases: it may, for example, be seen as God given, to stem from tradition, or from an election. This has the consequence that those who possess political power are always sharply observant of those who control the means of communication, of culture and education: in older times the Church, today the media and education. They may be content to observe, to intervene at the edges, if their authority is not threatened; they may move in to censor or take over.

Similarly they will be concerned with the use of economic resources. If the rulers are to maintain an army to defend the territory against outsiders and order within it (perhaps their basic task), they need to raise taxes; they may also decide they require revenue to provide themselves with the lifestyle to which they feel entitled, or to carry out certain projects. Now a poor economy not only provides a weak tax base, but is likely to increase the discontent of those who have to pay. Hence economic prosperity is desirable, and even more desirable if the rulers acquire the obligation to provide education or welfare. They may well feel the need to strike a delicate balance between allowing those who own and dispose of the economic resources to exploit them as they wish, and ensuring that the consequences do not create a level of social discontent that jeopardizes their own safety as rulers. Hence those who control the political resources (authority and coercion) will be very aware of those who control economic resources and may, for different reasons, move in to share or limit the rights of ownership.

There are then resources which provide those who possess them with power: the means of coercion, the attribute of authority, control of knowledge and ideas, the ownership of economic resources. Control over the means of coercion is the most important because it will decide the outcome of an issue if it cannot be resolved by other means; it is the most powerful resource of all. In analysing political regimes we take that for granted, then turn our attention to the relationships between the holders of political office (and authority), the citizenry, and those who 'own' and control the other key resources. These will determine the key contours of the state—society relationship. Coercion, authority, economic resources, and the means of communication all featured in the thumb-nail sketches of 1917, 1937, 1977, and 1991, and the changing relationship between them will run like a motif through the following chapters.

If a major objective is to make sense of developments in the Soviet Union as *perestroika* turned into the collapse of Communist Party rule, the other is to cast light on the extraordinary period 1917–91 as a whole. There was a revolution, the creation of a new state, an unprecedented experiment at crash industrialization and social mobility, a dictatorship and mass terror, its replacement by a system of conservative state control, and then the swift collapse of the state, the end of empire, and embryonic attempts to create a new political order. All pose interesting and difficult problems of analysis in their own right. All raise important political issues. To mention but two: what are the causes and consequences of terror, and what are the pre-conditions for the establishment and maintenance of a democratic order? As we shall see, there are no easy answers. The chapters that follow, while providing a minimal narrative account of the political history of the period, each address a different and important political topic. We begin with revolution.

Terror as a System of Power

Merle Fainsod

Every totalitarian regime makes some place for terror in its system of controls. Whether exercised on a massive scale by a Stalin or held in reserve by a Khrushchev, an awareness of its potentialities conditions the behavior of the totalitarian subject. Under Stalin, the pervasive fear of the informer and the secret police made the air heavy with suspicion and distrust. Under Khrushchev, Soviet citizens breathe and talk more freely, but the knowledge that the police remain vigilant serves as a brake on those who remember the past.

This does not mean that coercion is the only method by which a totalitarian regime maintains itself in power. Loyalty and devotion must also be elicited. The skillful totalitarian dictator weaves a complex web of controls in which social pressures and incentives have their appointed places and indoctrination plays a key role. Agitation and propaganda may rally fanatic support, and appeals to self-interest may enlist the energies of the ambitious and bind their fortunes to the regime. When discontent accumulates, "loyalty" to the regime may be consolidated by providing scapegoats on whom frustrated aggression may exhaust itself. The shrewd totalitarian dictatorship may go further and permit ventilation of grievances of a nonpolitical and nonorganized character. It may even institutionalize such expression as the Soviet dictatorship does when it sanctions criticism of bureaucratic malpractice or inefficiency. Such criticism may play a constructive role in strengthening the regime since it accomplishes the triple function of draining off aggression on the part of its subjects, prodding the bureaucracy to improve its performance, and sustaining the belief that the supreme leadership is genuinely concerned about popular complaints and vexations.

Yet ultimately the totalitarian dictatorship must depend on terror to safeguard its monopoly of power. The instrument of terror can always be found, ready for use when needed, operative, above all, even when not visible by the mere fact that it is known to exist. Because the totalitarian regime provides no legitimate channel for the expression of political dissent, its constant concern is to prevent or eliminate its illegal existence. To accomplish this purpose, it recruits its specialists in surveillance and espionage and uses fear as a political weapon. The task of the secret police is to

Source: Merle Fainsod, "Terror as a System of Power," *How Russia is Ruled*. Harvard University Press, 1963. 421-462.

serve as the eyes and ears of the dictator, to perform a prophylactic as well as a punitive function. It must not only hear what people say; it must also be prepared to diagnose their souls and plumb their innermost thoughts. It must transform every citizen into a potential watchdog and informer, not merely to paralyze the activities of "imperialist agents," but also to uncover "unstable Soviet people who have erred and fallen under alien influence." It must, as N. Mironov, the head of the Central Committee Department of Administrative Organs, put it, "rear Soviet people in a spirit of revolutionary vigilance," for only vigilance can be trusted to protect the regime against those who seek to "harm" and "undermine" it.

The Defense of Terror

The practice of totalitarian terror generates its own underlying theoretical justifications. The role of terror in Communist ideology furnishes a prime example. Violence is accepted as implicit in the class struggle. As Lenin said in defending the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, "Violence when it is committed by the toiling and exploited masses is the kind of violence of which we approve." This instrumental attitude toward violence prepares the way for its sanctification when employed by the Party in the name of the working class and by the Party leadership in the name of the Party.

The rationalization of terror embraces two central propositions. The first emphasizes the safety of the revolution as the supreme law. In the words of Lenin, "The Soviet Republic is a fortress besieged by world capital . . . From this follows our right and our duty to mobilize the whole population to a man for the war." The second emphasizes the intransigence of the enemies of the revolution, the necessity of crushing them completely if the revolution itself is not to be destroyed. "What is the 'nutritive medium'," asks Lenin,

which engenders counterrevolutionary enterprises, outbreaks, conspiracies, and so forth? . . . It is the medium of the bourgeoisie, of the bourgeois intelligentsia, of the kulaks in the countryside, and, everywhere, of the "non-Party public, as well as of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. We must treble our watch over this medium, we must multiply it ten-fold. We must multiply our vigilance, because counterrevolutionary attempts from this quarter are absolutely inevitable, precisely at the present moment and in the near future.

In essence, Stalin's defense of terror, delivered in an interview with visiting a foreign workers' delegation on November 5, 1927, covers much the same ground, though with notably less frankness.

The GPU or Cheka is a punitive organ of the Soviet government. It is more or less analogous to the Committee of Public Safety which was formed during the Great French Revolution . . . It is something in the nature of a military-political tribunal set up for the purpose of protecting the interests of the revolution from attacks on the part of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie and their agents . . .

People advocate a maximum of leniency; they advise the dissolution of the GPU . . . But can anyone guarantee that the capitalists of all countries will abandon the idea of organizing and financing counterrevolutionary groups of plotters, terrorists, incendiaries, and bomb-throwers after the liquidation of the GPU . . . ?

. . . We are a country surrounded by capitalist states. The internal enemies of our revolution are the agents of the capitalists of all countries . . . In fighting against the enemies at home, we fight the counterrevolutionary elements of all countries . . .

No, comrades, we do not wish to repeat the mistakes of the Parisian Communards. The GPU is necessary for the Revolution and will continue to exist to the terror of the enemies of the proletariat.

The real significance of Stalin's theory did not become fully manifest until the period of the Great Purge in the thirties. The liquidation of the Old Bolsheviks made it altogether clear that the salient role of terror in Stalinist ideology was to serve as a bulwark of defense for his own monopoly of Party leadership. Since this involved establishing a regime of terror within the Party, Stalin was faced with the problem of reconciling his innovation with the traditional notion that terror was reserved for the class enemy. The problem was neatly and ruthlessly solved by identifying any form of opposition to Stalin with counterrevolution and foreign espionage. The formula of capitalist encirclement proved elastic enough to embrace the enemy inside the Party as well as the enemy outside. Stalin put it as follows:

It should be remembered and never forgotten that as long as capitalist encirclement exists there will be wreckers, diversionists, spies, terrorists, sent behind the frontiers of the Soviet Union by the Intelligence services of foreign states . . .

It should be explained to our Party Comrades that the Trotskyites, who represent the active elements in the diversionist, wrecking and espionage work of the foreign intelligence services . . . have already long ceased to serve any idea compatible with the interests of the working class, that they have turned into a gang of wreckers, diversionists, spies, assassins, without principles and ideas, working for the foreign intelligence services.

It should be explained that in the struggle against contemporary Trotskyism not the old methods, the methods of discussion, must be used, but new methods, methods for smashing and uprooting it.

After the Great Purge, Stalin again faced the problem of reconciling the retention of these strong-arm methods with the claim that antagonistic classes had ceased to exist in the Soviet Union. In his report to the Eighteenth Party Congress in 1939,

Stalin addressed himself to the issue, "It is sometimes asked: We have abolished the exploiting classes: there are no longer any hostile classes in the country; there is nobody to suppress; hence there is no more need for the state; it must die away—Why then do we not help our socialist state to die away? . . . Is it not time we relegated the state to the museum of antiquities?" Again Stalin rested his case for the retention of the terror apparatus on the allegation of capitalist encirclement:

These questions not only betray an underestimation of the capitalist encirclement, but also an underestimation of the role and significance of the bourgeois states and their organs, which send spies, assassins and wreckers into our country and are waiting for a favourable opportunity to attack it by armed force. They likewise betray an underestimation of the role and significance of our socialist state and of its military, punitive and intelligence organs, which are essential for the defense of the socialist land from foreign attack.

At the height of the purge in 1937, Stalin had sought to justify mass terror on the ground that the internal class struggle was becoming more and more acute as the Soviet Union moved toward socialism. Khrushchev condemned this theory in his secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress, but he did not reject that part of Stalin's formulation which stressed the danger from without. "It must not be forgotten," Khrushchev declared, "that enemies have always tried and will go on trying to hinder the great work of building communism. The capitalist encirclement sent many spies and saboteurs into our country. It would be naive to suppose that our enemies will now give up their efforts to harm us in every way . . . We must therefore raise the revolutionary vigilance of the Soviet people and strengthen the state security agencies in every way." Addressing the Twenty-First Congress, he repeated: "The state security agencies, which direct their spearhead primarily against agents sent into the country by imperialist states, must be strengthened, as must other agencies which have the mission of blocking the provocative actions and intrigues of our enemies from the imperialist camp. Our enemies are spending enormous sums on subversive work against the socialist countries. How, then, can we abolish agencies which have the duty of safeguarding the security of the socialist state! That would be foolish and criminal." Behind these latter-day rationalizations lies the conviction that the Soviet regime cannot dispense with surveillance, even though the mass incidence of terror has been greatly curbed.

The Creation of the Cheka

The genealogy of the Bolshevik terror apparatus reaches back to the first weeks after the seizure of power. In prerevolutionary days, the Bolsheviks had occasion to acquire an intimate familiarity with the operations of the Tsarist *Okhrana* or

secret police; the lessons they learned then were later to be applied and amplified. Lenin quickly decided that the Bolsheviks would have to develop their own Okhrana. In a memorandum dated December 19–20, 1917, he called on Dzerzhinsky, the commandant of Smolny, to organize the struggle against counterrevolution and sabotage. On December 20, the Council of People's Commissars approved a decree establishing the Cheka or All-Russian Extraordinary Commission. Dzerzhinsky was made the first chairman of the eight-member commission. One of its early acts was an appeal "to all local soviets to proceed immediately to the organization of similar commissions." Workers, soldiers, and peasants were instructed to inform the Cheka "about organizations and individual persons whose activity is harmful to the Revolution." At the same time, a system of revolutionary tribunals was established to investigate and try offenses which bore the character of sabotage and counterrevolution. The judges of the revolutionary tribunals were to fix penalties in accordance with "the circumstances of the case and the dictates of the revolutionary conscience."

In the confusion of the first months of the Bolshevik Revolution, terror was far from being a monopoly of the specialists in terror. The Cheka was still in its organizational phase, and its regime was singularly mild compared with what was to come. Acts of violence against the bourgeoisie were common, but they were usually committed by revolutionary mobs and undisciplined sailors and soldiers and were not ordinarily officially authorized and inspired. The early death sentences of the Cheka were imposed on bandits and criminals. As the White forces began to rally their strength, the Cheka spread its net more widely and turned to sterner measures. On February 22, 1918, the Cheka ordered all local soviets "to seek out, arrest, and shoot immediately all members . . . connected in one form or another with counterrevolutionary organizations . . . (1) enemy agents and spies, (2) counterrevolutionary agitators, (3) speculators, (4) organizers of revolt . . . against the Soviet government, (5) those going to the Don to join the . . . Kaledin-Komilov band and the Polish counterrevolutionary legions, (6) buyers and sellers of arms to equip the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie . . . all these are to be shot on the spot . . . when caught red-handed in the act."

The terror began to gather momentum. Gorky's newspaper *Novaya Zhizn'* (New Life) reported, "Executions continue. Not a day, not a night passes without several persons being executed." On the night of April 11, 1918, the Cheka staged a mass raid on anarchist centers in Moscow; several hundred were arrested and approximately thirty were killed while resisting arrest. Though the curve of Cheka activity was rising, its operations still remained on a limited scale.

The terror was given a sharp impetus by the effort of the Left SR's to seize power in Moscow soon after the assassination of German Ambassador Mirbach on July 6, 1918. Large-scale arrests of Left SR's followed, and at least thirteen

were shot. As the punitive actions of the Cheka increased, the SR's replied in kind. On August 30, 1918, Uritsky, the head of the Petrograd Cheka, was assassinated, and Lenin was seriously wounded. The attacks on Uritsky and Lenin unleashed mass reprisals. In Petrograd alone, more than five hundred "counter-revolutionaries and White Guards" were immediately shot. The slaughter in Moscow included "many Tsarist ministers and a whole list of high personages." The president of the Provincial Soviet of Penza reported, "For the murder from ambush of one comrade, Egorov, a Petrograd worker, the Whites paid with 152 lives. In the future firmer measures will be taken against the Whites." The prominent Chekist Latsis declared,

We are no longer waging war against separate individuals, we are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. Do not seek in the dossier of the accused for proofs as to whether or not he opposed the soviet government by word or deed. The first question that should be put is to what class he belongs, of what extraction, what education and profession. These questions should decide the fate of the accused. Herein lie the meaning and the essence of the Red Terror.

The demonstrative massacres which followed the attack on Lenin were designed to strike fear into the hearts of all opponents of the Bolsheviks. The terror was mainly directed against the former nobility, the bourgeoisie, the landowners, the White Guards, and the clergy. But it was by no means confined to these groups. The SR's and Mensheviks, too, felt its sharp edge, and peasants who resisted the requisitioning of grain or who deserted from the Red Army were also among its victims. The Red Terror had its counterpart on the White side; the victims in this grim competition were numbered in the tens of thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands.

As the Cheka broadened the scope of its activities, it also jealously resisted any interference with its claimed authority. Its tendency to set itself above and beyond the law aroused concern even in Bolshevik circles. At the Second All-Russian Conference of Commissars of Justice held in Moscow on July 2-6, 1918,

Comrade Lebedev . . . pointed out that granting the necessity for the existence of the Extraordinary Commissions, it was nevertheless important to delimit their sphere of activity . . . Otherwise we shall have a state within a state, with the former tending to widen its jurisdiction more and more . . .

Comrade Terastvatsaturov said that . . . in the provinces the question of the activities of the Extraordinary Commissions is a very acute one. The Commissions do everything they please . . . The president of our Cheka in Orel said: "I am responsible to no one; my powers are such that I can shoot anybody."

The reply of Krestinsky, the Commissar of Justice, emphasized the difficulty of imposing restraints on the Cheka. "So long as the Cheka functions," concluded Krestinsky, "the work of justice must take a secondary place, and its sphere of activity must be considerably curtailed." The Cheka was vigorous and effective in asserting its prerogatives both against local soviet authorities and the Commissariat of Justice. The Chekist Peters put it bluntly, "In its activity the Cheka is completely independent, carrying out searches, arrests, shootings, afterwards making a report to the Council of People's Commissars and the Soviet Central Executive Committee."

After the end of the Civil War and the inauguration of the NEP, an effort was made to impose legal limits and restraints on Cheka operations. On the initiative of V. M. Smirnov, an Old Bolshevik of the Left Opposition, the Ninth Congress of Soviets, meeting in December 1921, adopted a resolution, which, after expressing gratitude for the "heroic work" of the Cheka "at the most acute moments of the Civil War," recommended that curbs be imposed on its powers.

The GPU

On February 8, 1922, the VTsIK (the All-Russian Central Executive Committee) issued a decree abolishing the Cheka and its local organs and transferring its functions to a newly created State Political Administration (GPU), which was to operate "under the personal chairmanship of the People's Commissar for Interior, or his deputy." The following tasks were assigned to it: "(a) Suppression of open counterrevolutionary outbreaks, including banditry; (b) Taking measures to prevent and combat espionage; (c) Guarding rail and water transport; (d) Political policing of the borders of the RSFSR; (e) Combating contraband and crossing of the borders of the republic without proper permission; (f) Executing special orders of the Presidium of the VTsIK or of the Sovnarkom for protecting the revolutionary order." Special army detachments were placed at the disposal of the GPU, and the field organization was made directly subordinate to the central GPU. Although the GPU was given full authority to undertake searches, seizures, and arrests, procedural restraints were imposed on it. Arrested prisoners were to be supplied with copies of their indictments not later than two weeks after their arrest. After holding a prisoner for two months, the GPU was required to free him or hand him over for trial, unless special permission for continued detention was received from the Presidium of the VTsIK. The decree further provided that criminal cases "directed against the soviet structure or representing violations of the laws of the RSFSR" were henceforth to "be exclusively judged by the courts," and the People's Commissariat for Justice was vested with authority to supervise the execution of these provisions.

After the establishment of the USSR, the GPU was transformed into the OGPU and given all-union functions. The new constitution of the USSR attached the OGPU directly to the Council of People's Commissars and granted its chairman an advisory vote in that body. The constitution also gave the Procurator of the Supreme Court "supervision of the legality of the actions of the OGPU." A special decree of the Presidium of the TsIK (Central Executive Committee) of the USSR dated November 15, 1923, codified these changes.

The bridles imposed on the GPU-OGPU by these decrees proved verbal rather than real. Although uneasiness over the arbitrary authority exercised by the GPU was widespread even in Party circles, Lenin was persuaded that the regime could not dispense with terror. On May 17, 1922, he wrote Kursky with reference to the Criminal Code, "The Courts must not do away with terror; to promise such a thing would be either to fool ourselves or other people." In the eyes of the Party leadership, the OGPU had become indispensable; its *de facto* authority to take summary action against enemies of the regime was a weapon which the regime showed no disposition to relinquish.

During the NEP period, the vigilance of the GPU was particularly directed against two categories, the "KR's or counterrevolutionists" and the "politicals." The KR's included one-time Kadets and supporters of the rightist parties in the prerevolutionary period, Tsarist bureaucrats, White Guards, priests, landowners, nobility, industrialists, and other former members of the well-to-do classes. The politicals represented the remnants of the parties of the left—Mensheviks, SR's, and Anarchists—who had once shared the amenities of Tsarist prisons together with the Bolsheviks. As old comrades-in-arms as well as opponents of the Bolsheviks, the politicals for a time enjoyed relatively favorable treatment in OGPU prisons and camps; toward the end of the NEP, their privileges were abolished, and all traces of prerevolutionary sentimentalism virtually disappeared.

In retrospect, the NEP period appears as a comparatively peaceful and "liberal" interlude in the state of siege which the Soviet regime maintained after 1917. Older ex-Soviet citizens who abandoned their native land during and after World War II still refer to it as the "golden age" of the Soviet period. While the OGPU was building and consolidating its power during the mid-twenties, its direct impact on the mass of Soviet citizens who had no connections with the "former people" or with the prerevolutionary parties of the left was still slight. The OGPU no doubt inspired fear even among those who were not caught in its toils, but the limited character of the categories against which its punitive actions were directed created a widespread illusion of safety and security.

The operations of the OGPU during this period reflected the dominant preoccupations of the Party leadership. Particular attention was devoted to checking on church activities, persons of unfavorable social origins, and former members of opposition parties. As the struggle of the Trotsky opposition mounted in

intensity, the OGPU concerned itself increasingly with nonconformity and deviation within the Party itself. Its field of supervision included the foreign embassies and foreign visitors. Through its Economic Administration, it sought to restrain malpractices and sabotage in industry; its Special Section penetrated the armed forces and kept a watchful eye on their morale, loyalty, and efficiency. Its Foreign Section conducted espionage abroad, observed the activities of Russian émigré colonies, and reported on personnel in all Soviet foreign missions. Its specially assigned troops were charged with guarding rail and water transport, policing the borders of the Soviet Union, and suppressing any counterrevolutionary risings which might take place.

During the NEP, most prisons and "corrective labor colonies" were outside the jurisdiction of the OGPU. The concentration camps directly administered by the OGPU were reserved for hardened criminals, so-called counterrevolutionaries, and politicals. The Northern Camps of Special Designation (SLON), of which the most notorious were located on the Solovetski Islands, formed the primary base of the OGPU detention network. According to one former inmate, in 1925 the Solovetski Monastery housed about 7,000 prisoners. "Two or three years later the prisoners totalled well over 20,000." Prisoners at first worked solely to meet camp needs. The system of large-scale exploitation of prison labor in lumbering, mining, and construction of public works had its antecedents in NEP experiments, but during the middle twenties its operations were still on a limited scale.

With the abandonment of the NEP and the decision to proceed with a program of rapid industrialization and agricultural collectivization, the OGPU began to play a much more prominent role. Its energies were concentrated on three targets: the Nepmen or private traders, who had been permitted to flourish under the NEP; the old intelligentsia, who were made the scapegoats for early failures and difficulties in the industrialization drive; and the kulaks, who offered active or passive opposition to the collectivization program. As a result of the cumulative impact of these campaigns, the OGPU became the intimate caretaker of the destinies of millions instead of tens of thousands.

The roundup and repression of the Nepmen assumed intensified form as the NEP period drew to a close. At the height of the NEP in 1924, the number of privately owned shops totaled 420,368. The proprietors of these shops became a special object of OGPU attention. There is no way of knowing precisely how many were incarcerated, how many were condemned to administrative exile, and how many succeeded in eluding the OGPU by shifting their occupations and disappearing into the anonymity of the rapidly expanding industrial labor force. Many were caught up in the drive which the OGPU spearheaded to accumulate gold and other sources of foreign exchange (*valuta*) in order to finance the purchase of machinery abroad. Nepmen, members of the former well-to-do classes,

and other persons suspected of hoarding gold or other valuables were arrested in large numbers and their property confiscated.

The persecution of the old intelligentsia, which revived in intensity after the beginning of the five-year plan, was inspired by doubt of their loyalty to the Soviet regime. As hardships mounted and living conditions deteriorated, the Party leadership utilized the old intelligentsia as a scapegoat to divert popular discontent and frustration. Every breakdown in production tended to be treated as an act of sabotage for which some old-regime engineer was held personally responsible. The acts of "sabotage" were in turn magnified into conspiracies to overthrow Soviet power in which foreign capitalist enemies of the USSR were alleged to be deeply involved.

The OGPU was given the responsibility of preparing a series of show trials which would lend plausibility to these flimsy accusations. The production lag in the Donets Coal Basin in 1927–28 led to the widely advertised Shakhty prosecution of Russian technicians and old-regime engineers who were alleged to have conspired with the Germans to commit acts of sabotage and espionage. In the autumn of 1930, forty-eight specialists in the food industry were arrested and shot for alleged membership in a counterrevolutionary organization charged with sabotaging the workers' food supply. In December 1930 came the famous *Prompartiya* (Industrial Party) trial in which Professor Ramzin and seven other prominent Soviet engineers were accused and convicted of organizing a secret political party, committing acts of sabotage, and conspiring with Franco to overthrow the Soviet regime. Six of the defendants received death sentences which were subsequently reprieved; the two others were given ten-year terms of imprisonment. In March 1931 another trial was dramatically staged. Fourteen professors and officials were convicted of counterrevolutionary activity and sabotage in conspiracy with the Mensheviks abroad. One of the main culprits was Professor Groman of the Gosplan, whose real sin apparently lay in insisting that the targets of the First Five-Year Plan were unrealistically high.

The drive against the intellectuals was not limited to show trials. As Sidney and Beatrice Webb observed in a volume notable for its generally friendly tone to Soviet achievements:

This much-discussed prosecution of Professor Ramzin and his colleagues inaugurated a veritable reign of terror against the intelligentsia. Nobody regarded himself as beyond suspicion. Men and women lived in daily dread of arrest. Thousands were sent on administrative exile to distant parts of the country. Evidence was not necessary. The title of engineer served as sufficient condemnation. The jails were filled. Factories languished from lack of technical leadership, and the chiefs of the Supreme Economic

Council commenced to complain "that by its wholesale arrests of engineers the GPU . . . was interfering with industrial progress."

On June 23, 1931, Stalin called a halt to the policy of specialist-baiting (see Chapter 4). Having accomplished his purpose of frightening the intellectuals into submission, he now faced the necessity of utilizing their indispensable skills. The new line announced by Stalin was soon echoed and re-echoed by lesser dignitaries. Soltz, a member of the Central Control Committee of the Party, proclaimed, "We are not accustomed to value the human being sufficiently. To withdraw men from important posts in industry and civil service by arresting and sentencing them without adequate justification has caused the state tremendous loss."

In the period immediately after Stalin's pronouncements, a substantial number of engineers were released from prison or recalled from exile. Ramzin, the convicted "agent" of the French General Staff, resumed his lectures at the Institute of Thermodynamics. Other engineer "traitors" and "saboteurs" received similar treatment. Encouraged by the promise of a more liberal dispensation, the old technical intelligentsia again began to take its place in industry, to recover its courage, and to assume the "production risks" out of which so many earlier charges of wrecking had developed.

The liberal interlude was not destined to be prolonged. With the sharp deterioration of living conditions in the winter of 1932–33, scapegoats again became necessary, and a new wave of persecution engulfed the old intelligentsia. In January 1933 another show trial was staged, this time directed against six British Metro-Vickers engineers, ten Russian technicians, and a woman secretary who had been associated with them. All were charged with sabotage of power stations and the usual accompaniment of conspiracy and espionage. Two months later, the OGPU announced the discovery and punishment of a large-scale conspiracy in the People's Commissariat of Agriculture and State Farming. The accused were charged with using their authority to wreck tractors and to disorganize sowing, harvesting, and threshing in order "to create a famine in the country." Thirty-five of the alleged culprits were shot; twenty-two received ten-year sentences; and eighteen were ordered confined for eight years. The victims were all alleged to be descended "from bourgeois and landowning classes." The pall of terror enveloping the old intelligentsia was lifted slightly after the favorable harvest of 1933. In July 1934 Andrei Vyshinsky, then deputy state prosecutor, ordered local prosecutors to cease their policy of indiscriminate prosecution of engineers and directors for administrative failures.

The mass incidence of OGPU arrests during the period of the First Five-Year Plan was most widely felt in the countryside. The commitment to collectivize and mechanize agriculture involved a decision to liquidate the kulaks as a class, on the ground that they were inveterate enemies of Soviet power and could be

counted on to sabotage collectivization. Stalin estimated in November 1928 that the kulaks constituted about 5 per cent of the rural population, or more than one million of the twenty-five million peasant families. The OGPU was assigned the task of ejecting them from their land, confiscating their property, and deporting them to the north and Siberia. Some of the more recalcitrant were shot when they resisted arrest or responded with violence to efforts to dispossess them. The great majority became wards of the OGPU and were sentenced to forced labor in lumber camps or coal mines, or on canals, railroads, and other public works which the OGPU directed. At one stroke, the OGPU became the master of the largest pool of labor in the Soviet Union. Its own enterprises expanded rapidly to absorb them; those for whom no work could be found in the OGPU industrial empire were hired out on contract to other Soviet enterprises encountering difficulty in mobilizing supplies of free labor.

The mass deportation of the kulaks meant a tremendous growth in the network of forced-labor camps. At the same time, the jurisdiction of the OGPU over ordinary criminals was enlarged. All prisoners serving sentences of more than three years were transferred to OGPU care, even if the crimes were not of a political character. No official statistics were made available on the population of the camps in the early thirties, but some indication of the magnitudes involved is provided by the fact that Belomor, the canal project connecting Leningrad and the White Sea, alone utilized more than two hundred thousand prisoners. By the end of the First Five-Year Plan, forced labor had become a significant factor in manning the construction projects of the Soviet economy.

The NKVD and the Great Purge

The powers of the OGPU were concurrently enhanced. It was given authority to enforce the obligatory passport system introduced in large areas of the Soviet Union at the end of 1932. In July 1934 the OGPU was transformed into the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, or NKVD. The enlarged activities of the NKVD included responsibility for state security, all penal institutions, fire departments, police (militia), convoy troops, frontier guards, troops of internal security, highway administration, and civil registry offices (vital statistics). The reorganization of 1934–35 involved a consolidation of the repressive machinery of the Soviet state. For the first time, all institutions of detention were placed under one jurisdiction. The secret police and their supporting military formations were united with the ordinary police. A formidable structure of power was cemented.

Some contemporary commentators tended to view the reorganization as an effort to impose limits on the arbitrary authority of the secret police. The bases for these hopes were twofold. In July 1933 a new office, the Procuratorship of the

USSR, was established, and among its duties was “the supervision . . . of the legality and regularity of the actions of the OGPU.” The statute creating the NKVD appeared to restrict its judicial powers. A special council attached to the NKVD was vested with authority “to issue orders regarding administrative deportation, exile, imprisonment in corrective labor camps for a term not exceeding five years.” No mention was made of any NKVD authorization to inflict penalty. The statute seemed clearly to imply that criminal cases not disposed of administratively by the NKVD were to be transferred to the courts for trial and that crimes such as treason and espionage which involved the possibility of the death penalty, were to be triable by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court or other military tribunals. Whatever may have been the intent behind these measures to restrict the NKVD, subsequent events testified to their futility. In the Great Purge, legal forms lost all significance. The arbitrary power of the NKVD reached previously unattained heights; the Yezhovshchina (as the worst phase of the purge became known after its sponsor, the NKVD head Yezhov) entered the language as a symbol of lawlessness run riot.

Before 1934 the victims of the OGPU-NKVD were largely former White Guards, the bourgeoisie, political opponents of the Bolsheviks, Nepmen, members of the old intelligentsia, and kulaks. During the late twenties and early thirties, some members of the Trotsky-Zinoviev and Right oppositions were also arrested by the OGPU and condemned to administrative exile or confinement in political *isolators*; but as Anton Ciliga, who was sentenced to one of the latter, records, the political prisoners received “special treatment,” had books at their disposal, held meetings and debates, published prison news sheets, and lived a relatively privileged existence compared with the wretched inhabitants of the forced-labor camps. Until 1934, the Party was largely exempt from the full impact of the OGPU-NKVD terror; the relatively few oppositionists who were confined in OGPU prisons were still treated with comparative humanity.

In December 1934, when Kirov was assassinated by Nikolayev, allegedly a former member of the Zinoviev opposition, a new era in NKVD history opened. The “liberal” regime which the imprisoned oppositionists enjoyed came to an abrupt end. The concentrated power of the NKVD was now directed toward uprooting all actual or potential opposition in the Party. For the first time, the Party felt the full brunt of the terror.

The murder of Kirov was followed by drastic reprisals. Nikolayev and a group of his alleged confederates were charged with having formed a so-called Leningrad Center to organize the assassination and were condemned to death. More than a hundred persons who had been arrested prior to Kirov’s death as “counterrevolutionaries” were promptly handed over to military commissions of the Supreme Court of the USSR for trial were found guilty of preparing and

carrying out terrorist acts, and were instantly shot. This demonstrative massacre was accompanied by the arrest and imprisonment, on charges of negligence, of twelve high NKVD officials in Leningrad. In the spring of 1935, thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of Leningrad inhabitants who were suspected of harboring opposition sentiments were arrested and deported to Siberia. In the sardonic nomenclature of exile and concentration camp, they came to be referred to collectively as "Kirov's assassins."

Zinoviev, Kamenev, and all the principal leaders of the Zinoviev group were also arrested and transferred to the political isolator at Verkhne Uralsk. During the summer of 1935, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and an assortment of lesser figures were secretly tried for plotting against the life of Stalin. According to Ciliga, "Two of the prisoners were shot: one collaborator of the G.P.U. and one officer of the Kremlin Guard. The others escaped with sentences ranging between five and ten years. Stalin; in addressing the graduates of the Red Army academies at the Kremlin on May 4, 1935, observed,

These comrades did not always confine themselves to criticism and passive resistance. They threatened to raise a revolt in the Party against the Central Committee. More, they threatened some of us with bullets. Evidently, they reckoned on frightening us and compelling us to turn from the Leninist road

We were obliged to handle some of these comrades roughly. But that cannot be helped. I must confess that I too had a hand in this.

During 1935 the purge gathered momentum, but its proportions were still relatively restricted. The dissolution of the Society of Old Bolsheviks on May 25, 1935, was an ominous portent of things to come. On May 13, some two weeks earlier the Party Central Committee had ordered a screening of all Party documents in order to "cleanse" the Party of all opposition elements. As Zhdanov stated in a report at the plenum of the Saratov kraikom, "Recent events, particularly the treacherous murder of Comrade Kirov, show clearly how dangerous it is for the Party to lose its vigilance . . . I have to remind you that the murderer of Comrade Kirov, Nikolayev, committed his crime by using his Party card." By December 1, 1935, 81.1 per cent of all Party members had been subjected to screening, and 9.1 per cent of these were reported as expelled. On December 25 the Central Committee of the Party, dissatisfied with the modest results of the verification of Party documents, ordered a new purge. Beginning February 1, 1936, all old Party cards were to be exchanged for new cards; the issuance of new Party documents was to serve as the occasion for a rigorous unmasking of enemies who had survived the earlier screening. The bite of the first phase of the purge is indicated by the striking decline of Party membership from 2,807,786 in January 1934 to 2,044,412 in April 1936. In a little over two years, more than one out of every four members and candidates disappeared from the Party rolls.

Their fate can be inferred from the diatribes which the Soviet press of the period directed against “wreckers, spies, diversionists, and murderers sheltering behind the Party card and disguised as Bolsheviks.”

The Great Purge readied its climax in the period 1936–1938. Its most dramatic external manifestation was the series of show trials in the course of which every trace of Old Bolshevik opposition leadership was officially discredited and exterminated. The first of the great public trials took place in August 1936.” Zinoviev, Kamenev, Ivan Smirnov, and thirteen associates were charged with organizing a clandestine terrorist center under instructions from Trotsky, with accomplishing the murder of Kirov, and with preparing similar attempts against the lives of other Party leaders. All sixteen were executed. In the course of the trial, the testimony of the accused compromised many other members of the Bolshevik Old Guard. A wave of new arrests followed. On August 23, 1936, Tomsky, hounded by a sense of impending doom, committed suicide.

In January 1937 came the trial of the Seventeen, the so-called Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Center, which included such prominent figures as Pyatakov, Radek, Sokolnikov, Serebryakov, and Muralov. This time the accused were charged with plotting the forcible overthrow of the Soviet government with the aid of Germany and Japan, with planning the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, and with carrying on espionage, wrecking, and terrorist activities on behalf of foreign states. Again, the trial was arranged to demonstrate that Trotsky was the *éminence grise* who inspired, organized, and directed all these activities. The prisoners in the dock fought for their lives by playing their assigned role in a drama designed to destroy Trotsky’s reputation. Radek and Sokolnikov were rewarded with ten-year prison sentences. Two minor figures were also sentenced to long prison terms. The remaining thirteen were shot.

On June 12, 1937, *Pravda* carried the announcement of the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky and seven other prominent generals of the Red Army “for espionage and treason to the Fatherland.” This time no public trial was held. The Party press merely declared that the executed generals had conspired to overthrow the Soviet government and to re-establish “the yoke of the landowners and industrialists.” The conspirators were alleged to be in the service of the military intelligence of “a foreign government,” to which they were supposed to have indicated their readiness to surrender the Soviet Ukraine in exchange for assistance in bringing about the downfall of the Soviet government. Besides Tukhachevsky, the Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense, the list of the executed included General Yakir, Commander of the Leningrad Military District; General Uborevich, Commander of the Western Military District; General Kork, Commander of the War College in Moscow; General Primakov, Budenny’s Deputy Commander of Cavalry; Feldman, head of the Administration of Commanding Personnel in the Defense

Commissariat; Putna, the former Soviet military attaché in Great Britain; and Eidemon, President of the Central Council of Osoaviakhim, the civilian defense agency. Gamarnik, who served as the Party's watchdog over the army in his capacity as head of the Political Administration of the Red Army (PUR), committed suicide to avoid arrest. The execution of Tukhachevsky and his associates was the prelude to a mass purge of the Soviet armed forces in the course of which the top commanding personnel was particularly hard hit.

Speaking to the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Khrushchov "rehabilitated" them and explained what happened: "Such outstanding military commanders as Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Uborevich, Kork, Yegorov, Eideman, and others fell victim to the mass repressions . . . A rather curious report once cropped up in the foreign press to the effect that Hitler, in preparing the attack on our country, planted through his intelligence service a faked document indicating that Comrades Yakir and Tukhachevsky and others were agents of the German General Staff. This "document," allegedly secret, fell into the hands of President Beneš of Czechoslovakia, who, apparently guided by good intentions, forwarded it to Stalin. Yakir, Tukhachevsky, and other comrades were arrested and then killed. Many splendid commanders and political officials of the Red Army were executed . . ." *Pravda*, October 20, 1961.

The slaughter of the Old Guard continued with the Trial of the Twenty-One, the so-called Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, in March 1938. Among the prisoners in the dock were Bukharin, Rykov, and Krestinsky, all former members of the Politburo; Yagoda, the former head, of the NKVD; Rakovsky, the former chairman of the Council of People's Commissars in the Ukraine and Soviet ambassador to England and France; Rosengoltz, the former People's Commissar of Foreign Trade; Grinko, the former People's Commissar of Finance; and Khodjayeve, the former chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Uzbekistan. The indictment against them embraced the usual combination of treason, espionage, diversion, terrorism, and wrecking. The bloc headed by Bukharin and Rykov was alleged to have spied for foreign powers from the earliest days of the revolution, to have entered into secret agreements with the Nazis and the Japanese to dismember the Soviet Union, to have planned the assassination of Stalin and the rest of the Politburo, and to have organized innumerable acts of sabotage and diversion in order to wreck the economic and political power of the Soviet Union. If the testimony of Yagoda is to be believed, he not only murdered his predecessor in office, Menzhinsky, but also tried to murder his successor, Yezhov; he facilitated the assassination of Kirov, was responsible for the murder of Gorky, Gorky's son, and Kuibyshev; he admitted

foreign spies into his organization and protected their operations; he planned a palace coup in the Kremlin and the assassination of the Politburo.

If these lurid tales strain the credulity of the reader, they nevertheless represent the version of oppositionist activity which Stalin and his faithful lieutenants found it expedient to propagate. Without access to the archives of the Kremlin and the NKVD, it is doubtful whether the web of fact and fancy behind the show trials will ever be authoritatively disentangled. Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Congress and the revelations of the Twenty-Second Congress left no doubt that the charges were unfounded, but he was singularly silent about the show trials themselves, and no tears were wasted on the oppositionists who were destroyed.

How then explain the confessions of guilt in open court? It is important to recall that the great majority of the executed, including all the military leaders, were tried in *camera*; presumably, despite the pressure to which they were exposed, they could not be persuaded to confess publicly to the crimes with which they were charged. The prisoners who appeared in the show trials represented a small handful of the accused, though they included a number of the leading figures of the Leninist epoch of the Party. What inspired them to pour out their guilt and to confess to deeds of which they were patently incapable? Why did only one of them, Krestinsky, use the opportunity of the public trial to repudiate the admissions of guilt which he had made in his preliminary examination, and why did he return the next day to repudiate his repudiation? Were Krestinsky and the rest shattered by the continuous interrogations and tortures of the NKVD examiners? Did they perform the roles assigned to them in the show trials in the desperate hope of winning clemency for themselves or their families? Were they inspired by a twisted sense of Party loyalty in which the ritual acknowledgment of crimes they had not committed and recantation of sins they were not guilty of served as an act of atonement for earlier breaches of Party unity? Was their attachment to the Communist dream so strong that their own capitulation and debasement appeared as a minor perversion in the glories and achievements of Soviet construction? Did they genuinely believe, as Bukharin claimed in his final plea, that "everything positive that glistens in the Soviet Union acquires new dimensions in a man's mind. This in the end disarmed me completely and led me to bend my knees before the Party and the country?"

The answers to these questions are buried with the dead. From Stalin's point of view, the motivations of the repentant sinners at the show trials were irrelevant. What counted was the creation of a legend which stamped the oppositionists irrevocably as spies and traitors to the Soviet cause. To liquidate the whole generation of Old Bolsheviks without pre-text or explanation would have represented too naked an exposure of the mechanics of a regime in which any form of dissidence had become a sufficient ground for extermination or imprisonment.

The role of the show trials was to demonstrate to the Soviet public and to the world that the Bolshevik Old Guard had become a fifth column which was desperately seeking to undermine and dismember the Soviet state and that the Great Purge had its ultimate justification in considerations of national security and defense. Behind the camouflage of this myth, Stalin proceeded with ruthless determination to consolidate his own power by eliminating every actual or potential rallying point for an alternative government.

The full history of the Great Purge has still to be written. The sordid stories of mass murder and criminality documented by Khrushchev and his associates at the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses focused exclusively on the activities of Stalin, Beria, and such members of the "anti-Party" group as Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov. The involvement of Khrushchev as Stalin's pro-consul in the Ukraine and of other members of his triumphant entourage elsewhere was passed over in dead silence. In Khrushchev's own words, "There are still many, a great many unclarified circumstances."

The course of the purge can be conveniently divided into three periods. The first dates from the assassination of Kirov to the removal of Yagoda as head of the NKVD in late September 1936. During this period, the purge was gathering momentum, but its sharpest edge was reserved for the remnants of the Trotsky-Zinoviev group and other left-wing oppositionists inside and outside the Party. The symbol of this phase of the purge was the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial in August 1936. In this period, Stalin appeared to be settling accounts with the left, and, though the victims were by no means confined to Old Bolsheviks suspected of harboring sympathies for Trotsky or Zinoviev, they constituted a primary target. The public signal for the widening of the purge was given at the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial; the prearranged testimony implicated the right as well as the left in the "plot" to wipe out Stalin. The whole Bolshevik Old Guard appeared compromised. The climax of this phase was reached with the removal of Yagoda as head of the NKVD and the purge of his leading associates in the secret-police apparatus. In his secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev quoted a telegram dated September 25, 1936, from Stalin and Zhdanov at Sochi to the Politburo, which read: "We deem it absolutely necessary and urgent that Comrade Yezhov be nominated to the post of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. Yagoda has definitely proved himself to be incapable of unmasking the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc . . ." The mystery of Yagoda's demotion was later officially "clarified" when he was attacked as one of the prime movers in the conspiracy. The actual cause of Yagoda's fall from grace remains an enigma. Plausible hypotheses stress his alleged sympathy for the Right Opposition in 1928-29, the danger which his entrenched position in the NKVD represented to Stalin, and the desirability from Stalin's point of view of eliminating an official who knew too much.

The crescendo of the Great Purge was reached in the second period, which extended from September 1936, when Yezhov took command of the NKVD, until the end of July 1938, when Lavrenti Beria was designated as Yezhov's deputy and eventual successor. The announcement of Yezhov's removal did not come until December, but meanwhile Beria assumed *de facto* command of the NKVD organization, and early in 1939 Yezhov disappeared and was liquidated.

The period of the Yezhovshchina involved a reign of terror without parallel in Soviet history. Among those arrested, imprisoned, and executed was a substantial proportion of the leading figures in the Party and governmental hierarchy. The Bolshevik Old Guard was destroyed. The roll of Yezhov's victims included not only former oppositionists but many of the most stalwart supporters of Stalin in his protracted struggle with the opposition. No sphere of Soviet life, however lofty, was left untouched. Among the purged Stalinists were three former members of the Politburo, Rudzutak, Chubar, and S. V. Kossior, and two candidate members, Postyshev and Eikhe. An overwhelming majority of the members and candidates of the Party Central Committee disappeared (see Chapter 6). The senior officer corps of the armed forces suffered severely. According to one sober account, "two of five marshals of the Soviet Union escaped arrest, two of fifteen army commanders, twenty-eight of fifty-eight corps commanders, eighty-five of a hundred and ninety-five divisional commanders, and a hundred and ninety-five of four hundred and six regimental commanders." The havoc wrought by the purge among naval commanding personnel was equally great. The removal of Yagoda from the NKVD was accompanied by the arrest of his leading collaborators, Agranov, Prokofiev, Balitsky, Messing, Panker, Trilisser, and others. The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic service were hard hit. Among the Old Guard only Litvinov, Maisky, Troyanovsky, and a few lesser lights survived. Almost every commissariat was deeply affected.

The purge swept out in ever-widening circles and resulted in wholesale removals and arrests of leading officials in the union republics, secretaries of the Party, Komsomol, and trade-union apparatus, heads of industrial trusts and enterprises, Comintern functionaries and foreign Communists, and leading writers, scholars, engineers, and scientists. The arrest of an important figure was followed by the seizure of his entourage. The apprehension of members of the entourage led to the imprisonment of their friends and acquaintances. The endless chain of involvements and associations threatened to encompass entire strata of Soviet society. Fear of arrest, exhortations to vigilance, and perverted ambition unleashed new floods of denunciations, which generated their own avalanche of cumulative interrogations and detentions. Whole categories of Soviet citizens found themselves singled out for arrest because of their "objective characteristics." Old Bolsheviks, Red Partisans, foreign Communists of German, Austrian, and Polish

extraction, Soviet citizens who had been abroad or had relations with foreign countries or foreigners, and “repressed elements” were automatically caught up in the NKVD web of imprisonment. The arrests mounted into the millions; the testimony of the survivors is unanimous regarding crowded prison cells and teeming labor camps. Most of the prisoners were utterly bewildered by the fate which had befallen them. The vast resources of the NKVD were concentrated on one objective — to document the existence of a huge conspiracy to undermine Soviet power. The extraction of real confessions to imaginary crimes became a major industry. Under the zealous and ruthless ministrations of NKVD examiners, millions of innocents were transformed into traitors, terrorists, and enemies of the people.

How can one explain the Yezhovshchina? What motives impelled Stalin to organize a blood bath of such frightening proportions? In the absence of revealing testimony from the source, one can only venture hypotheses. Stalin’s desire to consolidate his own personal power appears to have been a driving force. The slaughter of the Bolshevik Old Guard may be viewed partly as a drastic reprisal for past insubordination; it was more probably intended as a preventive measure to end once and for all any possibility of resistance or challenge from this direction. The extension of the purge to the Stalinist stalwarts in the Party and governmental apparatus is much more difficult to fathom. It is possible that many fell victim to the system of denunciations in the course of which their loyalty to Stalin was put in question, that a number were still involved in official or personal relationships with former oppositionists, that some were liquidated because they displayed traces of independence in their dealings with the Supreme Leader, that others were merely suspected of harboring aspirations toward personal power, and that still others simply furnished convenient scapegoats to demonstrate the existence of a conspiracy reaching into the highest circles.

Implicit in any understanding of the Yezhovshchina is a theory of the role of terror in Stalin’s formula of government. The consolidation of personal rule in a totalitarian system depends on the constant elimination of all actual or potential competitors for supreme power. The insecurity of the masses must be supplemented by the insecurity of the governing elite who surround the dictator. The too strongly entrenched official with an independent base of power is by definition a threat to the dictator’s total sway. The individuals or groups who go uncontrolled and undirected are regarded as fertile soil for the growth of conspiratorial intrigue. The function of terror thus assumes a twofold aspect. As a preventive, it is designed to nip any possible resistance or opposition in the bud. As an instrument for the reinforcement of the personal power of the dictator, it is directed toward ensuring perpetual circulation in the ranks of officeholders in order to forestall the crystallization of autonomous islands of countervailing force.

The manipulation of terror as a system of power is a delicate art. A dictator in command of modern armaments and a secret police can transform his subjects into robots and automatons, but, if he succeeds too well he runs the risk of destroying the sources of creative initiative on which the survival of his own regime depends. When terror runs rampant, as it did at the height of the Yezhovshchina, unintended consequences follow. Fear becomes contagious and paralyzing. Officials at all levels seek to shirk responsibility. The endless belt of irresponsible denunciations begins to destroy the nation's treasury of needed skills. The terror apparatus grows on the stuff it feeds upon and magnifies in importance until it overshadows and depresses all the constructive enterprises of the state. The dictator finds himself caught up in a whirlwind of his own making which threatens to break completely out of control.

As the fury of the Yezhovshchina mounted, Stalin and his intimates finally became alarmed. Evidence accumulated that the purge was over-reaching itself and that much talent sorely needed by the regime was being irretrievably lost. The first signal of a change of policy was given in a resolution of the January 1938 plenum of the Party Central Committee entitled "Concerning the Mistakes of Party Organizations in Excluding Communists from the Party, Concerning Formal-Bureaucratic Attitudes toward the Appeals of Excluded Members of the VKP(b), and Concerning Measures to Eliminate these Deficiencies." The resolution identified a new culprit, the Communist-careerists, who sought to make capital out of the purge by securing promotions through denunciations of their superiors. It was these careerists, the resolution charged, who were primarily responsible for sowing suspicion and insecurity within Party ranks and for decimating the Party cadres. The resolution concluded with a ten-point program designed to put an end to mass expulsions and to secure the rehabilitation of former members who had been expelled as the result of slanders. The immediate effect of this resolution was to produce a new purge of so-called Communist-careerists. At the same time, the Party press began to carry stories of the reinstatements of honest Communists who had been the unfortunate victims of unjustified denunciations.

The third and final phase of the Great Purge involved the purging of the purgers. In late July 1938 Yezhov's sun began to set when Beria took over as his deputy. In December, Yezhov was ousted as head of the NKVD and appointed Commissar for Inland Water Transport, from which post he soon disappeared unmourned but not forgotten. During the same month came the sensational announcement of the arrest, trial, and shooting of the head of the NKVD of Moldavia and a group of his examiners for extracting false confessions from innocent prisoners. The enemies of the people, it now appeared, had wormed their way into the NKVD apparatus itself and had sought to stir up mass unrest and disaffection by their brutal persecution of the guiltless.

It was now the turn of Yezhov and his collaborators to play the role of scapegoat for the excesses of the purge. A wave of arrests spread through the NKVD organization. The prisons began to fill with former NKVD examiners; many prisoners who had been tortured by these same examiners had the welcome experience of greeting their former tormentors as cellmates in prisons and labor camps. The Great Change, as it was soon to become known, was marked by a substantial amelioration in prison conditions and examining methods. According to Beck and Godin, "Prisoners were released by the thousands, and many were restored to their old positions or even promoted." A new era appeared to have dawned.

Stalin now presented himself in the guise of the dispenser of mercy and justice. Excesses of the purge were blamed on subordinate officials who had exceeded their authority, saboteurs who had tried to break the indissoluble link which bound leader and people, and careerists and counterrevolutionaries who had insinuated themselves into the Party and NKVD organizations in order to subvert and undermine the Soviet regime. At the Eighteenth Congress in 1939, Zhdanov reeled off case after case of so-called slanderers and calumniators who had tried to advance themselves in the Party by wholesale expulsions of honest Party members. Quoting from Stalin, he repeated, "Some of our Party leaders suffer from a lack of concern for people, for members of the Party, for workers . . . As a result of this heartless attitude towards people . . . discontent and bitterness are artificially created among a section of the Party, and the Trotskyite double-dealers artfully hook on to such embittered comrades and skillfully drag them into the bog of Trotskyite wrecking." Zhdanov called for a change in Party rules to ensure "an attentive approach and careful investigation of accusations brought against Party members," which would "protect the rights of Party members from all arbitrary procedure," and "abolish the resort to expulsion from the Party . . . for trifling misdemeanours."

Thus, the pressure of the purge was temporarily relaxed as Stalin sought to enlist the energies and loyalties of the new governing elite which he had promoted to positions of responsibility over the graves of its predecessors. Again, as in the collectivization crisis earlier, Stalin demonstrated his remarkable instinct for stopping short and reversing course at the brink of catastrophe.

The full circle of the Great Purge offers a remarkable case study in the use of terror. Arrests ran into the millions. The gruesome and harrowing experiences of the victims blackened the face of Stalinist Russia. The havoc wrought in leading circles appeared irreparable. Yet despite the damage and the hatred engendered, the dynamic momentum of the industrialization program was maintained. The arrests of responsible technicians and officials frequently produced serious setbacks in production, but, as their replacements acquired experience, order was restored and production began to climb again. While many functionaries reacted to the purge by shunning all responsibility, others responded to the fear of arrest

by working as they had never worked before. Terror functioned as prod as well as brake. The acceleration in the circulation of the elite brought a new generation of Soviet-trained intelligentsia into positions of responsibility, and Stalin anchored his power on their support. Meanwhile, Stalin emerged from the purge with his own position consolidated. The major purpose of decapitating the Bolshevik Old Guard had been accomplished. Every rival for supreme power who was visible on the horizon had been eliminated. The Party and the nation were thoroughly intimidated. The purgers had been purged and the scapegoats identified. The ancient formula of protecting the infallibility of the Leader by punishing subordinates for their excessive ardor was impressively resurrected.

The moving equilibrium on which Stalin balanced his power structure entered a new phase. The temporary lifting of the blanket of fear was designed to restore morale, to revive hope and initiative, and to reforge the bonds between regime and people which the purge had dangerously strained. But the mitigation of the terror involved no abandonment of the system. The Stalinist refinement on the use of terror as a system of power involved oscillating phases of pressure and relaxation which varied with the dictator's conception of the dangers confronting him. The essence of control was never abandoned. At the same time, when the pressure became too great, a mirage of security and stability was held out in order to enlist the energy and devotion of the oncoming generations. It is a system which devours many of its servants, but, as in games of chance, since the winners and survivors are highly rewarded and cannot be identified in advance, the ambitions of the players are periodically renewed and the regime bases its strength on their sacrifices.

As the Great Purge drew to a close, the major efforts of the NKVD were concentrated against elements which might prove unreliable in the event that the Soviet Union became involved in war. After the Soviet-Nazi pact and the partition of Poland, the NKVD undertook wholesale arrests in the newly occupied areas. The victims ran into the hundreds of thousands and included whole categories of people whose "objective characteristics" could be broadly construed as inclining them to anti-Soviet behavior. The great majority were deported to forced-labor camps in the north, from which the survivors were amnestied by the terms of the Polish-Soviet pact concluded after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation of the Baltic states in June 1940 was also followed by large-scale NKVD arrests and deportations of so-called anti-Soviet elements.

After the Nazi invasion, the NKVD engaged in widespread roundups of former "repressed" people and others whose records aroused suspicion of disloyalty to the Soviet regime. The Volga-German Autonomous Republic was dissolved, and its inhabitants were dispatched to labor camps or exile in the far reaches of Siberia. With the turning of the tide at Stalingrad and the advance of the Soviet

armies westward, the NKVD found new victims among the population of the reoccupied areas. Many were arrested on the ground of actual or alleged collaboration with the Germans, and the forced-labor camps reaped a new harvest. A number of the national minorities served as a special target of NKVD retribution because of their alleged disloyalty. The Crimean Tatars were penalized for their "traitorous" conduct by the abolition of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. As Khrushchev later acknowledged: "Already at the end of 1943 . . . a decision was taken and executed concerning the deportation of all the Karachi from the lands on which they lived. In the same period, at the end of December 1943, the same lot befell the whole population of the Autonomous Kalmyk Republic. In March 1944 all the Chechen and Ingush people were deported and the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic was liquidated. In April 1944, all Balkars were deported to far away places from the territory of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic. The Ukrainians avoided meeting this fate only because there were too many of them, and there was no place to which to deport them. Otherwise, he [Stalin] would have deported them also." Meanwhile, German war prisoners accumulated, and the NKVD took over the responsibility of running the camps in which they were confined.

After the capitulation of the Nazis, the NKVD confronted the vast new assignment of sifting the millions of Soviet citizens who found themselves in Germany and Austria at the end of the war. Most of them were war prisoners and *Osterbeiter* who had been shipped west by the Germans as forced laborers. Some, however, had retreated with the German armies in order to escape Soviet rule. Others had fought in Nazi military uniform or in separate anti-Soviet military formations such as the Vlasov Army. The latter when caught received short shrift; the great majority were executed. All of these groups on whom the NKVD could lay its hands were rounded up at assembly points and subjected to intensive interrogations before being shipped back to the Soviet Union. The NKVD followed a calculated policy of treating the "returnees" as contaminated by their contact with the West. In order to isolate them from the Soviet populace, large numbers were dispatched to labor camps on suspicion of disloyalty or traitorous conduct. Mass deportations were also reported from the border areas of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Karolia, and the western Ukraine; the native population was shifted to remote areas in Siberia and replaced by Russians, frequently war veterans, brought in from other regions.

After the war, according to Khrushchev, "Stalin became even more capricious, irritable and brutal; in particular his suspicion grew." The MGB, successor organ to the NKVD, fed "his persecution mania" by manufacturing new enemies who had to be suppressed. The so-called Leningrad Case which occurred shortly after the death of Zhdanov on August 31, 1948, involved a thoroughgoing purge of his

entourage. Among its victims were Politburo member N. A. Voznesensky; A. A. Kuznetsov, the Central Committee secretary who had been entrusted by Stalin himself with the supervision of state security organs; M. L. Rodionov, chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers; P. S. Popkov, first secretary of the Leningrad Party organization; and many others. The circumstances of the case remain mysterious. Khrushchev, in his speech to the Twentieth Congress, acknowledged that it was fabricated from beginning to end; according to him, “the elevation of Voznesensky and Kuznetsov alarmed Beria,” who took advantage of Stalin’s suspicion to destroy his political rivals. In the same speech Khrushchev also revealed that the so-called case of the Mingrelian nationalist organization of 1951–1952 in Georgia represented still another MGB invention. In Khrushchev’s words, “On the basis of falsified documents, it was proven that there existed in Georgia a supposedly nationalistic organization whose objective was the liquidation of the Soviet power in that Republic with the help of imperialist powers. In this connection, a number of responsible Party and Soviet workers were arrested in Georgia . . . As it developed, there was no nationalistic organization in Georgia. Thousands of innocent people fell victim to willfulness and lawlessness.”

There were other areas of MGB activity in the postwar period which Khrushchev chose to ignore. One of the most notable was the anti-Jewish campaign of the years 1948–1952, which began with a sweeping denunciation of rootless cosmopolitans and culminated in 1952 with the execution of several dozen leading Jewish writers. Khrushchev did, however, denounce the “doctors’ plot” of 1952–1953 as a fabrication, although without mention of its anti-Semitic connotations. Of this affair, which involved an alleged conspiracy of Kremlin doctors (mainly Jewish) to cut short the lives of Zhdanov and Shcherbakov and to destroy the health of leading Soviet military personnel, Khrushchev observed:

Actually there was no “Affair” outside of the declaration of the woman doctor Timashuk, who was probably influenced or ordered by someone (after all, she was an official collaborator of the organs of state security) to write; Stalin a letter in which she declared that doctors were supplying supposedly improper methods of medical treatment.

Such a letter was sufficient for Stalin to reach an immediate conclusion that there were doctor-plotters in the Soviet Union. He issued orders to arrest a group of eminent Soviet medical specialists . . . Present at this Congress as a delegate is the former Minister of State Security, Comrade Ignatiev. Stalin told him curtly, “If you do not obtain confessions from the doctors we will shorten you by a head.”

Stalin personally called the investigative judge, gave him instructions, advised him on which investigative methods should be used these methods were simple—beat, beat and, once again, beat

. . . When we examined the “case” after Stalin’s death, we found it to be fabricated from beginning to end.

The tense atmosphere which prevailed in high Kremlin circles at the time of the doctors’ plot, an atmosphere reminiscent of the period of the Great Purge, is suggested by still another of Khrushchev’s revelations. According to him, Stalin had plans “to finish off the old members of the Politburo.” Andreyev was ejected from the Politburo; Voroshilov was forbidden to attend meetings, was spied upon, and was accused by Stalin of being an English agent. Molotov and Mikoyan were under suspicion, and the decision to create a Presidium of twenty-five members after the Nineteenth Congress was intended as a cover “for the future annihilation of the old Politburo members.” If Khrushchev’s testimony is to be credited, only Stalin’s fatal illness averted a blood bath in the very highest Kremlin circles.

Post-Stalinist Reforms

After Stalin’s death, steps were taken to mitigate the terror. The amnesty decree of March 27, 1953, was widely saluted as the beginning of a new dispensation. On April 3 the Kremlin doctors were released, and a *Pravda* editorial three days later promised that all cases of official “high-handedness and lawlessness” would be rooted out and that constitutional rights would be safeguarded. A wide-ranging series of reforms unfolded, involving among others, a curbing of the extrajudicial powers of the security police, a reassertion of Party control over the police, the dismantlement of the security police’s economic empire, the release of hundreds of thousands of prisoners from the forced-labor camps, and the rationalization of the system of criminal justice.

The first stages of the reform movement became entangled in the struggle for the succession when Beria, the MVD chief, was accused by his Presidium colleagues of seeking to set the MVD “above the Party and government” (see Chapter 5). The news of his arrest in July 1953 was followed by an announcement on December 23, 1953, that he and six associates had been executed by a firing squad after a secret trial. The fall of Beria opened the way to a series of drastic reprisals against his subordinates and followers. In July 1954, Ryumin, the former deputy chief of the MGB who had been in charge of the investigation of the doctors’ plot, was executed; in December 1954, a similar fate befell the former MGB chief, Abakumov, and a number of his associates, who were held responsible for fabricating the Leningrad Affair. In November 1955 came the announcement of the trial and execution of a group of Georgian secret-police officials, and in the following April, M. D. Bagirov, a former alternate member

of the Presidium and a long-time associate of Beria, was executed together with a number of his subordinates. The elimination of Beria and his entourage was accompanied by an effort to make them the scapegoats for all the crimes of the Stalinist era. In the new mythology, Beria was transformed into a "rabid enemy" of the Party, "an agent of a foreign intelligence service," who wormed his way into Stalin's confidence, exploited his suspicions, and was ultimately responsible for the liquidation of "tens of thousands of Party and Soviet workers."

In the wake of the Beria purge, the Party also sought to reassert and tighten its control over the police. Party organizations were activated at every level of the police apparatus. In March 1954 the state-security organization of the MVD (the former MGB) was again separated from its parent and established as an independent body, the KGB, or Committee for State Security. At first both the MVD and the KGB were headed by professional police officials, but they were soon replaced by Party functionaries. In February 1956, S. N. Kruglov was succeeded as MVD chief by L. P. Dudurov, a veteran of the Party secretariat and, in December 1958, General I. A. Serov yielded his place as head of the KGB to A. N. Shchepin, a former Komsomol first secretary, who in turn was replaced in late 1961 by Y. Ye. Semichastny, another former Komsomol functionary.

Meanwhile, the powers of the MVD and the KGB were also being pruned. A secret edict of September 1953, which went unmentioned in the Soviet press until 1956, abolished the Special Board of the MVD, which had previously exercised a virtually unrestricted power to punish all those who fell into MVD hands. An act of April 19, 1956, repealed the so-called Kirov decrees which laid the legal basis for mass executions by the security police both during and after the Great Purge. A new statute on the Procuracy (April 20, 1956) authorized the establishment of a special department to supervise the operations of the security police and held out the promise of tighter control.

Beginning in mid-1953, functions previously exercised by the MVD were shifted to other agencies. The MVD border and internal troops were temporarily transferred to the Ministry of Defense, though they later reverted to KGB control. In August 1953 a new Ministry of Transport and Highways was established to take over the responsibility for roads and highways previously vested in the MVD. Many of the economic enterprises earlier managed by the MVD's Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps (GULAG) were placed under the jurisdiction of the economic ministries. The remaining camps were first made the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and then shifted to a new agency, the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Colonies (GUITK), which presumably is responsible to the Soviet authorities in the regions and the councils of ministers of the union republics.

Measures were also initiated to ameliorate conditions in the forced labor camps and to arrange large-scale release of certain categories of prisoners. The

first post-Stalinist amnesty of March 27, 1953, provided for the liberation of prisoners sentenced for terms of five years or less, a reduction by one half in the confinement time of those serving longer sentences, and the unconditional release of women with children under ten, pregnant women, minors under the age of eighteen, men over fifty-five years of age, women over fifty, and all those suffering severe incurable diseases. The amnesty, however, did not apply to those convicted "for counterrevolutionary crimes, large thefts of socialist property, banditry, and intentional murder." Thus so-called political criminals were among those specifically exempt from its benefits. Their desperation expressed itself in a series of unprecedented camp strikes and uprisings, Norilsk in mid-1953, Vorkuta in both 1953 and 1955, and Kingir in mid-1954. Although all of them were suppressed with much bloodshed, they did lend to a considerable improvement in the camp regimens and may have helped prepare the way for the amnesties which followed. Teams of procurators were sent into the camps to re-examine the cases of the "politicals," and in a number of cases prisoners were released and rehabilitated. In April 1954, a second amnesty decree provided for the release of young prisoners who had been less than eighteen when they had committed their crimes, and this was followed on September 17, 1955, by still another amnesty "for Soviet citizens who collaborated with occupiers during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945." Again, the decree contained significant exceptions. It did not apply to those convicted of the murder and torture of Soviet citizens, persons tried for sabotage, participation in anti-Soviet organizations, the wrecking of government equipment and property, and other forms of counterrevolutionary activity. An amnesty of 1956 freed former members of the armed forces convicted of surrendering to the enemy, and the fortieth anniversary of the revolution on November 7, 1957, furnished the occasion for the release of additional prisoners.

The measures described above marked a significant reduction in the incidence of Stalinist terror, but they did not mean its complete abolition. The fate of those released from the forced-labor camps is instructive. Some were completely rehabilitated and permitted to return to their homes. Others were either required to remain in the area of their previous incarceration or were confined to certain districts which they were not permitted to leave without express permission. There they remained under police surveillance; indeed, even some former political prisoners allowed to return home were also required to report to the local police officials at regular intervals. While the labor camps themselves have presumably been either abolished or transformed into corrective labor colonies with milder and more humane regimes, the Soviet government has yet to release official statistics of categories of persons under detention, and opportunities for outside observers to conduct firsthand checks virtually nonexistent, except at a few showplace prisons and colonies.

Informed visitors to the Soviet Union agree that most Soviet citizens appear far less fearful of the KGB than they were of its predecessor organizations under Stalin, but they also report that the KGB continues to be active, subjecting the politically suspect to careful surveillance and relying as of old on networks of informers to report disloyal utterances or conduct. The Special Board of the MVD has been abolished and authority of the courts has been restored, but the Law on Criminal Liability for State Crimes enacted on December 25, 1958, contains many of the same sweeping prescriptions of sabotage, wrecking, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and other counterrevolutionary crimes which made Article 58 of the old Criminal Code notorious. Under Khrushchev terror has been held in leash, but it is there to be used if the Party leadership deems it necessary. As the Deputy Procurator General of the USSR, P. I. Kudriavtsev, put it in an interview with Harold J. Berman of Harvard Law School in May 1957, "Do not forget that we have in the Soviet Union the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that law must serve the state authority . . . Compulsion may be necessary. The Special Board of the MVD was necessary in its time, in the late 'thirties. Only it was later abused. The Cheka, which Lenin introduced, was entirely justified . . . If it becomes necessary we will restore the old methods. But I think it will not be necessary."

Khrushchev has sought to give the KGB a fresh and more humane image. The official view of the new KGB was perhaps best expressed by Shelepin, former chairman of the KGB, in his speech to the Twenty-Second Party Congress:

The entire activity of the agencies of the State Security Committee is now under the continual supervision of the Party and government and is founded on complete trust in Soviet people and on respect for their rights and dignity . . . The Chekists derive their support from the people and have close links with the working people and the Soviet public at large. The state-security agencies are no longer the bugbear that enemies — Beria and his aides sought to make them not very long ago but are truly peoples' — in the literal sense of the word — political agencies of our party . . . What is fundamentally new in the work of the state-security agencies is that, along with intensifying their efforts to deal with hostile intelligence agents, they have begun extensively applying preventive and educational measures in the case of Soviet citizens, who commit politically improper acts, sometimes bordering on crimes, without any hostile intent but simply out of political immaturity or thoughtlessness.

N. Mironov, the head of the Central Committee Department of Administrative Organs, in an article in *Kommunist*, described these new "forms and methods of prophylactic work" as follows:

For example, a person may be called into state-security agencies for the purpose of explaining the antisocial nature of his actions and warning him that he is

embarked on an incorrect and dangerous path . . . In most cases, the people summoned for talks, realizing that the state-security agencies are sincerely interested in their fate and want to help them, frankly admit their guilt, promise to reform, and fulfill this promise . . . ”

Another method used is the submitting of material on those who have committed an antisocial act out of political stupidity for the examination of Party, trade-union, and Komsomol organizations and groups of working people, Public influence is now becoming the chief method of reforming such people . . .

Of course, the conduct of prophylactic educational work cannot be interpreted as a policy of tolerance toward persons who commit state crimes . . . As for the enemies of the Soviet state, they must bear responsibility for their crimes in the full measure of strictness of Soviet laws.

The Khrushchevian drive for political homogeneity seeks to mobilize the forces and pressures of social coercion as a supplement to and substitute for police coercion. The revival of comrades' courts, the antiparasite laws with their dependence on neighborhood assemblies to identify and exile persons not engaged in socially useful labor, and the use of voluntary people's detachments (*druzhiny*) to aid the militia in maintaining public order represent Khrushchev's effort to enlist the energies of the "activists" in Soviet society in a major campaign to eliminate drunkenness and hooliganism, speculation and idleness, imitation of Western dress, and all the deviant varieties of social behavior which Soviet ideologists lump together as the survivals of capitalism in the consciousness of Soviet man.

These attempts to extend the range of social controls and to internalize them in the disciplined behavior of the Soviet citizenry were described by Party ideologists at the Twenty-First Party Congress as part of a process by which "coercion" was to be replaced by "persuasion" and controls shifted from administrative organs to public organizations. They were accompanied by criminal-law reforms in 1958–1959 which reduced penalties, provided for more enlightened treatment of criminals in penal institutions and corrective labor colonies, made more extensive use of paroles, and not infrequently sent minor offenders to be reformed by the collectives from which they came rather than dispatching them to prison.

The swing of the pendulum in the direction of judicial "liberalism" was not, however, long-lasting. Whether because the social controls were proving ineffective or the hoped-for results were too slow in developing, harsher punitive sanctions were soon adopted. Signs of a reaction were already visible in August 1960 when *Sovetskaya Rossiya* launched an attack on the pampering of criminals in prisons and corrective labor colonies. During 1961–1962 a series of decrees

was enacted restricting the right of parole and providing the death penalty for such crimes as the pilfering of state or public property in especially large amounts, counterfeiting, speculation in foreign currency, bribery and rape when committed under aggravating circumstances, and assaults on policemen and prison guards. Shelepin in his speech to the Twenty-Second Congress pronounced: "Soviet laws are the most humane in the world, but their humanness should extend only to honest workers, while the law should be stern in the case of parasitic elements, all who sponge off the people — for persons in this category are our internal enemy . . . In our time when the Soviet people are engaged in the practical solution of the task of building communism, the actions of hooligans, thieves, loafers bribe takers, and slanderers should be classed as grave crimes." And Khroshchev, speaking to the Fourteenth Komsomol Congress in April 1962, went even further, "Some people reason that even if a man has stolen something but has not been caught he cannot be called to account, although many people know him to be a thief. But this kind of morality is characteristic of bourgeois society, where people say, "A man isn't a thief until he has been caught." Our principles should be different . . . We should not wait until he is caught red-handed to indict and try him." Sentiments such as those did not augur well for the future of socialist legality. They served as a reminder that self-imposed legal norms, however lofty-sounding, could be ruthlessly brushed aside whenever it served, the regime's convenience.

The Organization of the Police Apparatus

Over the years, the police apparatus of the Soviet state has passed through alternating phases of parturition and fusion. The NKVD, which was established in 1934 as a successor organ to the OGPU, united all police functions under its control. In February 1941 it was announced that the NKVD would be divided into two commissariats, the NKGB or People's Commissariat of State Security and the NKVD or People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. With the outbreak of war, however, the two commissariats were reunited, and the planned, division did not take place until April 1943. In 1946 the commissariats were renamed ministries and became the MGB or Ministry of State Security and the MVD or Ministry of Internal Affairs. The MGB inherited the secret police functions of the old NKVD; all other functions were relegated to the MVD. In 1949–50 the border guards and troops of internal security were also transferred to MGB jurisdiction. After the death of Stalin in March 1953, the MGB and MVD were again reunited in a new Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) under Beria. The union did not prove long-lasting. In March 1954 the state-security apparatus of the MVD was

again separated from its parent ministry and emerged as the KGB, or Committee for State Security. At present the security police, border guards, and internal-security troops are subject to the control of the KGB, which functions as a state committee under the USSR Council of Ministers. Until, 1960 the militia, or ordinary police, was under the jurisdiction of a union-republic MVD. In that year the union-republic ministry was dissolved and replaced by republic ministries of internal affairs. In August-September 1962 their titles were changed to Ministries for Defense of Public Order.

The KGB is particularly important in terms of its surveillance functions. Its responsibilities include the protection of high Party and governmental officials, the enforcement of security regulations, the conduct of espionage abroad, the trucking down of foreign intelligence agents in the Soviet Union, the censorship of correspondence within the Soviet Union and with foreign countries, and the supervision of a network of informers to detect disloyalty or political instability and to report on the attitudes of the Soviet populace toward the regime.

The KGB is organized on the pattern of a union-republic ministry with the main organization at the center and branches in each of the fifteen republics. Its extensive field organization, which is subject to more highly centralized control than is customary in the usual union-republic ministry, extends down to the regional, city, and district levels. In a report to the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Sbelepin, then the KGB Chief, stated that its size had "been cut down substantially," but perhaps understandably, no data were provided.

Although authoritative current information on the internal structure of the KGB is unavailable, the organization of its predecessor agency in the NKVD has been extensively described in the reports of escapees who served in it or who had occasion to familiarize themselves with its operations. A number of accounts compiled by different informants agree in identifying many of the same basic subdivisions, usually described in Soviet terminology as main administrations. A special administration was concerned with the security of high Party and governmental leaders, The Economic Administration (EKU) was responsible for coping with wrecking, sabotage, production failures, and other "counterrevolutionary" activity in Soviet industry and agriculture. All personnel occupying responsible positions in Soviet economic life had to be investigated and cleared by the EKU, which operated through special sections located in all industrial enterprises of any importance, The EKU was also responsible for the collection of economic information from foreign countries. The Secret Political Administration concentrated its fire against members of the Trotsky-Zinoviev and Right oppositions, former Mensheviks, SR's, and members of other anti-Bolshovik parties, leaders of the church and religious sects, national deviationists, and members of the

intelligentsia whose devotion to the Soviet regime was in question. The Special Section was concerned with the loyalty of the armed forces. Its representatives were assigned to all military and naval formations and constituted an elaborate special hierarchy with its own independent channel of command responsible directly to the NKVD. The Counter-intelligence Administration directed its efforts toward combating foreign intelligence agents operating within the USSR. Its responsibilities included surveillance of foreign visitors and foreign embassies and consulates on Soviet soil. The Transport Administration focused its activities on the protection of goods in transit, the fulfillment of state plans for freight movements, and protection against sabotage or other damage to the transportation network. The Foreign Administration devoted its primary efforts to espionage activity outside the Soviet Union. Its responsibilities included the control of Soviet personnel stationed abroad, the penetration of Russian anti-Soviet émigré organizations, the collection of intelligence of value to the Soviet leadership, and the recruitment of foreign Communists, sympathizers, and others as agents in the Soviet spy network.

The central administrations of the security organization had their counterparts in the union republics, the krais, oblasts, and larger urban centers. The lowest links in the system were the raion or district organizations where the nature of operations was governed largely by the character of the raion. In the rural raions, the state-security representatives operated through circles of informers who penetrated the collective and state farms, the machine-tractor stations, and the villages of the area. In the urban raions, which correspond to large wards in American cities, the headquarters staff directed a network of agents strategically placed to cover the apartment houses, factories, offices, and other communal enterprises of the district. The majority of the informers utilized by the professional staff of the security service were unpaid. They usually consisted of zealous members of the Party and Komsomol organizations, compromised individuals on whom the NKVD had a special hold, and others who were intimidated into serving the secret police because they feared unpleasant consequences if they failed to cooperate.

The meager information which is available on the recruitment and training of professional security personnel is derived largely from reports of former members of the Soviet secret police. Before the Great Purge, the higher circles of the NKVD organization were still dominated by Old Chekists who had won their spurs during the Civil War period and who had supported Stalin in his struggle with the Right and Left oppositions during the twenties. New officials of the NKVD were recruited almost exclusively from trusted Party members who were assigned to NKVD work by the cadre sections of the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee and lower Party organs. The purge of Yagoda and

his entourage was also accompanied by the elimination of many Old Chekists from responsible positions. Rapid promotions from the ranks became the order of the day. At the same time, the NKVD was compelled to resort to widespread mass recruiting of new personnel in order to cope with the burdens of Yezhovshchina. Again, the selection and assignment process was handled through Party channels. Under orders transmitted through the Central Committee Secretariat, quotas were imposed on local Party and Komsomol organizations, and Party and even Komsomol members who were deemed trustworthy were transferred to NKVD work. The purge of Yezhov and his followers created another personnel crisis for the NKVD. Again upward mobility was rapid, and the vacancies were filled by the designation of Party personnel for NKVD assignments. Under Beria, more emphasis was placed on professional qualifications in recruiting NKVD personnel. The new employees were used to control sectors of Soviet life with which they were familiar. Particularly noteworthy was the use of engineers for work in the special sections of industrial enterprises. The purge of Beria and his group was followed by a new infusion of Party personnel into the security organs. As Sbelepin pointed out to the Twenty-Second Congress, "The Party has assigned a large contingent of Party, Soviet, and Komsomol workers to positions in them."

During the Great Purge, the training of professional NKVD personnel had to give way to the urgencies of speeding new recruits into operative work. Even in this period, a network of special schools was maintained to instruct those who had been selected for NKVD duty. Courses were accelerated, and the training of lower-ranking personnel was concentrated in "inter-krai" schools located in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa, Baku, Tiflis, and other large centers. At these schools students were exposed to a combination of political indoctrination, military training, and instruction in criminal law and procedure, investigation, intelligence and counterintelligence. NKVD officials who were slated for promotion to responsible positions in the apparatus were dispatched to the central NKVD school in Moscow where more intensive training was given in specialized aspects of NKVD work.

The NKVD encountered no difficulty in attracting recruits. The privileges which it commanded marked it out as an elite service. A major in the state-security organization had the rank and perquisites of a commander of an army brigade; a colonel of state security was on the same level as the commander of an army division. In a scarcity economy, the NKVD officialdom inhabited an island of plenty. The advantages of affiliation were not lost either on the cynical careerists or the fanatics among Soviet youth. The Party leadership depended on the NKVD as one of its primary pillars of support. The rewards which were held out were designed to bulwark the edifice of NKVD loyalties.

The Methods of the Secret Police

During the Stalinist era the apparatus of the secret police reached directly into every organized formation in Soviet society. The head of the special section in the factory, the plenipotentiary of the secret police in the regiment, the chief of the raion office in rural areas, all operated under the same mandate to keep the Soviet populace under the most careful observation. This did not mean that every Soviet citizen was equally exposed to police surveillance. Certain categories were singled out for special attention. Among them were one-time members of hostile social classes or political parties, former oppositionists, "repressed people," and others whose political sentiments were regarded as particularly dubious. Certain areas of Soviet life were subject to more intensive supervision than others. The armed forces, military plants, industries of strategic military significance, transport, the universities and institutes, and the intelligentsia were scrutinized particularly closely.

In carrying out its surveillance, the secret police relied on a variety of techniques. A dossier was maintained on every subject in whom the police had an interest. In plants of strategic military importance, for example, responsible workers could not be employed or promoted without clearance by the police. All such employees were required to fill out questionnaires listing detailed biographical information, which was subject to check by the police. In addition, the head of the special section in the plant or his counterpart elsewhere employed a network of informers to gather compromising material on persons with whom they had contact. Denunciations were encouraged, sometimes to be checked and sometimes merely to be filed for later use. Interrogation also served as a form of intimidation, since reasons were rarely disclosed. Those summoned for questioning were frequently shattered by the conviction that the shadow of imminent arrest hovered over them.

The procedure in connection with arrests was equally harrowing. During the Great Purge almost all arrests were made in the dead of night. Agents presented themselves at the home of the victim with an order authorizing them to make the arrest and search the premises. All material regarded as compromising was confiscated; at the same time, a list was made of the articles appropriated and a receipt given for their detention. Once the search was finished, the agents escorted the accused to the place of detention, where his money and any articles on his person which he could use to harm himself were expropriated. Again, receipts were punctiliously given for the money and goods expropriated. The accused was then put in a cell to await the pleasure of the examiner assigned to his case. During the Great Purge, this waiting interval sometimes stretched out to several weeks or even several months.

When the prisoner was finally called out for interrogation, usually at night, the examiner ordinarily began by trying to persuade the prisoner to make a voluntary admission of guilt. The examination was almost invariably based on the assumption of the guilt of the accused; the primary task of the examiner was therefore to extract a confession from the prisoner and to compel him to disclose the names of all accomplices with whom he was involved. If the accused proved unamenable to persuasion, the examiner resorted to intimidation, threats, or physical violence. The prisoner might be warned that failure to confess would lead to retaliation against his family; the longer the accused held out, the more severe would be the penalty. If the prisoner still proved recalcitrant, he would be subjected to the nerve-wracking ordeal of continuous interrogations which might stretch over a period of weeks. During this period "on the conveyor" as it was called, the accused would be deprived of sleep, interrogated constantly by a rotating team of examiners, made to stand at attention while the questioning was going on, and beaten or slapped into consciousness when he collapsed from exhaustion. All but the iron-willed succumbed to this incessant bombardment. At the end, a "confession" would be signed, and the accused would be ready for trial or sentencing.

In the case of most political prisoners during the Great Purge, the indictment was usually based on Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR or similar provisions in the codes of other republics. The paragraphs of this article provided vague definitions of such crimes as high treason, armed revolt, espionage, sabotage, terror, counterrevolutionary agitation, and association with counterrevolutionary organizations. The task of the examiner was to extort a confession which could be brought within the ambit of one or more of these paragraphs. Once the confession had been obtained, the pronouncement of sentence would depend on the seriousness of the offense. In most cases, prisoners were sentenced in absentia by special boards attached to the NKVD, the so-called troika or committee of three in the provinces, or by a special council in Moscow. "When the Yezhov period was at its height," Beck and Godin report, "sentences of less than five years' forced labor were very rare. Normally they were for eight or ten years' forced labor, but sentences of twenty-five years' forced labor or imprisonment were not uncommon." In some areas, perfunctory closed trials were held before the military tribunal of the Supreme Court. Although the accused was present, counsel was not provided, and no opportunity was given to call witnesses to prove innocence or guilt. The death sentences pronounced by the military tribunal claimed many victims among senior military officers, officials of the NKVD, and high Party personnel. A very few cases, usually covering less serious offenses, were referred to the ordinary regional courts for disposition.

Forced Labor

The prisoners condemned to forced labor became charges of GULAG, the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps. This agency, a subdivision of the NKVD, administered the vast network of labor camps. The great mass of the prisoners at the disposal of GULAG during the Great Purge were assigned to heavy, unskilled labor—cutting timber; building roads, mining coal, dredging for gold, and other similarly burdensome tasks. Norms were established for all varieties of labor; the degree of fulfillment determined the rations to which the prisoners were entitled. Those who met their norms received five hundred to six hundred grams of bread a day and a hot meal of inferior quality, enough to sustain life only at a very low level. While overfulfillment was rewarded with more normal rations, the work targets were set so high that such an accomplishment was extraordinarily difficult. Those who failed to attain the norms received a basic ration of three hundred grams of bread a day, a diet which was virtually a sentence to starvation. Intellectuals unused to hard physical labor often fell into this category. Some highly qualified specialists among them were given an opportunity by GULAG to work at their specialties; the great majority were utilized as unskilled laborers.

The position of the political prisoners was made even more difficult because of the persecutions to which they were subjected by the ordinary criminals. As enemies of the people, the “politicals” represented the lowest stratum of prison society. In the organization of prison labor, foremen and overseers tended to be drawn from the ranks of the criminals. Camp authorities looked on with benevolent neutrality as the criminals stripped the politicals of their food and their possessions. The long arm of the secret police followed the prisoners into the prison barracks is themselves. Attached to each camp was a security section which operated an informers’ network both among the prisoners and the free personnel who formed part of the camp administration. Prisoners who spoke their minds too freely ran the risk of denunciation, reduction of rations, confinement in isolators, or even an extension of their terms of confinement.

Estimates of the number of people confined in forced-labor camps under Stalin run a wide gamut, even within the same period. The Soviet government has not seen fit to release any official statistics. Most estimates represent the guesses of former prisoners who escaped from the Soviet Union and whose personal experience was ordinarily confined to one or a few camps or even sections of camps. Beck and Godin, in an account of the Great Purge which is distinguished by its sobriety and restraint estimated the total number of prisoners “living in detention under the NKVD” during the Yezhovshchina as between seven and fourteen million. Alexander Weissberg, a distinguished scientist who

was imprisoned in Kharkov during the Yezovshchina, hazarded the guess that between 5 and 6 per cent of the local population was arrested in the 1937–1839 period. By projecting this percentage to the country at large, Weissberg arrived at a total of nine million arrests, of which two million represented criminal charges and seven million were attributable to the purge. After reviewing a wide variety of estimates by former inmates of labor camps. Dallin and Nicolaevsky, in a work devoted exclusively to forced labor, concluded that the totals ranged in different periods from seven to twelve million. In the nature of things, these estimates are not susceptible to precise corroboration.

Perhaps the most revealing collection of unquestionably authentic data on the role of forced labor in the Soviet economy is contained in an official Soviet document entitled “State Plan of Development of the National Economy of the USSR for 1941.” This classified Soviet document which was captured by the Nazis in the rapid advance of the first months of the war, contains a detailed statement of economic targets for 1941; it also includes a rich assortment of material on the economic activities of the NKVD. The 1941 plan lists a projected capital investment of 37,650,000,000 rubles, exclusive of capital investments of the Commissariats for Transportation, Defense, and Navy. Out of this sum, the NKVD accounted for 6,810,000,000 rubles, or about 18 per cent in presenting the 1941 economic plan. Voznesensky, the chairman of Gosplan, reported the total capital investment planned for 1941 as 57,000,000,000 rubles. The NKVD share of this total was approximately 12 percent. On the basis of the 1941 capital-investment data, Naum Jasny reached the conclusion that the NKVD was expected to account for 17 per cent of the total 1941 construction and that the number of concentration camp inmates engaged in NKVD construction projects alone would approximate 1,172,000. The 1941 plan indicated that lumbering was the second most important industrial activity of the NKVD. The total share of the NKVD in this industry was about 12 per cent, but this percentage was substantially exceeded in the northern areas of the USSR. In Archangelsk oblast it was 26 per cent; in the Khabarovsk krai and the Karelo-Finnish republic, more than 33 per cent; in Murmansk oblast, more than 40 per cent; and in the Komi Autonomous Republic, more than 50 per cent. Other NKVD industrial targets mentioned in the plan included 5,300,000 tons of coal out of a total 191,000,000 tons; 250,000 tons of oil out of a total 35,000,000 tons; 150,000 tons of chrome ore out of a total of 370,000; and 82,000,000 bricks to be produced in the Khabarovsk and Maritime kraises.

It should be noted that the captured version of the 1941 plan is incomplete. Data on gold production and armaments were not included and were apparently reserved for separate supplements which circulated among a very restricted group. Information from other sources indicates that gold mining

was virtually an NKVD monopoly; the vast development in the Kolyma region was administered by the NKVD through its subsidiary *Dalstroï* and was largely manned by forced labor. On the basis of sober reading of the reports of former inmates of the concentration camps in the Kolyma area, it would appear that *Dalstroï* utilized from two hundred thousand to four hundred thousand forced laborers in the 1941 period. This, it should be stressed, is a conservative figure. The estimate of Dallin and Nicolaevsky runs from one and a half to two million prisoners.

The 1941 plan did not list the number of camp inmates. The data on the economic activities of the NKVD, however, made it possible to arrive at a fairly reliable estimate of approximately three and a half million. This total applied only to forced labor confined in prison camps under direct NKVD jurisdiction. It did not include forced laborers hired out to other enterprises. It did not include persons sentenced to exile in remote areas who remained under NKVD supervision even though they lived and worked under the same conditions as the rest of the population. Nor did it include the arrested who were being held for investigation and sentence in remand prisons or those serving terms of confinement in ordinary prisons. It did not include workers penalized for tardiness and absenteeism by being compelled to work at their jobs at substantially reduced pay. And it took no account of the degree of compulsion then attached to job assignments and transfers of so-called free labor. It is obvious that estimates of "forced labor" must necessarily vary widely, depending on the categories which are included.

Since 1941, no authoritative internal source comparable to the "State Plan" has become available. Large contingents of new prisoners continued to flow into the camps during and after World War II, but estimates of their numbers must necessarily be speculative. In his interview with Berman in 1957, Deputy Procurator General Kudriavtsev admitted that about three million persons were under detention in March 1953, "about half of whom were 'politicals,'" but what relation this estimate bore to reality is difficult for an outsider to judge.

The large-scale release of prisoners from the forced-labor camps since the death of Stalin and the transformation of such camps as remain into so-called corrective labor colonies suggest that prison labor at present plays a much smaller role in the Soviet economy than it did at the height of the Stalinist purges. But it would be a mistake to assume that the Soviet regime relies only on economic incentives in allocating its labor force. The employment of the system of exile and forced residence in remote areas to penalize those who violate the norms of Soviet society constitutes a more humane form of punitive action than prevailed under Stalin, but for those who suffer its restrictions it remains a species of coercion which no high-flown rhetoric can conceal. The crude terror and

massive exploitation of the forced-labor camps have been largely abandoned, but that subtler form of terror induced by police surveillance and manipulated social pressure persists.

The Hazards of Terror

The reliance on terror as an instrument of dominion has its elements of danger. It is not easy to control. A secret police develops its own laws of growth. The more discord it discovers or unfolds, the more indispensable it becomes. Its tendency is always to extend its own sovereignty, to emancipate itself from external controls, to become a state within a state, and to preserve the conditions of emergency and siege on which an expansion of its own power depends. From the viewpoint of the leadership, there is an even greater worry, the fear that the secret police will become a menace to the security of the highest Party leaders themselves. It is a risk of which the leadership has been aware and against which it takes precautions. Every effort is made to subordinate the KGB to central Party controls. Responsible employees are required to be Party members. Appointments and promotions must be cleared with the Department of Administrative Organs of the Central Committee Secretariat, which maintains a particularly close watch over the KGB. The secretaries of Party organizations in the KGB are used as the eyes and ears of the Central Committee. Special groups in the Party-State Control Committee are assigned to observe the KGB. In these and perhaps other ways, the Party leadership seeks to safeguard itself against the possibility that "the avenging sword of the revolution" may turn against the revolutionary leadership itself.

Thus far, no head of the Soviet secret police has succeeded in using his position as a platform from which to strike out for supreme power. The first director of the Cheka and OGPU was Felix Dzerzhinsky, an Old Bolshevik of unimpeachable idealism whose whole career documented the proposition that there is no fanaticism so terrible as that of the pure idealist. Dzerzhinsky gave no evidence of Napoleonic ambitions and died in 1926 without attaining Politburo status. His successor, Menzhinsky, was a much lesser figure, and though he continued as head of the OGPU until 1934, he never moved beyond the second rank of Party leaders. Yagoda, who came next was removed from office in 1936 and executed in 1938. His successor, Yezhov, was relieved of his duties in 1938 and disappeared in 1939. Neither Yagoda nor Yezhov could be counted in the front ranks of Party leaders. Beria, who succeeded Yezhov, was the first head of the NKVD to enter the Politburo, where he became a leading figure. But he too was executed in the succession struggle after Stalin's death. His successors were two professional

police officers Kruglov, the MVD chief, and Serov, head of the KGB, neither of whom seemed to pose any real danger to the ruling group. But they too were soon replaced by two Party functionaries, Dudorov and Sbelepin, both then outside the Presidium circle of top Party leaders. In late 1961, Shelepin was promoted to a Central Committee secretaryship and yielded his KGB post to Semiehastny, former Komsomol first secretary. Thus far, the vigilance of the Party leadership has been proof against all dreams of utilizing the police apparatus as the road to supreme power.

Even if the Party leadership is successful in controlling the secret police, there are other disadvantages in a regime in a police surveillance, which are not so amenable to skillful manipulation. A system which puts large-scale reliance on a secret police is wasteful of manpower. The atmosphere of suspicion which surveillance breeds is not ordinarily conducive to creative thinking and displays of individual initiative. There is always the hazard that the secret police will run amok, as it did during the Great Purge, and do serious and perhaps unintended harm to the productive and administrative machinery of the state. It is no easy task to apply terror and at the same time to hold it in leash.

Perhaps the most subtle danger posed by police surveillance is its effect on political decisions at the very highest levels. The KGB is an important source of intelligence regarding both domestic and international dangers. Since the KGB apparatus lives and grows on emergency and crisis, its justification hinges upon the maintenance of a state of siege. Consequently, the intelligence that filters through the KGB to the top political leadership is apt to emphasize the storms that are brewing, the plots against the regime, and sinister threats at home and abroad. The risk which the Party leadership faces is that it too will become the unconscious victim of the Frankenstein's monster which it has created. The ultimate hazard of terror as a system of power is that it ends by terrorizing the master as well as the slave. To read Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress is to sense the extent to which Stalin was trapped by his own suspicions and fears. In turning his back on the Stalinist legacy of mass terror and in bridling the KGB, Khrushchev may well be building his power on a more rational and ultimately more secure base.

Soviet Stability and its Sources

Seweryn Bialer

The pronounced tendency in journalistic and even academic accounts of the Soviet Union to dwell on difficulties, troubles, and unresolved issues goes far to color and distort our perceptions of conditions within the country. What major aspect of Soviet reality has not been associated with a “problem”? There is the “problem” of the economy, the “problem of nationalities, the “problem” of technological lag, the “problem” of rising popular expectations. In the last fifteen years more has been written about the “problem” of dissent than about any other single subject. One could only think that dissent is the overwhelming fact of life in the Soviet Union and decisively shapes internal politics and policies. There is, of course, no doubt that all these and other aspects of Soviet life are truly “problem” areas, points of genuine and recognized vulnerability and potential crisis; but what has been most surprising during the Brezhnev era is not the presence of these genuine problems but rather that they did not create any semblance of a systemic crisis whether separately or in combination.

Among more serious observers of the Soviet Union there are some who regard the system as inherently unstable owing to an alleged lack of legitimacy and others who focus on the persistence of crisis situations, some quite profound, which fail to yield durable solutions despite repeated efforts and mobilization of resources. To the former one can for the moment observe that a line of reasoning which admits to no other stability of the regime than its survival over the last quarter-century assigns to stability a very narrow, almost grotesque meaning, while its questioning of Soviet legitimacy is extremely exaggerated and one-sided. It almost equates legitimacy, with the existence of constitutional democratic regimes. To the latter one should point out that political stability cannot simply be equated with a lack of crisis situations and challenges to the system but rather with the political regime’s ability to resolve these crises, to neutralize or even to ignore them, and to adjust to periods of prolonged coexistence with them.

The overwhelming feature of the Brezhnev era is the sociopolitical stability of country which has accompanied and sustained the stability we have clearly demonstrated among political leadership and elites. The Soviet political system shows

Source: Seweryn Bialer, “Soviet Stability and its Sources,” *Stalin’s Successors*. Cambridge University Press, 1980. 141-183.

no signs of political fragmentation. The centralization of its administrative structure at the present time is if anything greater than at the beginning of the Brezhnev era. The divisive pull of interest groups, while strong, is manageable for the process of unified policy making; the pressures of participation are containable. The aggregating and coordinating functions of the party, apparatus are still pronounced. The centrifugal forces of ethnic self-identification and assertiveness in the multinational Soviet state have not only failed to produce symptoms of political disintegration, but no single situation has developed in the last fifteen years that can be described as a serious challenge to Moscow's ethnic policies.

Alone among the industrially developed states the Soviet Union has avoided the political consequences of a cultural generational chasm. While one can speak of the developing youth culture, especially in large metropolitan centers, one can hardly postulate a politically meaningful youth revolution that actively counters the values of older generations. The Soviet Union has not escaped the wave of rising popular expectations, but these have not evolved into the well-known vicious-circle pattern of exaggerated, unfulfillable, and conflicting hopes which overload and undermine the political process. It is highly significant, moreover, that the rising popular expectations are almost entirely confined to the material sphere and scarcely encroach directly on cultural and political areas.

One feat of the Soviet authoritarian system, so amazing to observers and critics because of its unexpectedness, has been the ability to contain the political consequences of widespread intellectual dissent movements, the first in Soviet history. Surprising was the fact that this containment did not entail resort to mass political terror or to satisfaction of any of the dissenters' demands but the most marginal politically and harmless domestically.¹ The Soviet elite exhibited greater flexibility, self-confidence, and cunning in dealing with dissent than any of its critics had anticipated. Today the international impact and repercussions of dissent far exceed any domestic consequences.

The stability of the Soviet system stands out against the background of events and trends in developed industrial democracies over the last fifteen years. As recently as a decade ago, Samuel Huntington began his major work, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, with the following proposition:

The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities. . . . The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union have different forms of government, but in all three systems the government governs.²

Just a few years ago, however, in the superb report to the Trilateral Commission entitled *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), to which Huntington contributed, the question was posed: Are democracies governable?³ No such question is being asked about the Soviet system. To be sure a multiplicity of small and large crises afflicts the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact its entire history constitutes an unending chain of crisis situations, primarily in the economic area but also to some extent in social, cultural, and political areas. There is adequate evidence to argue that the dominant style of Communist politics was and remains to a large extent "crisis politics"; the dominant style of its political leadership was and remains largely that of emergency leadership. The increased institutionalization of the Soviet political order was and remains to a large extent the institutionalization of this type of politics and style of leadership. Indeed, far from entering a post-mobilizational state, as some postulate, this leadership is still associated with and committed to high levels of mobilizational effort.⁴

While some serious students have suggested that a process of decay and debilitation is eroding the Soviet political system, even they regard its destructive effects as a long-range potential rather than as a clear and present danger to existence and effectiveness. All would certainly hesitate to proclaim the "crisis of communism in power" or even to raise the question of the "governability" of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the principal author of the Trilateral Commission's report on the "governability of democracies," recently made a strong argument that to date . . . the Soviet system has certainly demonstrated the ability to contain or protect itself from extrinsic challenges. None of the challenges which are identified for the future, moreover, appear to be qualitatively different from the challenges which the Soviet system has demonstrated the ability to deal with effectively in the past.⁵

Whatever the future of the Soviet system may be, it projects internally the image of a society of law and order and externally the image of a growing world power which is just beginning to assert an influence to match its strength. This image contrasts with the realities of an unstable world where an unending stream of coups and rebellions and transitions undermines old and new autocratic regimes and where popular disillusionment, lack of effective leadership, and unprecedented challenges engulf even the most successful industrial democracies.

The purpose here is not to analyze and test the validity of various claims concerning the supposed future of the Soviet system but to examine the almost quarter-century of post-Stalinist development and especially the Brezhnev era. And here, despite wide differences of opinion about the present state of the Soviet system and the even greater disagreement about its possible futures, there does exist a basis for consensus regarding the proposition that the Soviet political system has remained and remains as yet *politically stable* in the Brezhnev era, regardless of disputes concerning the nature and sources of this stability.

By any meaningful standards, the Soviet social and political system during the Brezhnev era has displayed a high level of stability and governability. Surprise has been one ingredient in the reaction to this state of affairs. Not only did such an outcome contradict the expectations of a majority of Western analysts when Brezhnev came to power. Not only did it contrast strikingly with the situation in a majority of Western industrial nations. The element of surprise resulted also from the expectation that certain changes that have occurred in the Soviet system during the post-Stalin period as well as the persistence of certain challenges, some of them clearly unresolved, should normally have yielded destabilizing effects.

Those changes include first and foremost the patent and extensive, if uneven, weakening of mass and elite controls; the acquisition of a relatively higher degree of professional autonomy by the expert and managerial classes; and the greater freedom of access to the decision-making process by elite and subelite groups and institutions. Those past and present challenges that could be expected to undermine the stability of the system include the traumatic shock of the anti-Stalin campaign and the continued questioning of the Soviet past which lingers even after the official closing of the campaign; the novel wave of dissent which seized a small but vocal segment of the intelligentsia; the probably more important newly developing attitude among larger segments of the creative intelligentsia of withdrawal from official life, of internal emigration, at best of neutrality toward the official goals of the regime; the explosion of the massive and unprecedented Jewish emigration drive after decades of assimilation; the shocks in Soviet relations with Eastern Europe which could have brought into question the very principles on which these relations are based; the highly accelerated modernization of many aspects of Soviet life and almost all regions, with the attendant material and spiritual dislocations and displacements—indeed, all the “problems”, which commentators have enumerated and which retain their reality and seriousness.

That the extent of systemic stability under Brezhnev has been so unexpected is in part a legacy of implications of the totalitarian model which for so long governed the study of the nature and future of the Soviet state and in part a consequence of our cumulative experience with modernizing authoritarian regimes. According to the totalitarian model, the abolition of mass terror, personal dictatorship, and the most extreme forms of the transformation-mobilization push of the regime should have weakened the intrinsic ability of the system to survive, should have left it without an internal *raison d'être*, without a control mechanism to assure its replication. If, on the other hand, the Soviet Union can best be understood as a highly, authoritarian but not totalitarian regime, as most students would agree our experience with the history of such regimes—whether exclusionary, inclusionary, or even Communist—argues for the exceptionality of

prolonged and high levels of stability, especially when accompanied by economic growth, social transformation, and particularly political systematic change, the case with the Soviet regime. Our experience with modernizing authoritarian regimes on the contrary calls for recurring crises of legitimacy, participation, and governability. Given the weight of the reasons adduced to anticipate destabilization, it becomes enormously important, for both practical and theoretical considerations, to attempt an explanation of the remarkable stability enjoyed by the Soviet system in the Brezhnev era.

The most general and immediate explanation of Soviet stability is obvious and valid. The Soviet leaders and elites who direct the system work very hard to make the system stable. If there is any single value that dominates the minds and thoughts of the Soviet establishment from the highest to lowest level, it is the value of order; if there is any single fear that outweighs all others, it is the fear disorder, chaos, fragmentation, loss of control. This fear supports the world's most extensive and methodical police-state machinery which derives its principal strength less from the extent of actual punitive action than from the extraordinary attention paid to preventive action against any form of social deviance, an effort soldiered by untold millions of informers.⁶ This enormous coercive effort—potential and actual, preventive and punitive—is augmented by an extensive attempt to inculcate positive socialization through the educational process, massive propaganda efforts, the elimination of competing ideas, and so forth.⁷ How is it, though, that these efforts have apparently proved effective for so long?

Part of the reason rests with the fact that fear of disorder and attachment to orderly society are valued not only by political leaders and elites but find strong resonance in the Soviet popular mind. This is to a large extent a historical phenomenon; the mechanism and process of conditioning in this direction are impossible to trace. Undeniably, the Russian people in all walks of life fear the chaos and disorder they sense directly below the surface of their lives; they fear the potential of elemental explosions of violence and rage that mark their historical past and occupy a central place in their history textbooks; they prize and yearn for strong government, the *khoziain* or boss who will ward off the *smuta*, the time of troubles.”

It is noteworthy that this fear pervades the communities of Soviet dissidents, most of whom urge evolutionary, incremental change and have a horror of contributing to the unleashing of spontaneous and destructive forces in Russian society. Pavel Litvinov, the dissident grandson of Stalin's foreign minister Maxim Litvinov, has remarked:

Under the czars we had an authoritarian state and now we have a totalitarian state but it still comes from the roots of the Russian past. You should

understand that the leaders and the ordinary people have the same authoritarian frame of mind. Brezhnev and the simple person both think that might is right. That's all. It is not a question of ideology. It's simply power. Solzhenitsyn acts as if he thinks this has all come down from the sky because of Communism. But he is not so different himself. He does not want democracy. He wants to go from the totalitarian state back to an authoritarian one.⁸

A second ingredient of the explanation for Soviet stability may be found in the largely noncumulative nature of the problems faced by the Soviet leadership. There are very different priorities among the dissatisfactions and demands expressed by Soviet "public opinion." These are not expressed simultaneously; they often contradict rather than reinforce one another. One has only to think of the aspirations of Russians versus those of other minorities (and particularly the large Russian minorities in non-Russian areas); the anti-authoritarianism and desire for creative freedom among intellectuals versus the managers' desire for greater autonomy and for more stringent discipline of workers; and the aspirations of both intellectuals and managers versus the egalitarian goals of workers and their anti-intellectualism.

To go to the core of the explanation for Soviet stability, the effectiveness of the regime's massive efforts to maintain order, one must turn to a number of deeper processes and undercurrents in Soviet society. These have frequently been overlooked as a consequence of the coincidence of certain aspects of official Soviet and Western analysis that often leads to a distortion of Soviet reality and inhibits the deeper understanding of the system's social processes and mechanisms of functioning. The Soviet version of this parallel portrayal is best expressed in describing the society as "planned," as evolving in accordance with the law of "planned, proportionate development."⁹ The Western version of Soviet society is often not very different. To take but one example, Charles Lindblom makes the following comparison of the polyarchic, market societies of the West with their Communist counterparts:

In their reach into every aspect of life and in the weakness of major social constraints on their scope and ambition, rulers of these [communist] systems go far to substitute—deliberately—formal organization for the complex social structures found in noncommunist societies. *Formal organization supersedes a variety of other forms of social coordination: ethnic solidarity, religious belief, market, family, and moral code.*¹⁰

There is undoubtedly a strong element of truth in these parallel images. The issue range of centralized political decision making in the Soviet system is clearly

broader, the scope of deliberate decision making consciously directed at managing the society is clearly larger than in Western democratic societies. The role of the “invisible hand” of market and social forces is more dominant in the democratic systems as compared to the Soviet system where there is a pronounced stress on the “visible hand” of coordinated organizations, regulations, and detailed social policies. Despite the increased complexity of Soviet society on the one hand and the increased role of the state and progressing bureaucratization of Western societies on the other, it would still be correct to argue the unequal weight and significance in both societies of formal organizations as compared to social organization. Relative to one another, the stability and legitimacy of the democratic systems rest and depend much more on the latter and the Soviet system on the former. It is easy to forget, however, that the differences here are only relative, those of degree.

The parallel Western and Soviet images of Soviet society that we have described tend to exaggerate the “visible hand” features of the Soviet system with its stress on formal organizations and to underestimate the “invisible hand” aspects of systemic processes with their stress on social organization. In so doing, they yield a number of consequences which skew our understanding of the Soviet system.

In the first place this picture tends to minimize the elements of spontaneity, the degree of give-and-take in the Soviet political process itself. It exaggerates the planning dimension of Soviet policy making, the phase of adopting decisions and policies, and undervalues the phase of policy implementation in which adopted, “deliberate” policies usually lose their original shape in the cross current of conflicting interests and forces. Second, this picture underestimates the significance and scope of the unintended consequences of Soviet policies. It tends to exaggerate the degree to which Soviet policies even at their inception are deliberate attempts to shape societal environment according to long-range plans rather than continuous reactions to the shape and influence of political and social forces beyond the policy makers’ control. Third, and most important for our theme, this picture tends to exaggerate the role of the formalized and guided control mechanism in securing the stability and legitimacy of the regime and to ignore the significant role of social mechanisms and processes in the attainment of these ends.

The analysis of the sources of the stability of the Soviet regime during the Brezhnev era in this chapter will seek therefore to explore some of those processes. It will address four sources of Soviet stability: the performance of the Brezhnev leadership; the nature of rising popular expectations; the relation between the institutionalization of Soviet politics and popular participation; and the effect of social and political mobility.

The Performance of the Regime

There can be little doubt that a regime's performance in areas which citizens deem important, and especially those which touch on their everyday lives, is directly related to stability. This does not necessarily mean that bad or indifferent performance creates or deepens instability, for the time gap between performance and citizens' response may be quite wide, especially in a society of the Soviet type where social controls are strong and communications are highly managed and manipulated. What it does mean clearly is that good performance contributes to the stability of the regime.

The major question is what one selects to evaluate and how one evaluates the performance. From the vantage point of the Western analyst, the comparison of technological progress in the Soviet Union and the West, for example, may be considered a crucial point of evaluation of Soviet performance over the last fifteen years¹¹. Or one can survey the dreary wasteland of Soviet culture in this period and note the forced emigration of some of Russia's most talented and creative writers and artists. By either of these standards one would hardly judge the Brezhnev era a success. I would argue, however, that in order to gauge the regime's stability, the only legitimate vantage point is that of Soviet citizens themselves. And here the crucial sphere is the domestic economy, and the point of reference for judging performance is the comparison with the immediate Soviet past. By this standard the regime's performance in the Brezhnev era can be judged a success.

The key successful projects of the Brezhnev era five-year plans—among them the Kama power complex, the Togliatti automobile factory, the Samotlor oil field, the Kama truck plant, the "Friendship" pipeline through the Urals, the chemical fertilizer plants, the Soviet fishing and merchant fleets, the Orenburg natural-gas pipeline, the metallurgical complex at Kursk, the Baikal-Amur Railroad—all are fitting symbols of Soviet economic accomplishments. Yet from the point of view of our interest the most important and impressive change and the most salient characteristic of Soviet economic performance has occurred in the consumer goods sector with the raising of the standard of living. Brezhnev spoke the truth with regard to the raising of Soviet living standards when he proclaimed at the Twenty-fifth Party Congress that the "history of our country has not known such a broad social program as that fulfilled in the period for which I give the report."

The major conclusion that emerges from our presentation of Soviet performance in the Brezhnev era is that the Soviet regime has by and large been able to deliver the goods; it has generally been able to satisfy popular expectations for higher standards of living. The indices which we used to reach this conclusion have been aggregate figures for the entire population. From the point of view of

our interest in how the regime's performance influences Soviet stability, it is questionable, however, whether one can draw inferences for political stability from aggregate figures. It can be argued that these figures must be disaggregated to get at the political problems. In other words, what is most important to stability are sudden changes or discontinuous drops in living standards (such as changes in work norms or sudden price increases) and other matters of equity for given groups; because even when aggregate standards rise, the situation of some group or groups may decline. Similarly, one should probably make regional breakdowns, since any region which feels disadvantaged by the system may harbor resentments which could erupt into political disturbance. In sum, factors which affect the standards or relative position of specific groups are more important in triggering political disruptions than are slow, continuous changes in the aggregate measures. Moreover, while in decentralized market systems resentment is diffused, in the centralized systems of the USSR and Eastern Europe it is channeled to the center, since economic problems are necessarily blamed on the government and lower authorities usually lack power to act.

The availability of economic data does not permit a detailed disaggregation of the comprehensive indicators by groups and regions. A few well-grounded impressions based on what data do exist, however, would strongly argue that with regard to the main groups of the population and the main regions a disaggregation of indices would not alter the basic conclusion that Soviet performance under Brezhnev in the area of living standards does contribute to the stability of the regime.

First of all, the data indicate that all major groups of Soviet society have participated in the general improvement of living conditions. Although their respective shares were unequal, no group was left out. The improvement affected both the urban and rural populations, the skilled and unskilled workers, the managers and professionals, the students and pensioners. White-collar workers, clerks, typists, etc. probably profited least from the increase in the living standard, but this group from the point of view of political weight in the society, past record of causing trouble, ability to organize, and so forth is the least sensitive for the Soviet regime to deal with.

Second, all major regions, that is, primarily the republics, benefited from the improvement. Regional differences did exist, but they followed the normal, long-standing pattern that the greatest improvement in production and consumption related inversely to the level of the region's development. If differences among regions have therefore somewhat narrowed, the prevailing ranking of the regions has not changed.¹²

Third and most important, by far the greatest improvement in living conditions was felt by the most unprivileged groups in Soviet society, those who were

probably most dissatisfied with their lot. Minimum wages rose by about 50 percent; pensions were substantially increased; the peasants were included in the social security system; collective farms were covered by a state insurance system against bad harvests. In the decade 1965–75 the number of people with a monthly income of 100 rubles or more per family member increased eight and one-half times, a virtual income revolution embracing tens of millions of people.

Fourth, the government in this period pursued a very cautious policy with regard to raising norms or increasing prices, that is, the steps which would lead to a drop in the standard of living of specific groups. As a matter of fact, it is the level of prices of basic consumer goods, supported by enormous subsidies and the sometimes absurdly low and unchanging level of industrial norms of production, to mention two of many items, which account to a large extent for the strong inflationary pressures in the Soviet market and for the glaring inefficiencies and low productivity of the Soviet worker. It is virtually certain that this policy of caution betrays exactly the regime's concern over the possible destabilizing effects of any other alternative—a view which the bitter experiences with raising norms and prices in Poland could only have reinforced.

Fifth, the rise in the living standard was achieved in part through a channel which, from the point of view of its contribution to stability, is probably the most advantageous to the regime, namely, through social mobility. Improvement in this area is the most satisfactory, most drastic and most immediate of all forms of improvement in the standard of living and, incidentally, requires the least investment from the state. I am thinking here not only of the regular channels of mobility through higher education but primarily about mobility from rural to urban occupations and from unskilled to skilled labor.

Between 1965 and 1975 the percentage of the total population employed in agriculture declined by 37 percent, and the absolute number of farmers in the collective farms declined by 20 percent. The change in the structure of the urban working class is indicated in Table 7 by figures concerning requalification of workers.

The Nature of Rising Popular Expectations

Stability of the regime cannot be discussed apart from the question of the nature and level of popular expectations. As we have mentioned, the most important aspect of the rise of popular expectations to date is its confinement largely to the material sphere. No doubt the rise of nonmaterial expectations would present dangers to the system's stability.

It seems clear that the nonmaterial expectations and aspirations of various Soviet groups and the population at large differ today in many respects from what they were twenty or twenty-five years ago. All groups now expect a secure

life, free from capricious harassment and from terror. All aspire to live in a state which preserves a respectable level of legality in daily contacts with citizens. The creative intelligentsia—writers, artists, directors—expect greater artistic freedom; they aspire to a state of being where they can, within limits, experiment and err. They expect to continue the often enjoyed advantage to opt out, to engage safely in artistic pursuits which are neutral to the goals of the regime.

The creative and technical intelligentsia as well as the various elites share the expectation and strong desire never again to be isolated from the main streams of non-socialist world culture and progress. Professional groups expect a greater degree of professional autonomy and aspire to extend still further the limits of this autonomy, to gain greater access to information and data about their own and other societies, to be able to address the areas of their expertise more freely if only in closed discussion and publications of limited circulation.

The émigré dissident Valery Chalidze has contended that active dissent in the Soviet Union represents only a tip of the iceberg, that behind each *active* dissenter there are scores of *hidden* dissenters among the intelligentsia and even within the elites who share the ideas but lack the courage or ability or opportunity or desire to act openly. We cannot know whether Chalidze is correct. In all probability he accurately describes those groups of dissenters who hold the most moderate views. Even if Chalidze were right, however, from the point of view of the regime's stability, the point to be made is that the distinction between a small active dissent movement and a large inactive dissent group is a crucial one. The small active dissent movement can be fought with relative ease; it can be fragmented, isolated, neutralized. Where *conditions of stability* already exist, it suffices at most to identify for further reference the larger inactive dissent sympathy mood and then to ignore it. *Inactive dissent does not produce instability: its danger to the regime lies in the possibility of its activation under conditions of instability.*

Yet one may also argue, as this author does, that Chalidze exaggerates the extent of the inactive dissent by identifying it incorrectly as dissent. In light of what has just been said about the raised nonmaterial expectations and aspirations of various groups in Soviet society, it is more probable that what we observe is the partial coincidence of these aspirations and some of the views of the dissenters. What is crucial about the coincidence of shared aspirations, however, is, first, that for the dissenters the aspirations of these strata, especially in scope and intensity, represent only a small part of their program and, second, that for the dissenters their program is to be achieved through systemic change, while the various other groups aspire to realize their goals within the system by means of pressure that results in policy relaxation.

The nondissident groups and strata then do not expect a change of system but seek accommodation within it. Moreover, their expectations and, within limits, their aspirations are not neglected by the system's directors. As a matter of fact,

their very expectations are based on changes which have already taken place in the post-Stalin era with the willing or grudging support of the leadership. These changes—toward greater professional autonomy, greater freedom of expression, greater contacts with the non-socialist world—did not endanger the regime's stability. Indeed, their implementation owed perhaps less to pressures from the various groups than to the coincidence of those pressures with some interests of the leadership itself. The leadership slowly became convinced that such changes, when controlled and kept within limits, could serve to enhance the effectiveness and performance of the system or were even necessary to that end. The crux of the matter is to contain the aspirations within limits so as not to impinge on issues which the regime considers crucial to its survival.

It now seems that despite the partial coincidence of the aspirations of these groups and strata with those of active dissidents the former do not pose a threat to the system as long as they do not share the dissidents' broader goals and selection of means for their attainment. In addition, as long as the regime has the opportunity and these strata show the willingness to trade off nonmaterial aspirations for material demands—and this is what the regime has also been doing throughout the Brezhnev era—the regime is well prepared to cope with those aspirations.

In this connection the following proposition of Walter Connor holds true not only for the relations between the elite and the population at large but for relations between the regime's leadership and all important strata of the Soviet, particularly Russian Soviet, society:

The political culture links the bureaucratic elite and the "masses" more closely than it links the dissidents to either. The institutional framework that emerged in the Stalin era "fitted" relatively well with the antecedent political culture of tsarist Russia at the most critical points, and to all appearances the *contemporary* Soviet political culture still "fits" this relatively unchanged institutional pattern quite well.

Under Brezhnev the rise in the expectations and aspirations of Soviet citizens of high and low status has been most noticeable in the material sphere. In the last fifteen years a fever of materialism has seized the Soviet population of all classes and stations, a visible and all-pervasive drive to acquire goods, to live better, to enjoy. What is more striking, however, especially when compared to the situation in the West, is first that in absolute terms these expectations are very modest for an industrial nation and second that they are not far removed from what is realistically possible, though often unrealized, in Soviet conditions. To put it differently, although material expectations remain in advance of reality, one doubts whether there is a widening gap between expectations and reality.

The rising material expectations of the Soviet population do not get out of hand. They do not create a vicious circle which narrows restrictively and increasingly the leadership's ability to impose its own set of priorities on the society, which creates unbearable inflationary pressures and, by translating rising expectations into political pressures, overloads the entire system of government. The Soviet situation under Brezhnev, the combination of rising material expectations on the one hand and their limits on the other, has led to a partial reordering of the regime's priorities in the direction of consumerism. At the same time the system's directors have retained enough flexibility to decide the order of priorities, free from society's dictation.

The consequences of this situation from the point of view of the level of expectations are significant. In a society where food still constitutes over 50 percent of the family budget, where starches still account for about two-thirds of the food consumed, where fresh vegetables, not to mention fruits, are a rarity in urban areas, where regular meat deliveries to the stores are an exception, where a pair of shoes wears only a few months before disintegrating and a suit of clothes looks as though it was confected at the turn of the century, and where the pattern of building and inhabiting communal apartments with shared kitchens and bathrooms has only recently been abandoned, the "normal" consumer expectations are unimaginative and modest. They are likely to remain so in a society which displays before the public no examples of conspicuous luxury and mounts no advertising campaigns directed to the consumer. The modesty of consumer expectations thus renders them attainable under Soviet conditions long before they become economically and politically difficult to handle. From the existing base any step forward in the quantitative and especially the qualitative indicators of consumer supply will continue to be welcome as a real improvement.

An extremely important dimension in evaluating one's standard of living and setting one's expectations concerns the reference point used as the base. It is our contention that for the average Soviet consumer this reference point is neither the West nor even East European Communist countries but his own past.¹³ We often exaggerate tremendously the effects that opening the Soviet Union to the West in the last ten to fifteen years has had on the general Soviet public, given both the long history of isolation and the relative narrowness of the present opening. True, many "normal" Soviet citizens in metropolitan areas see foreigners and even have sporadic contacts with them. At the same time they are denied comprehensive and visual information about life in the West and are bombarded, if anything at a greater rate than before, with distorted data and images of life in the West. Travel to the West of course is enjoyed almost entirely by representatives of elites and subelites as a major ingredient of their privileged position.¹⁴

For the "normal" Soviet citizen who suspects the official version, life in the West has nevertheless no reality of its own. It cannot and does not in my opinion

serve as a reference point of his rising expectations. That point is provided by his own and his peer group's past, which, it should be stressed, is very often a peasant past, even in urban areas. Comparison with this past can only heighten approval of ongoing improvements and temper expectations.

The situation differs for elites and subelites and part of the professional classes. Their notion of the Western standard of living acquires plasticity thanks to their access to literature, their contacts with foreigners, their personal travel, or the accounts of friends. To counter potential disaffection the authorities assure these groups a standard of living much closer to the West and infinitely higher than the Soviet average. These beneficiaries contrast their superior lot to their less fortunate fellow citizens and enjoy it with some gratitude and even some guilt.

The picture we conveyed would not be correct were it to depict simply a harmonious society with modest expectations and high levels of satisfaction. If, as we contend, the basic background is that of modest expectations, the situation is more complex. The level of satisfaction of various Soviet publics is not normally high because the attainment of even modest expectations comes at the cost of constant gripes, dissatisfaction with what is available, and the unceasing competition for it. The point is, however, that the dissatisfaction and unfulfilled expectations with rare exceptions find expression in ways that may be unpleasant and injurious to the system but not dangerous.¹⁵ Discontent is funneled through specifically designated channels which tend to deflect criticism from central authorities to local bureaucracies. (The principal channel for complaints is the local soviet, the authority closest to the citizen.) One senses that expressions of dissatisfaction function for the regime not only as a safety valve but as a pressure on subordinate bureaucracies. Deviant *individual* behavior (alcoholism, absenteeism, and the like) serves as another channel of expression.¹⁶

Needless to say, dissatisfaction is almost never expressed in more drastic and independent ways through the organization of autonomous groups or actions like strikes, given the stringent controls over nonofficial communication and organization. Restrictions on the articulation of grievances are an essential means by which Soviet authorities manipulate popular expectations. Where they failed to work, as in Poland, the industrial working class achieved a virtual veto over the government's economic policies. The Soviet Union in this regard has very far to go.

Paul Hollander in his excellent comparison of Soviet and American societies has remarked: "The key to the stability of the Soviet system lies in its management of expectations rather than in the powers of the KGB."¹⁷ As long as Soviet citizen's focus their expectations on material achievements, as long as the rising spiral of expectations remains relatively modest and partly satisfied, as long as the articulation of dissatisfaction follows traditional Soviet channels, the Soviet regime will be able to maintain this major pillar of its stability.

Institutionalization and Popular Participation

The question of stability in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev requires consideration of the interconnections among three processes or characteristics of Soviet society: political apathy, political participation, and professionalization of social and political management. (Only those aspects of these vast topics that relate to stability will be examined here, while the matter of participation will be treated at greater length when I discuss legitimacy.) One of the most accepted and well-tested propositions in the study of political stability concerns the relation between institutionalization and participation. What has been convincingly argued may be summarized as follows: While a modern polity in the process of socioeconomic and political modernization produces and requires an increase in the intensity and scope of political participation, it requires as well a high level of political institutionalization which will keep pace with the increased participation. Political instability inevitably results if the level of political institutionalization is not high enough to absorb the increased pressures of the participation.¹⁸

Analysts have frequently alleged that in contrast to the Khrushchev period, the succeeding Brezhnev period is characterized by the decline of participatory politics. It is our contention that the level of political participation today seems, if anything, to be higher than in the immediate post-Stalin decade, that what has changed involves some emphases, directions, moods, and forms of political participation but not its level.

The two periods differ most in our opinion in the relation between participation and institutionalization. One may suggest that in the Khrushchev period the levels of participation and institutionalization did not keep step and, indeed, that their respective directions ran counter to one another. Khrushchev, in his attempt to shake up the system, destabilized political institutions. He may be said to have deinstitutionalized Soviet politics somewhat at the very same time that he conducted a partially successful effort to increase popular political participation. In our view participation increased also during the Brezhnev period and went less noticed because the institutionalization of Soviet politics matched its pace of development.

Both periods share the un-Stalinist attitude of encouraging criticism, feedback, and initiative, that is, a positive commitment to expanded participation. Yet, while the tendency of the Khrushchev approach was to equalize the political status of full-time officials and the participatory *aktiv*, Brezhnev seeks successfully to reconcile the expanded political participation of nonbureaucrats with a strong commitment to the political and bureaucratic autonomy of Soviet officialdom. (In the apt phrase of George Breslauer, Khrushchev's approaches to achievement, participation, and authority building may be labeled "organizational," "populist," and "confrontational"; Brezhnev's as "financial," "rational-administrative," and "corporate.")¹⁹

If, as we noted above, expanded participation often produces the danger of destabilization, a degree of political apathy in society, an element of apolitization is not undesirable *from the systemic point of view*, as Huntington suggested. It does, after all, provide a stabilizing cushion, a safety valve. Exactly this is taking place in Soviet society. Contradictory as it may sound, the expanded participation of the Brezhnev era goes hand in hand with the retention of one of the most characteristic features of major Soviet social groups—their high level of apolitization.

In order to understand this apolitization, a major distinction has to be made between “high politics” and “low politics.” The former involves the principal political issues of society, the abstract ideas and language of politics, the decisions and actions of the societal leadership. The latter involves the decisions that directly touch the citizen’s daily life, the communal matters, and the conditions of the workplace.

The average Soviet citizen is apolitical, indifferent, apathetic with regard to “high politics.” Lacking curiosity and interest, he suffers his routine encounters with “high politics,” unavoidable in Soviet conditions, but he remains untouched by them. The language is rich in sayings that convey this attitude: for example, “The bosses know best” (“Nachal’stvo luchshe znaet”) or “That’s none of my business” (“Moia khata s kraiu”).²⁰ The average person considers politics a separate way of life, a profession for which one is trained and paid. He customarily regards dissenters who risk their lives and careers for “high politics” as abnormal and aberrant or simply as trouble-makers. Nowhere is this attitude toward high politics more prevalent than among youth, so often the most politically volatile of all groups, but who in the Soviet Union, according to most competent observers, orient their lives toward careers and leisure.²¹ Former Soviet citizens recall from their experience as Komsomol members that the organization from the point of view of “high politics” was very nonpolitical.

By contrast, “low politics” regularly involves a very high proportion of Soviet citizenry. As we shall restate later in our discussion of legitimacy, “low politics” constitute the very substance of the Soviet system of political participation. Very seldom under Soviet conditions do the “low” and “high” dimensions of Soviet politics intersect. When they do, it is a matter of the objective *effects* of the “low politics” of mass political participation on “high politics,” and not as a consequence of the conscious *actions* of citizens. In all probability only a major shock or a prolonged crisis could provoke such actions.

This form of political apathy, while obviously an important element of political stability in the Brezhnev era, equals or perhaps even yields in significance as a factor of stability to the element of the increased institutionalization of Soviet politics. Increased institutionalization manifests itself in a number of ways—in the stability and streamlining of organizations active in Soviet politics, in the depersonalization

of Soviet politics as compared to the Khrushchev period, in the establishment and adherence to long-range procedures in decision making, and so forth. Yet the major and to a large extent the new factor of this institutionalization is the heightened professionalization of all aspects of Soviet politics and administration.

Social and Political Mobility

Of all the social processes in the Soviet Union there is one that provides the crucial safety valve against discontent and a key basis for the positive identification of various social strata with the regime. It is the process of social mobility in general and, more especially, the process of political mobility. There would appear to be no necessary relation between the degree of democracy within a given political system and the openness of recruitment into its elites and sub-elites. If one measures the openness of recruitment by the ease of access of diverse social strata to positions of a political and administrative power, that is to say, by intra- and intergenerational political and administrative mobility, one must consider highly democratic society like Great Britain to possess a fairly closed, non-democratic system of recruitment and, by contrast, a highly authoritarian society such as the Soviet Union to display the most open, democratic system of recruitment of all developed societies.

Soviet society exhibits vast inequalities of class, status, and power. The revolutionary Bolshevik egalitarian ideal is farther from fulfillment today than it was in the first postrevolutionary decade. These inequalities remain firmly-embedded-in-the fabric the of Soviet society, despite the appreciable rise in living standards and improvement in the level of political participation during the post-Stalinist and especially the Brezhnev periods.²² Yet they should not distract attention from the high degree of political mobility within the society, that is to say, from the degree to which the elite system is open, accessible to recruitment from the lower strata of the society.²³

The original Bolshevik elite came from the intelligentsia or middle class. From the 1930s and especially from the Great Purge until today, however, the overwhelming majority of the national Soviet leadership as well as the leading officials of the various functional bureaucracies are working class in origin. This holds especially true for officials on all levels of the most exclusive and powerful bureaucracy, the party apparatus, as Table 1 illustrates. In this respect the present and the past are differentiated by the type of mobility that has brought individuals of working-class origin into the elites. In the past it was partly intergenerational mobility but to a large extent also intragenerational mobility; today it is primarily or predominantly intergenerational mobility.

To say it differently, those individuals who entered the elite in the late 1930s, 1940s, or even 1950s were very often not only of working-class origin but had actually engaged in physical labor in their youth. Those individuals who entered the elite more recently may still derive predominantly from working-class origins, but their own social position prior to joining the political world was much less frequently that of worker or peasant.²⁴ The decline in intragenerational mobility reflects the changes which have taken place in the typical lifestyle pattern of educationally mobile working-class youth in Russia in the last few decades, especially with the advent of mass middle education.

The openness of recruitment into Soviet political and administrative elites and subelites results in part from deliberate policies and in part from the functioning of spontaneous social processes. First of all, it can occur only in an ideological atmosphere that encourages the advancement of individuals of working-class origin into the elites and subelites. The official Soviet ideology with its symbolic cult of the working classes creates a propitious environment which supports the aspirations of working-class individuals to enter the elite and propitious conditions for their competition with individuals of other social origins.

Social origin of leading Soviet cadres, 1956–66.

<i>Cadres</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>% of worker and peasant origin</i>
Top party and state leaders (Politburo Secretariat, Presidium of Council of Ministers, Presidium of Supreme Soviet)	67	87
Central Committee apparatus	48	73
Council of Ministries	107	76
Provincial and republican party-state Leaders	276	82
Key economic managers	185	72
Key military commanders	65	74

Source: Calculated on the basis of the author's personal files. The two major official sources of data on the social origins of Soviet high officials—*Deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, Piatoi sozyv* (Moscow: Izd. Izvestiia, 1958) and *Deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, Shestoi sozyv* (Moscow: Izd. Izvestiia, 1962)—provide the following picture: Of 581 officials listed in those sources, data concerning social origin are provided for 364 individuals (62.6 percent). Of these, 344 officials (94.5 percent) are listed as being of worker or peasant origin.

Second, the dominant working-class origin of the Soviet elites is widely publicized in the Soviet Union precisely because it is ideologically attractive to Soviet rulers and because it confirms the claim that Soviet authority is derived from the people. This too encourages individuals of working-class origin to advance into the elite. Studies of mobility in Western countries have reinforced the axiom that people, as a rule, strive primarily for what they consider attainable and avoid what they consider, rightly or wrongly, unattainable.²⁵

Third, the easiest means to recruit individuals of nonworking-class origin into the elites would obviously be to coopt members of the families of the elites and subelites themselves. Such cooptation, however, is officially and strenuously discouraged at all levels of the administrative ladder. Party policy was and remains directed against it for fear of populating the functional bureaucracies and geographical regions with family cliques whose personal loyalties would resist the penetration and supervision of superior authority and create a diffusion of central power. Party policy vigorously encourages recruitment into elites and subelites from families of party members and discourages it from families of elite members.

Fourth, the main precondition of recruitment into elites and subelites is educational achievement, and education constitutes the main channel of entrance. As many studies have shown, the higher educational process in the Soviet Union favors groups of nonworking-class origin, despite official efforts to the contrary. One discerns the discriminatory class element in Soviet higher education, however, only when one examines the relative group representation of various classes in the student body and especially among graduates of the various Soviet institutions of higher learning. But from the point of view of the availability of working-class candidates for recruitment into the elite, the absolute pool of Soviet graduates of working-class origin is so large as to make irrelevant the relative class representation among the graduates.

Fifth and finally, a crucial factor in the advance of working-class individuals into the elites and subelites is on the one hand the attractiveness of this type of career for these individuals and on the other hand the pronounced reluctance of individuals of professional and "upper class" origin (with the notable exception of the military elite) to embark on a road which would lead them directly to such careers. This is especially true with regard to the political elite in the strict sense of the word, the party apparatus.²⁶ Were this not the case, one would suspect more obstacles in the path of advancement by working-class individuals.

The degree to which the children of professional and especially elite families are disinclined to choose a political career is striking. A number of reasons may account for such reluctance in addition to the previously mentioned official discouragement of the practice. In the case of individuals from professional families, the attraction of their parents' profession, whether doctor, engineer, or scientist,

may be of overwhelming importance. In the case of individuals from elite and subelite families, the force of the negative example of their parents' careers combined with the relative ease of their own advance into the "free" professions or arts or diplomacy thanks to family backing may be crucial.

Parents for their part want their children to have a "better" future than an administrative or political career, the pitfalls and difficulties of which they know so well. They consider it one of the perquisites of office to be able to direct their children along different, attractive, high-status paths. The children, for their part, have an opportunity to observe the tedium, insecurity, and extreme hard work associated with their parents' careers. While taking for granted and even regarding as hereditary the privileges of status, they are at the same time drawn to other high-status careers.²⁷

By contrast, ambitious individuals of working-class origin face very stiff competition from better-prepared and better-backed children from professional and elite families in the striving for high-status, nonpolitical, and nonadministrative careers. Moreover, they perhaps idealize the realities of political and administrative careers while coveting the material benefits and power that accompany political elite status.

Whatever accounts for the pattern of recruitment, however, the high level of working-class intergenerational mobility into the political and administrative elites has highly significant consequences for the system. For the working classes, the high levels of social mobility in general and mobility into the elites in particular provide one of the most tangible and visible stakes in the system.

Probably there are few families in the Soviet Union where either the nuclear or extended family has no member who can be identified with a ruling group, whether as an officer of the armed forces or the police, a manager of an enterprise, a functionary of the party, or an official of a ministry. There are probably few working-class families where parents fail to hold aspirations for their children's future career and with the reasonable expectation of realization. The Soviets have long provided opportunities of advancement for the working classes, a circumstance which could not fail to influence at least in part a positive identification with the regime and to dilute significantly any feelings of opposition to the regime.

There is yet another important sense in which upward mobility and the predominantly working-class origin of the leadership and elites bear on the legitimacy of the regime. Well before the revolution in Russia and to the present day, society has exhibited a pronounced "we" versus "they" syndrome. Usually we contrast "we," the simple "normal" people, with "they," the power holders on all levels, the *nachal' stvo*. Yet the reality and genuineness of this division may conceal a phenomenon no less real and for questions of stability even more significant. It is the sense of cultural community between "we" and "they," where the "we" represents the workingclasses. After all, they both come from the same

social stuff; they share much the same life histories; they resemble one another culturally to an amazing degree, as witness their sentimentalism, basic nationalism, mannerisms, artistic and literary preferences, language, and all the rest. The world of privilege may separate “we” and “they” in Soviet society, but origin and culture unite them. It is in this sense and only in this sense that one should understand the observation of a Russian writer in a conversation with me, “Our power is a genuinely popular power” (“U nas nastoiashchaia narodnaia vlast’”).

To this point the discussion has focused on a number of processes which underlie the stability of the Soviet regime in the Brezhnev era. The argument can be further developed in two directions. First I propose to analyze the question of the legitimacy of the Soviet system, a central ingredient in our understanding of the nature and mechanism of its stability. Then I propose to demonstrate some of my propositions concerning stability by studying in more detail the most serious long-range domestic challenge to Soviet stability at the present time, the national problem.

NOTES

1. The case of the Jewish emigration is truly an exception and, because of its circumstances, has to be treated separately. The key here is Soviet popular anti-Semitism, which makes possible popular mobilization against the Jews who wish to emigrate and prevents the contagion of a successful emigration drive from affecting other, more homogeneous, concentrated, and settled nationality groups.

2. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 1.

3. Michel J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

4. I find the definition and analysis of the concept of mobilization most fruitfully developed by Amitai Etzioni in *The Active Society*, chaps. 13 and 15, where it refers to the process by which a controlling unit gains significantly in the control of assets it previously did not control. From this point of view, the Soviet regime is still a highly mobilizational regime with an enormous scope of mobilizational activity. What is different from the past is, first, that its mobilization of resources is directed primarily at the creation of new resources rather than the amassing of resources already in existence, and second, that its mobilizational activity is not directed primarily at transforming the society but rather at preserving its present structure.

5. Samuel P. Huntington, “Remarks on the Meanings of Stability in the Modern Era” in S. Bialer and S. Sluzar, eds., *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age, 3: Strategies and Impact of Contemporary Radicalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977), 277. The term “extrinsic” is used here to denote challenges emanating from outside the political system itself.

6. In every society the police rely on informers located in criminal circles themselves or on the peripheries of crime as their major, perhaps main instrument of crime detection and prevention. What is different in the Soviet Union is that the society at large is treated by the police as a “criminal circle” and covered by a network of informers placed in factories, collective farms, among journalists, writers, etc. Only the recruitment of party members as informers requires the approval of nonpolice authorities.

7. Our detailed knowledge of Soviet censorship is quite limited. We gained an indirect insight into it, however, through the publication of a unique, original, and authentic series of documents smuggled out to the West from Poland by Tomasz Strzyzewski. When reading

them, one has to remember that these instructions limiting freedom of information came from a country where censorship by comparison to Soviet standards may seem very relaxed (see *Czarna Ksiega Cenzury PRL* [London: Anex, 1977]). A partial English translation of this book is contained in "Official Censorship in the Polish People's Republic" (Ann Arbor. Mich.: North American Study Center for Polish Affairs, April 1978).

8. Quoted from Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), pp. 332-3.

9. According to Soviet political economy, the principal socioeconomic law of Soviet society describes its *goal* as "the securing of the maximum satisfaction of the constantly rising material and cultural requirements of the whole society through the continuous expansion and perfection of socialist production on the basis of higher techniques." But the principal *mechanism* of the society is provided by the law of "planned, proportionate, balanced development." These "laws" were "discovered" by Stalin and were retained virtually unchanged by his successors (I. Stalin. *Ekonomicheskie problemy sotsializma v SSSR* [Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952], pp. 45-6).

10. Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 239.

11. The growth of Soviet industrial might did not lead to any perceptible narrowing of the technological lag behind developed Western societies. In this respect, one very well-researched Western study states: "In most of the technologies we have studied there is no evidence of a substantial diminution of the technological gap between the USSR and the West in the past 15-20 years, either at the prototype/commercial application stages or in the diffusion of advanced technology" (Ronald Ammann, Julian Cooper, and R. W. Davies, eds. [with the assistance of Hugh Jenkins], *The Technological Level of Soviet Industry* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977], p. 66). The sources of this lag are to be found in the inflexibility of the Soviet system of management and incentives of the economy, science, and technology (see Bruce Parrontt, "Technological Progress and Soviet Politics. *Survey*, 23, no. 2 [Spring 1977-78], 39-60).

12. The difference in the level of republican development is still considerable, though narrowing. Differentiation in the production of per capita national income in the last year for which official figures are available (1961) was as follows (RSFSR = 100):

Latvia	123.1	Kazakhstan	71.9
Estonia	112.7	Turkmenia	62.9
Lithuania	89.8	Kirgizia	60.7
Ukraine	87.6	Uzbekistan	58.7
Armenia	76.0	Tadzhikistan	51.5
Belorussia	72.5		

Source: Calculated from Iu. F. Vorob'ev, *Vyravnivanie urovnei ekonomicheskogo razvitiia siouznykh respublik* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1966), p. 192.

13. As the accompanying table indicates, the comparable levels of real net average monthly earning in Soviet industry remain below the East European level and much below the West European level as represented by Austria. Moreover, between 1960 and 1973 the gap between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has somewhat narrowed, but it opens even more in comparison to Western Europe, (Socialist East Europe without USSR = 100.)

Country	1960	1973
Bulgaria	81.5	90.1
Czechoslovakia	106.7	100.1
GDR	112.4	121.5
Hungary	98.3	90.4
Poland	97.9	98.0
Rumania	83.4	92.4
USSR	68.8	79.6
Austria	127.4	160.2

Source: Janet G. Chapman, "Recent Trends in Soviet Industrial Wage Structure," p. 44.

14. In 1977 about 2.7 million Soviet citizens traveled abroad. Of these, about 1.75 million visited socialist countries while 950,000 went to industrialized and Third World countries. To the six main industrial countries (U.S.A., West Germany, France, Japan, Great Britain, Italy) there were 277,300 Soviet visitors, of whom 16,600 came to the U.S.A. (*Vneshniaia torgovlia*, 1978, no. 9, p. 36). An overwhelming majority of those traveling to capitalist countries were on official business and exchanges of delegations. According to the State Department, fewer than 1,000 of those coming to the United States can be classified as tourists, who incidentally would also come in all probability from the privileged strata of Soviet society.

15. An important safety valve, particularly regarding dissatisfaction with the availability of goods on the official market, is provided by the second market or—to say it simply—by stealing and other illegal transactions, the scale of which we are only now beginning to appreciate (see Dimitri K. Simes, "The Soviet Parallel Market," *Survey*, 21, no. 3 [Summer 1975], 42–52; John M. Kramer, "Political Corruption in the USSR," *Western Political Quarterly*, 30, no. 2 [June 1977], 213–24; Gregory Grossman, "Notes on the Illegal Private Economy and Corruption," in *Soviet Economy in a Time of Change*, U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, 1 [10 October 1979], 834–55).

16. Absenteeism and especially labor turnover are major and serious problems of Soviet industry which reflect a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with job conditions and pay. While in West Germany about 5 percent of the working force change their work each year (1967–72) and in the U.S.A. 4.8 percent (2.1 percent at their own request [1970]), in the Soviet Union in 1970 the comparable figure; was 21 percent. This is especially astonishing when one considers the very close relation in the Soviet Union between income and seniority and job tenure (Anna-Juta Pietsch, "Die Fluktuation der Arbeitskräfte in der UdSSR im Verhältnis zum ökonomisch bedingten Umsetzungsbedarf und in internationalen Vergleich," Working Papers, Osteuropa Institut. Munich).

17. Paul Hollander, *Soviet and American Society: A Comparison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 388.

18. Huntington writes: "The stability of any given polity depends upon the relationship between the level of political participation and the level of political institutionalization. . . . As political participation increases, the complexity, autonomy, adaptability, and coherence of the society's political institutions must also increase if political stability is to be maintained" (*Political Order in Changing Societies*, p. 79).

19. George W. Breslauer, *Dilemmas of Leadership in the Soviet Union since Stalin: 1953–1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), pp. 14/2–14/3.

20. Alexander Zinov'ev well expresses, even if he rather exaggerates, the conservative and pessimistic attitude of the Russian worker: "Everything that was, will happen. Everything that will be, is already here" ("Vse, chto bylo, budet! Vse, chto budet, est'") (Aleksandr Zinov'ev, *Ziiaishchie vysoty* [Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1976], p. 221).

21. Walter D. Connor, "Generations and Politics in the USSR," *Problems of Communism*, 24, no. 5 (September–October 1975), 20–31.

22. A growing number of major studies address the questions of equality and privilege in the Soviet Union. By far the best is Alastair McAuley, *Economic Welfare in the Soviet Union: Poverty, Living Standards, and Inequality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979). Other studies include Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (New York: Walker, 1972) and *Privilege in the Soviet Union* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978); and Walter D. Connor, *Socialism, Politics, and Equality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

23. For a detailed Soviet discussion of this process, see N. M. Katuntscva, *Opyt SSSR po podgotovke intelligencesii iz rabochikh i krest'ian* (Moscow: Mysl', 1977).

24. In his report to the Twenty-fourth Party Congress. Brezhnev declared, "More than 80 percent of the present secretaries of central committees of the union republican parties, of the *kraikoms* and the provincial party committees, of the chairmen of the republican Council of Ministers, of the chairmen of the *krai* and provincial executive committees of the Soviets, and about 70 percent of ministers and chairmen of state committees of the USSR Council of Ministers began their active life as workers or peasants" (XXIV s'ezd *Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovet-skogo Soiuzu. Stenograficheskii otchet*, 1 [Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1971], 124). Brezhnev is speaking here about close to one thousand top officials of the party-state. The figures seem somewhat high for the intragenerational mobility suggested by Brezhnev but fit very well my own calculations for intergenerational mobility.

Other Soviet figures concerning research into the social origin of selected units of the party apparatus seem more realistic. According to a study in 1974–5 of the party apparatus in twenty-nine cities and counties of the RSFSR, Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Moldavia, Latvia, and Tadzhikistan, 82.6 percent of the *apparatchiki* were of worker and peasant origin and, of those, 563 percent were at the beginning of their working life workers and peasants themselves (*Voprosy raboty SPSS s kadrami na sovremennom etape* [Moscow: Mysl', 1976], p. 152).

25. It is known, for example, that for a long time and as recently as the 1960s even such privileged American minority groups as Jews did not apply for some jobs, for example in large Wall Street law firms, because they believed they would have no chance of being accepted. At the same time the study of those firms showed that they were much more ready to accept Jewish lawyers than they themselves believed. If the study is correct, misperceptions of this kind reinforce the exclusion of minorities or disadvantaged from higher status positions through the manipulation of their aspirations.

26. The children of the top leadership can serve as an interesting indicator. I was able to trace the education and/or the type of employment of forty-nine children of post-Stalin Politburo members. Without exception none was or is involved in politics in the strict sense. Science, arts, journalism, and diplomacy are the occupational pursuits of the overwhelming majority.

27. A career in the political elite proper, in the party apparatus, requires a long period of apprenticeship, years of hard work in low positions before reaching a position of considerable power. Most importantly, it almost inevitably involves service in areas removed from large metropolitan centers. It is interesting to note, therefore, that in an overwhelming majority of known cases, the senior party *apparatchiki* were born or brought up in towns.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union

It is safe to say that when Mikhail S. Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, no serious scholar anticipated the imminent collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe, much less the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. Yet, in less than five years, the Soviet empire was gone, and by the end of 1991, the CPSU and the USSR itself were relegated to the dustbin of history.¹

Over the next two years, as Gorbachev initiated economic and political reform under the slogans *glasnost* (openness), *perestroika* (restructuring), and *demokratizatsiya* (democratization), Western observers predictably engaged in debate over the likelihood those reforms would prove successful. These reforms were Gorbachev's response to the years of "stagnation," as both Russian and Western experts referred to the decline in the Soviet economy that began in the late 1970s. It was not just a stagnation of economic growth but also of ideas and of the officials who clung to them. Change and innovation had become anathema to every aspect of Soviet rule. Gorbachev, sensing a looming, systemic crisis, initiated his reforms to reinvigorate what had become a stagnant system through and through.

Some, who continued to see the totalitarian underpinnings of the system Stalin created, predicted utter failure due to that system's basic inflexibility.² Any attempt to upset the apple cart was doomed to failure, and Gorbachev would suffer the same fate—removal from his post—as the earlier reformer Khrushchev.³ They did not, as a rule, forecast that these efforts would topple the party and the regime itself. Rather, they anticipated an era of retrenchment internally and hostility toward the West externally.

These were a distinct minority in the West, however. The vast majority of experts on the Soviet Union were swept away by a general infatuation with the idea of the reforms and with the leader himself, who projected an innovative,

dynamic, modern image. Gorbachev's image in the West, enhanced by media and academic accounts alike, was of a brilliant renaissance man, a liberal akin to the American Founding Fathers. He stood not just for peace with the West but for real integration with the liberal, democratic, and capitalist world. Hard to believe in retrospect, but this was the public perception of him and was reflected in his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.⁴ Though widely scorned and even hated at home at all ends of the political spectrum, he was beloved in the West.

I witnessed this disconnect personally in October 1990, when working as an accredited Moscow correspondent for Crain's Communications, a news and media group specializing in business and trade publications. At a banquet in the most exclusive hotel restaurant in Moscow designed to support the fledgling advertising and public relations industry just emerging in Russia, I was seated next to the company's matriarch, Gertrude Crain, then in her late seventies. On the other side of me sat a twenty-something female Muscovite, an artist and aspiring advertising designer, sporting a nose ring and short, spiked purple hair. Gorbachev had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize earlier that day, and a positively ecstatic Mrs. Crain asked whether everyone in Russia was excited by the news. Turning to the hip, young woman on my left, I asked dryly, "She wants to know what people here think about Gorbachev's receiving the Nobel."

Her large eyes bugging out and shaking her head, she simply stated, "*Uzhasniy koshmar.*"

I translated for Mrs. Crain, "She says it is a terrible nightmare."

The look of utter incomprehension on the face of this powerful, stately woman was one I shall never forget. The local experience with Gorbachev was chaos and breakdown brought about by half measures and unfulfilled promises. This initial exchange triggered a fascinating education of a news powerhouse by a wannabe punk artist on the intricacies of the late-Soviet socioeconomic milieu. For, by October 1989, the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe was spinning out of control as the communist regimes were falling like dominos. Across Russia, the masses found their earnings had become largely worthless, while store shelves were becoming barren. Hour-long lines for meager basics were the norm as black-market prices topped unreachable levels for most of the Soviet people. Where Gorbachev had promised growth, modernity, and the strengthening of the country, the people experienced exactly the opposite while observing their leader being indecisive, erratically switching course, and generally demonstrating incompetence. The attempt at educating the wealthy, American media mogul failed entirely. After about twenty minutes, a flabbergasted Mrs. Crain shook her head and, ending the conversation, stated, "It does not make any sense. He has made everything so much better. He has brought so much change for these people and peace to the world."

Perhaps the normative bias in the West regarding the direction of events in the USSR, reflected in Gertrude Crain's incomprehension, blinded people to the harsh realities that the mass of the Soviet population experienced as the demise of the empire and the collapse of the country approached. While we in the West were celebrating the end of the Cold War and the triumph of liberal, capitalist democracy, we failed to grasp the realities of systemic collapse in Russia. People were in fear during hyperinflation in the late 1980s and early 1990s that they would go hungry, that there would be another famine. It was existential fear.

But what is, in retrospect, truly bewildering is that the total and rapid demise of all of the communist regimes across Eastern Europe in the second half of 1989 did not shake the widespread perception of Gorbachev's success, much less raise anticipation of a pending collapse of the Soviet political system. Gorbachev was making the world more peaceful with unilateral force cuts, troop withdrawals, and accelerated arms control negotiations with the United States. His reforms advanced within the Soviet Union the cherished Western liberal ideals of political and economic freedoms. These domestic and international changes produced euphoria in the West—things were changing in ways that the United States and its allies wanted. Writers, musicians, and artists were free to produce and disseminate their work. How vibrant the cultural space was becoming! People were able to espouse their political views without fear. How dynamic the political space was becoming! The military standoff between East and West was receding. How peaceful the world was becoming! It was understandably easy to get carried away and to equate all of these changes with success.

And, so, the abrupt demise of the Soviet Union following the unsuccessful coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 came as a shock to virtually everyone in the West. The coup, in which eight government officials, including Gorbachev's Vice President, Interior Minister, KGB Chief, Minister of Defense, and the head of the parliament, petered out as the erstwhile leaders and the army units deployed into Moscow lacked the resolve to open fire on the small group of citizens and politicians, including Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who gathered in protest of the action. In the wake of the Soviet collapse, scholars have surveyed where the study of that country went wrong and why so few foresaw the end.⁵ These discussions probed the interesting question of whether any reform strategy in a Soviet-type political system could have succeeded or whether such systems were immutable to reform and, if there were paths to reform that could have succeeded, why other choices were made.

The following selections provide an overview of the myriad challenges the Soviet Union faced in its final years, a review of the reforms Gorbachev initiated

that sought to address these challenges, and explanation of why that attempt so spectacularly failed. Most of these analyses directly link to the wider literature on “transitions to democracy”, as Gorbachev’s response to systemic crisis was a series of reforms designed to “open up” the Soviet system, to ease controls, and to provide a wider scope for individual action and individual responsibility. They were liberalizing measures designed to resolve crisis that instead triggered an explosion of antisystem sentiment. Because the Western expectation was that these measures would succeed in transforming the Soviet Union, the ultimate collapse sparked inquiries attempting to explain the failure. Katherine Verdery, in “What Was Socialism and Why Did it Fail?” offers a compelling overview of the failure of the Soviet political economy as it was first and foremost economic failure that sparked Gorbachev’s reformist orientation. Verdery’s is a thorough analysis of why Soviet-style economies fell behind so catastrophically, with insights into both the internal and external challenges that made the situation so dire. By contrast, Alexander Dallin, in “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR” offers an overview of various political explanations for the causes of the Soviet collapse. My own piece, “Glasnost Gutted the Party, Democratization Destroyed the State,” seeks to reevaluate the role of Gorbachev himself, evaluating his leadership, the decisions he made, and the forces he unleashed in an attempt to demonstrate how far the results deviated from his own goals. In the end, one comes away impressed that the systemic, circumstantial, and individual variables all contributed substantially to the unraveling of the Soviet political system, to the disintegration of the empire, and to the dismemberment of the state.

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NOTES

1. The phrase was coined by early Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, who hurled it at less radical socialist competitors in Russia who walked out on a meeting of communists during the Revolution in 1917. “You are pitiful isolated individuals; you are bankrupts; your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on into the dustbin of history!” Trotsky shouted at them. (See Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* Vol. 3 [Chicago: Eastman], ch. 10.)

2. Most famous and controversial among these was Z [Martin Malia], “To the Stalin Mausoleum,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (1990), pp. 295–344.

3. Marshall Goldman, in particular, routinely predicted in public talks that Gorbachev would be removed from power within six months. He began making this prediction in mid-1987. See an account in *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1987, titled “The Washington Summit: Enigmatic Gorbachev Taxes Kremlinologists’ Skills.”

4. This was clearly the dominant position in the West, with far too many representative sources to identify as leading. Stephen Cohen and Katrina vanden Heuvel’s *Voices of Glasnost* (WW Norton, 1991); Seweryn Bialer’s *Inside Gorbachev’s Russia: Politics, Society and Nationality* (Westview Press, 1989); and Ed A. Hewett and Victor H. Winston’s *Milestones in Glasnost and Perestroika* (Brookings, 1991) are all edited volumes with selections of leading scholars of Soviet politics, economics, and society, who without exception hailed the dawning of a new age.

5. For a nice exchange laying out varying approaches to the Soviet crisis and their strengths and weaknesses, see George Breslauer, “In Defense of Sovietology,” in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (October–December 1992), pp. 197–238; and Ken Jowitt, “Really Imaginary Socialism,” in *East European Constitutional Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2–3 (Spring/Summer 1997), pp. 43–49.