

*Authority and Inequality under Capitalism
and Socialism*

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I. USA

These lectures will be an attempt to explain the major similarities and differences in the systems of authority and inequality in the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. By focusing on the developing character of bureaucracies in each of the three societies we can make comparisons that bring out essential characteristics in each case.

At the start it will be useful to give a very brief sketch of the major historical factors that have determined the shape of authority and social inequality in capitalist and socialist societies. One is the body of doctrines, such as Thomas Jefferson's synthesis of Enlightenment theories, and their intellectual successors as they crystallized in Marxism-Leninism. Such social theories present a continuing diagnosis of social ills and a remedy for them. Though the remedies seldom work, by providing a framework for understanding human society, the theories have an enormous influence on the policies of rulers. A second set of factors is the requirements of industrialization, that is, (a) how to get the resources to build machines; (b) how to put the machines together with men and women to turn out huge numbers of new products; and (c), how to distribute these products among the general population. A third set of factors, which I shall not discuss in any detail, includes those that promote or prevent the emergence of a single ruler in a police state. The last one, which it will also be necessary to neglect, is the context of international relations. This context can often be the main factor that determines whether or not an historically new type of society can get started. Thus French intervention was crucial in the American Revolution, while the absence of powerful Western intervention was crucial to the success of the Russian and Chinese Communist revolutions. The

main point to emerge through these brief comments is that every major country faces a very similar set of problems and issues in the course of industrialization —including whether or not to industrialize. But the solutions differ. Prior traditions and social institutions together with the international context largely determine the solutions.

Turning now to the United States and beginning with a look at current doctrines, the first impression is likely to be the absence of any single body of ideas that could channel political or more general discussion about the character of this society. There is no agreed-upon diagnosis and remedy for our ills, not even one that could be widely attacked because it seems factually mistaken and morally wrong. (Factual and moral errors do not necessarily have anything to do with one another.) Instead one sees a rank profusion of incompatible ideas. They range from the most nonsensical forms of nativist or romantic anti-rationalism — which have been on the increase lately —through pragmatic realism to highly abstruse forms of rationalism and idealism. Yet this apparent confusion may conceal significant recurring themes. To find out we shall have to look more closely at patterns of social behavior as well as ideas.

For a long time there has been a noticeable reluctance to accept any kind of authority in the United States. No individual or office is immune to criticism, sometimes quite savage criticism and abuse. In the absence of an hereditary aristocracy Americans do not have the habit of deference that has been ascribed to the British. Americans have heroes, mainly figures in sports and entertainment with a scattering in space exploration and other dramatic areas of science. But they lack comparable figures of authority. Well below the level of national political leadership one finds the same reluctance to accept authority. Some thirty years ago a distinguished anthropologist observed that bosses, politicians, teachers, and *ibig shots* were all accepted only at a discount in American

society insofar as their positions implied authority.¹ More recently there has appeared a substantial body of evidence from opinion polls indicating a loss of confidence in political and economic leadership since that time. The decline began during the war in Vietnam and has continued since the end of that war.² Such a loss of trust implies a further deterioration of authority, since authority implies trust in those who command.

It is worthwhile to try to locate somewhat more precisely the time when this loss of authority took place and the causes of this failure. There are good reasons for holding that it derived from the disintegration during the 1960s and 1970s of the New Deal coalition forged by Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. Nearly forty years ago Hans Morgenthau remarked that if one studied this coalition in a seminar, one would conclude that it was an impossibility. The coalition was put together with urban workers, recently enfranchised urban immigrants, and intellectuals — together the sources of its liberal reformist wing — a broad spectrum of the then-rural South with a substantial reactionary component, and other discontented farmers in the Midwest, the whole topped off with a numerically small but fairly influential set of business leaders who saw no other way out of the Depression. The New Deal did not put an end to the Depression. The boom of the Second World War did that. Nevertheless the coalition was successful for a long time, from 1932 to the 1960s and beyond. Its main policies were economic growth, encouragement of unions, and social welfare expenditures at home for the sake of equity and social peace. Abroad its policies emphasized the support of preferably but not necessarily liberal regimes as a bulwark against Communist expansion and in order to create a favorable climate for American

¹ Cora Dubois, "The Dominant Value Profile of American Culture," in Paul Hollander, ed., *American and Soviet Society: A Render in Comparative Sociology and Perception* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 26.

² For a review of the evidence see Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, "The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions," *Political Science Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 379–402.

interests. American efforts to promote European recovery through the Marshall Plan may have represented the high point in the success of the coalition's policies.

After that, difficulties set in gradually, each one intensifying the others. It became apparent that perpetual economic growth would not solve all social problems. Instead it created new ones, such as the poisoning of the water and the atmosphere. Workers rapidly became hostile to the environmentalists, whom they saw as upper-class do-gooders cutting off their opportunities for fun, money, and big cars just at the point when workers were starting to make enough money to enter the consumer society. Welfare expenditures grew without producing peace or social order. Blacks rioted over long-standing grievances that suddenly seemed legitimate to many middle-class whites, especially young ones. In the cities crime increased and seemed to become more violent and vicious.

The most serious shock to the liberal establishment, however, came from foreign affairs in the form of the war in Vietnam. Many opponents of this conflict called it the Liberal's War. By the middle 1960s there were no more dependable democratic allies for the United States to support against a military and revolutionary, as well as nationalist, Communist offensive. Before long the government in Washington found itself fighting a war without real prospect of victory and increasingly unpopular at home. After a long search for a diplomatic fig leaf to cover its withdrawal, the United States eventually just abandoned the field. Thus for the first time in its history, defeat in war came to the United States. Defeat as such, on the other hand, was not so important. The significance of the war lay in the way it made so many Americans from all classes and occupations ask searching and painful questions about their own society and the authorities that ruled them. The mood of guilt has by now of course subsided. But questions once asked seldom vanish altogether. Instead they remain in the form of sullen psychic sore spots that may burst into inflammation under renewed pressure.

The war in Vietnam intensified latent pressures toward inflation because it was financed mainly through borrowing rather than by taxes. Needless to say, the effect of inflation on authority is to introduce elements of apparent — or should one say visible — injustice all through the society. The traditional connection between effort and reward is twisted out of shape. Those with scarce goods and scarce skills reap inflated rewards, while those working for sticky wages or lacking goods for sale see their standard of living deteriorate and their savings evaporate. According to some economists a major cause of inflation has been the invisible handshake between unions and business executives. It amounts to another aspect of the search for social peace. Rather than undergo an expensive strike, business leaders tacitly or openly grant their unions a hefty wage increase and pass the costs along to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Union leaders know what is going on and are, by and large, happy with the arrangement. The invisible handshake can work only in good times with an expanding economy. Another major cause of inflation was of course the sudden rise in the price of oil. No amount of American authority could do much about this rise. But rather unexpectedly the workings of the market have greatly diminished the power of the oil exporters and greatly moderated inflation. Whether it will recur under the present Administration's policy of no money for social peace and transfer payments — except for social security and its powerful constituents — and billions for defense remains to be seen. A government that promises not to tax its population while it takes resources away from the market would seem headed for another burst of inflation. All this has taken place under a rhetoric of nostalgia for individual independence and virtue. Because this rhetoric appeals to the dissatisfaction of many little people, it serves to legitimate current forms of authority and current policies.³

³ For a most imaginative study by a social psychologist of variations in attitudes toward authority, see Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental*

At this point it is necessary to enter a general caution. Like any others, attitudes toward authority take very different forms of expression in different circumstances. Over long periods of time American culture displays a strong current of generalized disobedience. Simultaneously the government acts semi-paralyzed by conflicting interests. Yet the paralysis and rejection of authority can vanish for a time, in the case of war or unusually severe economic stress. Then those in authority are expected to act swiftly and without challenge. On his inauguration President Franklin D. Roosevelt closed all the banks in the country for four days. Nobody had any money except that in purse or pocket. Then Congress convened in a special session to make the President's behavior legal.

A much more unsavory episode took place shortly after the Japanese attack that forced American entry into the Second World War. On the advice of the military, President Roosevelt ordered all persons of Japanese descent, including American citizens, away from the West Coast. They were sent either to enemy alien camps or to detention camps if they were citizens, although a few were permitted to return to other parts of the country if they had homes. There was no serious challenge to this executive decree, although some indignation arose after the war. Thus despite their general dislike of authority Americans accept it willingly enough in what they perceive as an emergency, especially if the authority is to affect someone else. To give one last example, there are frequent demands to give more authority to the police in order to stop the increase in crime.

Several reasons for this dislike of authority are apparent. There may be a substratum of basic human nature behind it.

View (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). Critics who express outrage at this book seem to me upset by its surprising yet convincing findings about how cruelly human beings will behave in response to authority. As if all history did not teach a similar lesson! The most interesting aspect of Milgram's book is the material he gives showing the ways resistance to oppressive authority can arise. I have tried to present and reinterpret this material in my *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1978), pp. 94–100.

Authority implies restraint, and restraint is generally unpleasant even if socially necessary. But such generalizations cannot tell us anything about specific American attitudes toward authority. These are the precipitate of historical experience. Early in their history Americans experienced British authority in forms they defined as arbitrary and then rejected by force of arms.⁴ When they established their own form of government in a written constitution, they tried to make sure that the new government could not act in the same arbitrary and tyrannical fashion as the British allegedly had done. On this score they were rather successful. The famous division of powers between executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government is not a myth of political science textbooks. One has only to look at a daily newspaper to realize that these three branches are continually at each other's throats and that policy emerges as a compromise among them. These three branches are of course not the only contestants in the political arena. There are the major interest groups of industry, labor, and the farmers, each composed of a series of subgroups and a host of other special interest groups, such as professionals (especially the medical lobbies), blacks, ethnic minorities, the elderly, feminists, homosexuals, and many others. Political parties try to focus all these groups and forces for their own purposes, mainly getting and holding offices. Regional alignments form out of the differential distribution of interest groups in various parts of the country. Meanwhile the contest among interest groups and regions powers the contest among the three branches of government.

From this description one might infer that nearly all Americans are passionately if selfishly interested in politics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Poll after poll has found a large mass of people who know next to nothing about politics and care even less. For the most part, interest groups are like awkward

⁴ Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: Knopf, 1972) provides a good account of the changes in opinion that culminated in revolution.

swimmers lashing the surface of the waters to create a little current moving in the direction they want. Meanwhile the depths of the ocean remain undisturbed.

One should not overemphasize the anarchic trend in American politics for another reason. The founding fathers of the Constitution, who were part of a brilliant but short-lived patrician elite, wanted a government with enough authority to protect property and serve as a barrier against domestic faction and insurrection.⁵ This theme of the proper role of authority in protecting property was to remain highly influential for a long time. Not until the time of the New Deal did concern for the welfare of those who had no property push this theme toward the background of public concerns. Nevertheless one can make a good case for the thesis that the strategy of the New Deal was to preserve the institutions of private property by requiring those who had most of it to make some sacrifices for the benefit of the rest.

The relatively equal distribution of property prior to industrialization also had consequences for attitudes about authority and equality. The latter we will discuss shortly. To avoid misunderstanding it is necessary to emphasize that there were substantial pockets of wealth in towns and cities and that a plantation oligarchy grew up in the South during the nineteenth century. But property, especially landed property, was distributed fairly equally in comparison with countries where a nobility owned the lion's share of the land. Together with the frontier that created an emphasis on self-reliance, the existence of a large class of independent farmers and artisans supported an ethic of individualism under which each man could claim to be as good as anyone else. And where a man *feels* as good as anybody else—a sentiment by no means dead even today—he will be reluctant to grant anybody else authority over him.

⁵ *The Federdist*, No. 9, by Alexander Hamilton. See also No. 10 on the same theme by James Madison, wherein he gives an analysis of property and interest groups that resembles Marx's.

By way of provisional summing up we can point to at least three sources of antagonism to authority that were at work in American society before the advent of big industry. One was the experience of British authority that was felt to be arbitrary and capricious. Another was the experience of frontier society, where the government was remote and the individual depended on his own resources. Finally, nineteenth-century American society was one with a widespread distribution of property that promoted an individualist ethic and resistance to authority. All of these forces have ceased to operate. They were dead about a century ago. Yet they still have echoes in American thinking that reverberate, as new sources of hostility to authority put in an appearance.

The advent of big industry beginning around 1870 fundamentally altered the nature of authority and inequality in the United States. Big industry, or more properly big business, which includes big commerce and transportation such as the railroads, introduced command-obedience relationships in the form of bureaucracy. The railroads first introduced administrative hierarchies in order to coordinate the expeditious and moderately safe movement of freight and passengers over their far-flung network of tracks. By 1870 this bureaucratic system was well in place.⁶ Furthermore, through the creation of a wealthy business elite and a large class of wage earners with little or no property, the advent of big business greatly magnified economic inequalities. Yet anti-authoritarian egalitarianism has by no means disappeared even if deprived of its economic base. As a disembodied ideal it has long energized the laments of social critics and reformers who surface whenever some form of injustice appears — which occurs nearly all the time.

One possible reason for the continued life of this disembodied ideal is the historical fact that American big business managed to import a substantial portion of its proletariat through open im-

⁶ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), pp. 81, 87–88.

migration. In turn, ethnic divisions within the working class helped to inhibit the growth of a socialist challenge to the rule of big business. Thus there was no powerful political organization to hammer home the mythical nature of anti-authoritarian egalitarianism or to present a plausible alternative to the status quo. People were free to believe in these ideals without fully realizing that they were a form of romantic nostalgia. Indeed, under President Reagan this romantic nostalgia became a political program.

In the United States bureaucracy arose mainly from the requirements of big industry, and only much later, at the time of the New Deal, from the requirements of running a big government.⁷ To be sure, the federal government had acquired wide powers of control over business during the First World War. But the controls were put out of action with the end of the war, giving business free rein to generate what was hoped to be a permanently rising prosperity. In contrast to the origins of bureaucracy in America, let us recall the sharply different sources in Prussia. There bureaucracy arose long before the coming of industry. Its source lay in the military and a militarized government. In other parts of the world, such as the Roman Empire and Imperial China, bureaucracy put in an appearance much earlier. Therefore it is not a feature of industrial societies or societies attempting to industrialize rapidly. Nevertheless, today bureaucracy and hostility to bureaucracy are the most important traits shared by capitalist and socialist societies.

Bureaucracy derives from the need of a society's leaders to coordinate or control the actions of a large number of people or a

⁷ For a different interpretation see William E. Nelson, *The Roots of American Bureaucracy, 1830–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 5, 158–59. The author sees tension between the idea of majority self-rule and concern for protecting individual and minority rights as the main element in the history of governmental bureaucracy. The genteel reformers of the last half of the nineteenth century, known as the mugwumps, produced civil service reform and independent regulatory commissions as the judiciary moved toward a more formal and abstract form of reasoning. It seems to me that this interpretation puts too much emphasis on high-minded reformers and not enough on structural changes in American society.

large number of activities. In the case of the railroads just mentioned, administrative hierarchies arose to ensure that a large number of railroad cars reached their separate destinations as rapidly as possible. The formal organization of a bureaucracy is one of a hierarchy with command-obedience relationships from top to bottom. The higher the position in the hierarchy the greater the number of individuals subject to that authority. In modern Western bureaucracies the scope of authority is supposedly limited to activities connected with the job, that is, whatever task the bureaucracy is intended to perform. A railroad administrator supposedly does not inquire into the private life of a switchman, unless the switchman shows up drunk for work rather too often.

In practice there is a great deal of deviation from the strict model of command-obedience relationships. Authority is by no means strictly limited to matters pertaining to the job. Many a large American company has dress codes for its desk-bound employees, presumably to ensure that the company maintains a sufficiently dignified public image. In recent years too there has been quite a bit of public discussion about what is expected of the corporate wife, that is, the wife of an executive in a large firm.

While there are signs like these of an extension of bureaucratic authority beyond its proper realm, there is evidence to demonstrate a much more important tendency toward the restriction of superior authority by the lower ranks. In practice a bureaucracy seldom resembles its organizational chart with lines of authority flowing downward into little boxes representing people with different tasks. Instead it resembles a burgeoning series of largely independent and competing cells, all anxious for access to higher authority and more funds. Meanwhile, each cell works out its own informal but effective rules of behavior for its own members. These rules control the division of labor and methods of work within the unit, such as, for example, what facts out of all those required must actually be put on the records, and how the records will be filed. These informal work rules also serve as a barrier

against undue curiosity and interference by higher administrative authorities. At the same time higher authorities continually seek to penetrate the bureaucratic cells beneath them for the sake of their own authority.

Sometimes it seems a wonder that bureaucracies ever accomplish anything. Leaving aside for the moment the elements of enthusiasm and terror that characterize newly created bureaucracies in the early stages of socialism, we can inquire into the exercise of authority in Western and primarily American administrative systems. These are *not* at all the faceless impersonal organizations described by Kafka. Instead they are rather cheery, even toward clients and ordinary citizens a great deal of the time, and in their workings very personal. An American administrator seldom tries to oppose or overrule the informal organization of his subordinates. To do that is to court disaster for his own reputation and career, since subordinates can see to it that nothing works for an administrator they dislike. Instead, he works through the informal organization by disregarding minor infractions of rules. Often rule-breaking is essential to getting a job done. By doing this and protecting his staff from the depredations of other segments of the bureaucracy, he earns the loyalty of his staff. This loyalty may then pay off in willingness to do extra work when a rush job comes along. Then the administrator can get credit for a job well done.⁸

In order to learn the mood of his own staff as well as threats and opportunities in the larger bureaucratic environment, an administrator spends a great deal of time gathering personal information. That is one explanation for the apparently endless round of staff meetings. At staff meetings lower ranks meet with higher ranks, and the prestige of a lower official derives in part

⁸ An early study of informal organization and still one of the best is Peter M. Blau, *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy: A Study of Interpersonal Relationships in Two Government Agencies*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). I have also drawn on my own experience of the bottom ranks of the bureaucracy in Washington during the Second World War.

from the highest ranking individual who comes to the same meeting. Endless rounds of coffee are part of American staff meetings. Even if they make few important decisions, they provide information about moods and problems elsewhere in the bureaucracy, and sometimes even the world at large, revealing what policies are likely to work and which ones likely to fail. The coffee too has its sociological benefits, since the lavatory is often an important place for exchanging news.

Bureaucracies vary considerably, of course, in accordance with the functions they perform and the political milieu in which they operate. For instance, a useful study of managerial hierarchies in five countries —Yugoslavia, the kibbutz of Israel, the USA, Austria, and Italy —found sharp hierarchical gradients everywhere (except possibly in Yugoslavia, where the authors regard their data as unreliable). But there were important differences. The kibbutz plants showed the least steep gradient of authority and the Italian ones the steepest." In drawing this portion of the discussion to a close, I want to draw attention to two factors that have a powerful influence on systems of authority under both capitalist and socialist systems. One is the level of skill among subordinates. A high level of skill creates tendencies toward equality. The other is the degree of danger or threat in the environment. For groups above the size of face-to-face or first-name relationships danger generally promotes a demand for discipline and obedience or, in other words, organized inequality.

First we may look more closely at the role of skill. Command-obedience relationships are at a minimum where the task requires a high level of skill and the workers have this skill. In this situation the relationship between the superior and the work force is primarily one of cooperative problem-solving. To keep the worker's respect the supervisor has to know as much as the worker, and it is better if he knows even more. Direct orders are kept to an abso-

9 Arnold S. Tannenbaum et al., *hierarchy in Organizations: An International Comparison* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), pp. 29–32, 120.

lute minimum. Otherwise a worker may balk and simply refuse to do a job. An unwelcome order is an affront to his self-respect, and especially so if it comes from someone unfamiliar with the technical requirements of the task. At times certain linguistic conventions may spring up that serve to conceal the command-obedience relationships between people behind the technical imperatives of the job. Thus the superior instructing an experienced carpenter on how to make up and install a piece of cabinet work in a tight corner of a ship's cabin will use anthropomorphic expressions: "This piece of wood wants to go here. The other one wants to go over there." The carpenter understands that it is his job to shape the pieces of wood very accurately so that they will go there.

The opposite kind of situation is likely to arise where the plant employs a large number of unskilled workers, often migrants from the countryside or immigrants from abroad. In such a situation it may be necessary to supervise every move of workers who have a very limited comprehension of what is happening or why. There is likely to be a high ratio of foremen to workers, and the foremen are likely to be brusque and impatient. Actually, much of the discipline comes from the machines which determine what human operations are necessary and the pace of these operations. This was the case in the early textile plants and remains the case today wherever the assembly line exists. However, by 1973 assembly-line jobs probably came to less than two percent of all the jobs in the United States.¹⁰ This extreme form of authority relationship has become a quite minor form. There are reasons for suspecting that its importance may decline even further. Nowadays when an employer becomes faced with a work force that seems sullen, inefficient, expensive, and militant, the employer turns to automation and robots if at all possible. Problems

¹⁰ *Work in America*, Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1973), p. 13.

of control over human beings in this way are transformed into problems of control over more and more complicated machines.

Now we may turn to the effects of physical danger. As military discipline the world over shows, danger intensifies authority and increases the importance of command-obedience relationships. Even a passenger ship at sea is no democracy. All this is obvious to the point of banality. I think it has to be modified by taking into account the informal organization that always exists among subordinates. When a real emergency strikes in the form of an enemy attack or a bad storm at sea, the commanding officer is heavily dependent on what those under his command will do. To a great extent they have to know what to do themselves and be able to do it fast. That capacity in turn depends on their own informal organization and division of labor. A good commanding officer is one who recognizes this situation and works with and through the informal organization rather than against it. In a paternalistic fashion he will tolerate minor infractions of regulations in return for loyal and effective support in emergency. He will also try to get to know those under his command in other ways, treating them like individual human beings, rather than automata. Where that occurs, men often respect strictness in other areas closely related to a shared task or mission. Thus even in the most strictly hierarchical organizations humans have created there is a tendency to soften the sharper contours of authority.

Here it is appropriate to ask what might be the most important differences between bureaucracy in a liberal capitalist democracy and bureaucracy in a socialist country. One difference is so obvious that we need spend little time on it even if the difference is very important. In a liberal capitalist society the central government does not try to control every aspect of social life from a single center through bureaucratic means. The liberal capitalist government is not expected to do this. Intervention is expected only when enough people complain about an intolerable situation or when sufficiently powerful interests claim they need assistance.

A socialist society, on the other hand, attempts to organize the thinking and the behavior of the entire population around specified goals. The pretense is maintained that the masses are enthusiastic in pursuit of the goal. But practically everybody realizes that the enthusiasm is mainly a useful fiction, useful, that is, for those in charge.

The other major difference is this: under capitalism economic inequality creates inequalities of authority. Under socialism the relationship is reversed: economic inequalities come out of differences in political authority. In both systems, however, the higher political and economic administrators serve at the pleasure and discretion of somebody else. Appointed supposedly on the basis of performance and promise, high administrators are exposed to intrigue, demotion, and dismissal. On this score they turn out to be not so unequal after all. Hereditary aristocrats were rather more secure in their privileges.

At this point in the discussion we glimpse a break in the continuity of human civilization that has had profound consequences for forms of authority and social inequality. Before the coming of the industrial revolution almost the only way for a group or an individual to increase his, and occasionally her, wealth was by overt or disguised compulsion. One just took things by means of conquest or forced the underlying population in one's own country to turn over more in the form of dues and taxes. Except for clearing uncultivated lands to grow more crops — a safety valve generally unavailable in the more crowded and civilized areas — there was very little anyone could do to produce more goods and services. That situation did not undergo any drastic change until the coming of modern industry, a transformation clearly under way around the middle of the nineteenth century. Only about then did it begin to make practical sense to advise men and nations not to steal in order to become rich and powerful. Instead, with the help of machines one could set up an ever more abundant flow of goods and services. There have of course been many be-

sides Marx who have been skeptical about this newfangled and allegedly hypocritical bourgeois morality. My impression is that the suspicion may be highest in the poorer countries with their expropriation of groups that have nothing to expropriate. There are also abundant signs that many people in search of wealth and profit prefer to use tried and true methods like fraud instead of financially risky ones such as turning out serviceable products. Still, these qualifications do not, so far as I can see, alter the fundamental fact that there has been a change in the system of production and in the moral principles of inequality sustaining this system.

As befitted a relatively static economic order with limited opportunities for improving one's situation, either collectively or individually, pre-industrial justifications of inequality generally put a heavy stress on supposedly innate qualities. The innate qualities came to be thought of as hereditary. One had certain privileges such as the right to expect deference from social inferiors, the right to command troops in wartime, the right to certain forms of material support produced by the work of peasants, etc., simply because one was born an aristocrat. There were of course important exceptions. Chinese society generated a bureaucracy theoretically open to merit, although in practice the ownership of landed property played a major role. In the West the Catholic Church also provided a way for intelligent young men from poor or undistinguished backgrounds to achieve influential posts, especially if they displayed what would now be called executive talents. In the light of these two major exceptions it may be too much to consider the transformation as from one justified in terms of hereditary qualities to one based on merit and specific forms of competence. Nevertheless such a change did occur amid bloodshed and suffering. It continues today despite efforts to bring it to a halt. A real meritocracy may be impossible to live with because it offers no consolation for failure. Since the belief systems of civilized societies as different as the Hindu caste system and ad-

vanced liberal Christianity devote a great deal of attention to accounting for failure in ways inoffensive to the failed, we may guess that the need for such comfort is widespread and deep-rooted.

To return to the American scene, the American Revolution opened with a blast against the whole idea of noble birth. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed as a self-evident truth the allegation that all men were created equal. It said nothing about women. And it said nothing about blacks.¹¹ Without time to discuss sexual and racial inequalities in any detail, I would like to emphasize that both are very live issues in American society today, with racial discrimination the more acute issue. Finally, the Declaration of Independence says nothing specific about what does or should happen to men after they are created. Presumably some aspects of equality should remain after creation. Otherwise there would have been no point to saying anything about equality in the first place. But to judge from later discussion and practice, certain forms of inequality were to be expected and were morally acceptable. Equality came to mean equality of opportunity. All men should start the race of life from the same position, without unfair advantages or disadvantages. It is hardly necessary to point out that this is a utopian position for a complex civilized¹² society. After the race had started, men were expected to run at different speeds in search of wealth, fame, and comfort.*¹

¹¹The Second Continental Congress deleted from the Declaration Jefferson's clause accusing the king of violating the rights of distant people and carrying them into slavery. But Jefferson's own position was highly ambiguous, to say the least. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 24, 169-84.

¹²For a very good historical treatment of this theme see J. R. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). On contemporary aspects the study by Sidney Verba and Garry R. Orren, *Equality in America: The View from the Top* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), is most illuminating. The authors point out on several occasions that leaders of American opinion favor equality of opportunity but have very little sympathy for equality of results. The general public joins the leaders in opposition to the redistribution of wealth or equalizing incomes. The result of course is that unequal economic power spills over into unequal political power and influence. In

As long as no one cheated, there was supposedly nothing wrong with big prizes going to some of the runners while others dropped out from sloth or exhaustion and got nothing. In practice there was a huge amount of cheating and corruption right from the beginning. Profiteers and speculators of the type who cornered the supply of shoes and warm clothing for the revolutionary army were in George Washington's opinion more dangerous than the entire military might of Great Britain.¹³ From a comparative-historical standpoint the American image of society as essentially a race for material goods seems a bit peculiar, to say the least. But until quite recently there have been very few to suggest that there might be better things people could do with their time. For that matter, contemporary criticism comes in large measure from romantic rebels in easy circumstances.

Despite the cheating and speculation, for more than three generations after the Declaration of Independence had proclaimed that men were born equal, no great inequalities were apparent in the United States. In the 1830s, according to Lord Bryce, there were no great fortunes in the United States, few large ones, and no poverty.¹⁴ By the time his *American Commonwealth* reached a second edition in 1891, both gigantic fortunes and poverty were plain for all to see.¹⁴ These inequalities began to take shape after the Civil War as a consequence of the spurt in industrial growth that began after 1865. They have been with us ever since and show no sign of disappearing despite high income taxes, inheritance taxes, and rapidly rising transfer payments, such as welfare

a society formally committed to democracy and one person—one vote! this outcome can be somewhat disturbing. Yet the acceptance of economic inequality as supposedly the result of the race for life helps to legitimate political inequalities.

¹³ Nathan Miller, *The Founding Finaglers* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1976), p. 77. From this somewhat journalistic but very useful account it appears that corruption has been rife in American history from the beginning down to the present day.

¹⁴ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2d ed., rev. (Toronto, 1891), II. 616.

and social security. In 1960 government transfer payments were 27 billion dollars, or five per cent of a gross national product of 506.5 billion dollars. By 1981 these transfer payments had multiplied well over ten times to reach 323.9 billion dollars. They came to 11 per cent of a GNP that had meanwhile risen less than six times to become 2,937.7 billion dollars.¹⁵

Even these large transfer payments have not eliminated poverty. In 1959 18.1 per cent of the white population and 55.1 per cent of the black population were below the poverty line as defined by the Social Security Administration and later revised by other agencies. By 1978 the proportions had fallen sharply to 8.7 for whites and 30.6 for blacks. After that it rose again slightly in the next three years to reach in 1981, the last year for which figures are readily available, 11.1 per cent for whites and 34.2 per cent for blacks. In slightly more human terms, that means 21.6 million white and 9.2 million black persons below the poverty line. In 1981 the poverty line was set at an annual income of \$4,620 for a single individual and \$9,287 for a family or household of four.¹⁶

If the poor have not disappeared, neither have the rich, as one can see from a glance at the statistics on the distribution of income. At the bottom end in 1981 were 4.5 per cent of the white families and 16.7 per cent of the black families with incomes under \$5,000 a year. At the other end of the scale were those receiving more than ten times as much, or \$50,000 a year and over. Since quite a few individuals receive a great deal more, the cut-off point of \$50,000 conceals the more striking aspects of in-

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1982-83* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), Table 692, p. 420.

¹⁶ *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, p. 417, and table 727, p. 440. David A. Stockman, then director of the Office of Management and Budget, asserted that the number of poor people in the U.S. was less than two thirds of the total officially reported by the Census Bureau. The official poverty count, he pointed out, is based only on money income and ignores the 107 billion dollars in kind in medical, housing, food, and other aid that raises the living standard of many low-income families. See *New York Times*, November 4, 1983, p. D16.

equality. The highest paid executive in the United States in 1982 received a total compensation of \$1,806,000, or nearly forty times the same cut-off point.¹⁷ In the category of those receiving \$50,000 a year and more were 9.7 per cent of the white families and 2.1 per cent of the black families. At the same time it is significant that the largest percentages of families — 21.1 per cent for whites and 13.0 per cent for blacks — fall in the income category one could consider quite well off, perhaps even upper middle class, that is \$25,000 to \$34,999.¹⁸

A substantial portion of this upper middle class now comes from the rapidly increasing sector of professional and technical workers. Between 1960 and 1981 their numbers more than doubled, rising from 7,469,000 to 16,420,000. However, their proportion of the employed population rose only from 14.2 per cent in 1970 to 16.4 per cent in 1981. Still outnumbered by the blue-collar workers, the professional and technical workers are rapidly gaining on them. Though the blue-collar workers gained in absolute numbers from 24,057,000 in 1960 to 31,261,000 in 1981, their proportion of the employed population dropped from 35.3 per cent in 1970 to 31.1 per cent in 1981. By 1981 there were more than half as many professional and technical workers as there were blue-collar workers, whereas in 1960 the ratio was fewer than one to three.¹⁹ For the most part, the professional and technical workers are the carriers of a belief in the beneficial effects of action by the federal government and of new cosmopolitan and somewhat permissive tastes in leisure. Thus their culture acts corrosively on traditional and rural-based values, especially those that made visible hard work and saving just about the only morally acceptable basis for inequality.²⁰

¹⁷ *Business Week*, May 9, 1983, pp. 84–85.

¹⁸ *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982–83*, table 713, p. 432.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, table 648, p. 386.

²⁰ On the culture of this rapidly growing sector see Joseph Bensman and Arthur J. Vidich, *The New American Society: The Revolution of the Middle Class* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), esp. Part III.

These statistics confirm and extend the results of common observation. To be sure, the United States is a land of sharp extremes in poverty and wealth. On the other hand, it is also a rich country with a substantial proportion of the people able to live in comfortable circumstances. Even a number of blacks share now in the general prosperity. This distribution of income helps to explain the conservative tenor of American political life and the lack of response to demands for a complete overhaul of American institutions generated by the war in Vietnam. What is harder to explain is the tone of fearful crusading that conservatism has displayed when in power.

If the information to be gleaned about the upper middle class indicates a continuation of conservative stability, that is not necessarily the case with the middle class itself. Economists studying the figures on the size and earnings of this class have recently concluded, despite some differences in their statistical methods, that this class, supposedly the backbone of liberal capitalist democracy, has been shrinking for some time. It has lost a few members who have moved up to a richer stratum, and many more who have dropped down to a poorer level. Stephen J. Rose defined middle-income families as those with annual incomes of \$11,500 to \$27,400 in 1978 or \$17,000 to \$41,000 in 1983. In 1978 approximately 55 per cent of the population fell between the first set of boundaries. In 1983 the proportion between the second set of boundaries was only 42 per cent. In other words, there was a drop of 13 per cent in only five years. Of those who left the middle class, three quarters suffered a decline in their standard of living. Only one fourth improved it.²¹

Using somewhat different figures and time periods, the well-known economist Lester C. Thurow reaches roughly similar conclusions, although in his figures the trends eroding the middle class appear less powerful. He uses as a range of incomes for middle-class households \$15,100 to \$25,200 in 1982. On this

²¹ *New York Times*, December 11, 1983, p. 28.

basis he finds that the middle class declined from 28.2 per cent of the population in 1967 to 23.7 per cent now — which might be anytime between 1982 and 1984. In any case Thurow reports a drop of slightly under five per cent for fifteen years as against Rose's drop of 13 per cent in only five years. Thurow further reported that about half of those who left the middle class rose above it and about half fell below. The size of the income groups above and below the middle class increased by about two per cent each. This is a trend in the direction of a bipolar distribution of income, with the rich clustering at one end and the poor at the other, as Thurow points out. But at only two per cent a year it would take quite awhile for serious consequences to appear.²²

Both economists agree in their assessment of the main causes for these trends. The economy, as Rose puts it succinctly, is creating high-income jobs in high-technology industries and many lower-paying service jobs for workers such as building custodians, cooks, waiters, and others. But the number of middle-income jobs in the automobile, steel, machinery, construction, and other manufacturing industries has fallen off sharply. To this Thurow adds a significant point. In his judgment the unions in the industries that have fallen off in production were in the past able to push wages up beyond the level warranted by the worker's skills, thereby creating for a time many middle-income jobs that are now ceasing to exist. Other factors too are important, such as jobs lost through the deterioration in the American position in international trade. This is not the occasion, however, to go into further detail. Because the findings of the two studies vary quite widely, I think it is a bit early to accept their pessimistic conclusions. They deserve attention, but not alarmed attention.

A few figures on the distribution of wealth will complete the picture of economic inequality in the United States. Wealth refers to what one has or possesses. Income refers to what comes in on a

²² Lester C. Thurow, 'The Disappearance of the Middle Class,' *New York Times*, Sunday, February 5, 1984, p. F5.

regular recurring basis. The accumulation of wealth is possible of course only in a capitalist society. In a socialist society where there is no private property in the means of production it is almost out of the question to acquire wealth, although a few individuals such as popular and officially approved writers have managed to acquire quite substantial sums. Figures on wealth are harder to come by than those on income, perhaps because an individual's total assets only come to light at death. But there are some figures on the share of all wealth held by the richest one per cent. In 1929 it was 36.3 per cent, or well over a third of all wealth. By 1972, for which the most recent figure is available, their share had fallen, with some minor fluctuations during the interim, to 20.7 per cent, or slightly over one fifth. We also have some figures on the dollar value of assets held by all persons and by the very rich. The net worth of all persons in 1972 amounted to 3,535.9 billion dollars. Of these the richest one-half of one per cent had a net worth of 721.7 billion dollars, or 20.4 per cent. There were 1.04 million very rich individuals in this category as compared with 24.5 million below the poverty line in the same year (and 31.8 million in 1981).²³

There are at least two ways to explain the kinds of inequality just described. One is to show how and why society has created a set of unequally rewarded positions. The other is to take these unequally rewarded positions more or less for granted and find out how and why individuals in the society in the course of their lives become distributed among these positions.

The first explanation requires a recapitulation of the main features of capitalism, something I shall not attempt in any detail. Great wealth comes partly from the creation of wholly new industries by not very scrupulous entrepreneurs. There is also a process of industrial and financial concentration. In the course of competition big firms drive little ones to the wall, either buying them

²³ *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1982-83*, tables 742, 743, p. 449 on shares of wealth; table 727, p. 440, on poverty level.

out or letting them die. In a great many cases big firms have little ones as satellite suppliers. Finally there is the creation and disciplining of the industrial labor force, a mass of people with little or no property but with labor power to sell. The United States is unusual on this score in having imported its proletariat, first in the form of black slaves and much later in the form of white immigrants. This set of forces created the combination of great wealth and severe poverty characteristic of capitalism. But, as pointed out above, capitalism also created a large middle class and a series of steps between the very rich and the very poor.

The best studies of the way people get to different occupations and levels of income in American society are those by Christopher Jencks and his associates. They are critical and interpretative reviews of survey data and therefore heavily statistical though quite accessible to the non-specialist reader. Their general effect is to demolish, or at least diminish very sharply, the power of conventional explanations of inequality given by conservatives, liberals, and even some radicals. 'Neither family background, cognitive skills, educational attainment, nor occupational status,' Jencks asserts, 'explain much of the variation in men's incomes.' Comparing men who are identical in all these respects, he continues, 'we find only 12 to 15 percent less inequality than among random individuals.'²⁴

A later publication by Jencks and his associates presents some updated and slightly revised figures on some of these factors. Family background might explain 15–35 per cent of the variance in mature men's earnings.²⁵ Years of education were found to be correlated .38 to .49 with earnings.²⁵ Put somewhat differently, education 'explained' about 55 per cent of true variance in occu-

²⁴ Christopher Jencks et al., *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 226. First published by Basic Books (New York) in 1972.

²⁵ Christopher Jencks et al., *Who Gets Ahead?: The Determinants of Economic Success in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 217.

pation but only about 20 per cent of true variance in income.²⁶ Thus education appears as the only variable with substantial explanatory power, and then only in connection with the choice of occupation. But as everyone knows, there is a wide range of earnings to be had, and education as such has very little to do with where an individual ends up on this range.

With all traditional explanations of inequality demolished, in *Inequality* Jencks resorts to luck. Luck covers such matters as whether a new superhighway has an exit near your restaurant, or whether you get a job in a firm that expands and promotes you rather than a firm that goes broke and leaves you with a set of unmarketable skills.²⁷ In the later publication he amplifies and corrects his conception of luck. By my reading, luck then has become another word for the structure of the economy and the state of the business cycle, matters the individual could do nothing about even if he understood them and their local significance completely, something that is very rarely the case. Nevertheless this conception of luck is important because it brings us back to the structural and historical determinants of inequality emphasized in the first explanation. Because such factors are in part historical they vary from case to case and between capitalist and socialist societies. But the overall results are broadly similar. They will appear in the next two lectures.

II. THE USSR

Stalinist Russia was a totalitarian state, most of whose features remain standing today. The origins of Stalinist totalitarianism lie deep in the history of Tsarist autocracy. Before examining these connections it is necessary to spend a few moments on the meaning of the words totalitarian and autocratic. The word totalitarian

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 226, 294.

²⁷ Jencks, *Inequality*, p. 227.

is out of fashion now because of its connection with the cold war. Some see the term as mere pejorative epithet used to discredit the Soviet regime. As one who is keenly aware of crusading hypocrisy on both sides in the East–West conflict, I nevertheless find totalitarian a useful and meaningful term. It refers to a regime that tries with considerable success to control the whole range of human thought and action from a single center for the purpose of achieving a total transformation of human behavior in the direction of some allegedly higher goal.

The line between an autocratic and a totalitarian regime is admittedly at times thin and blurred. Peter the Great, for example, sounds like a totalitarian ruler in his efforts to westernize Russia by force. Yet in comparison with Stalin his efforts seem puny. They left the basic class structure and political system largely untouched. More generally, an autocratic regime lacks the will and the means to carry through a total revolution of the social order. So long as they do not constitute a perceived threat to the existing political authorities, under an autocracy many human activities are allowed to go their own way. In nineteenth-century Russia, literature reached one of the world's great peaks of creative originality, all with no more than minor interference from Tsarist censorship. Such freedom for literature and the arts was out of the question under Stalin. (According to a widely circulated joke, the only music permitted was what Stalin could whistle.)

The main similarities between autocracy, mainly a pre-industrial form of rule, and totalitarian dictatorship are fairly obvious. Both display a high concentration of power at the center, perhaps more intense in the case of a totalitarian regime with its superior control of the means of transport, communication, and violence. Neither kind of regime tolerates opposition readily or, when at the height of its power, will refrain from cruelty and violence to crush the opposition. The existence of semi-tolerated opposition is a sign of decay in either an old-fashioned autocracy or a modern totalitarian dictatorship.

The habits of mind and social institutions forged in the course of history to support the Tsarist autocracy placed powerful obstacles in the way of any democratic and liberal resolution to the tensions Russian society faced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Russian feudalism was sufficiently different from West European feudalism to make some authors doubt whether it deserves to be called feudalism. Without attempting to answer that question it is sufficient to draw attention to the nature of the difference as perceived by the great historian Marc Bloch. In the West he saw reciprocity in unequal obligations symbolized by the act of homage which thereby became a contract. All this was missing in Russia.¹

Russian feudalism was characterized by the grant of land in return for military service. The grant was given by the Tsar and carried with it all sorts of privileges, including rights to the labor of peasants dwelling on the land so granted.² Thus in the West feudalism laid the groundwork for limitations on authority through the conception of a freely chosen contractual relationship as its basis. There were other important ingredients too, such as the right of resistance to royal authority.³ In Russia, on the other hand, feudalism laid the basis for a bureaucratized service-nobility taking its orders from the Tsar and economically dependent upon serfdom.

It would be very misleading to leave the impression that in the course of Russian history there were no indigenous movements that could have led toward a democratic and liberal outcome. As the famous German historian Otto Hoetzsch pointed out, it is not in the least true that from the beginning Russia was a non-democratic, absolutist, and despotic state. There were in the Kievan period in the tenth and eleventh centuries democratic

¹ Marc Bloch, *La SociÉTÈfÈdodale* (Paris, 1949), vol. II, pp. 350–51.

² Otto Hoetzsch, *Grundz,ge der Geschichte Russlands* (Stuttgart, 1949), p. 46.

³ Fritz Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht im friiheren Mittelalter: zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Monarchie* (Leipzig, 1914).

institutions of considerable importance. One was the assembly of clan elders, comparable to the Germanic *Thing*. Another was the *vetche* or popular assembly in the towns. But at an early date both fell victim to the power of the territorial princes.⁴ Again much later, in the seventeenth century at the beginning of the Romanov dynasty, royal absolutism was temporarily weakened. The Tsar ruled in conjunction with a quasi-parliamentary gathering of leaders of the *St,nde* or status groups. This gathering was known as the *zemskii sobor*, roughly igathering of the land. Without the council of the nobility the Tsar could do nothing, and from time to time the *zemskii sobor* issued laws⁵ Eventually, of course, the Tsars recovered their power, which rested on superior control of the instruments of violence. So far as I can discern, control of the means of violence as a basis for power stemmed from a general acceptance by the upper classes of a need for domestic tranquility as well as for the protection and extension of the Russian state.

These trends led to the firm establishment of a bureaucratic military state that had further negative consequences for the prospects of a liberal democratic regime. It greatly inhibited the growth of a bourgeoisie, one of the most important prerequisites for a liberal democracy. Right up to the collapse of the Empire, most Russian cities were garrison towns and administrative centers, not foci for trading and manufacturing.⁶ When a capitalist bourgeoisie did put in an appearance during the last half of the nineteenth century, compared to its English counterpart it was a weak and sickly thing. Both economically and politically it was heavily dependent on the Tsarís fickle favor.⁷ On this score it is

⁴ Hoetzsch, *Grundziige*, pp. 28–29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

⁶ P. Miliukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kultury*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg, 1900), vol. I, pp. 192–202. For a fuller treatment of political trends see the 1909 6th edition of this work, Vol. I, pp. 137–252.

⁷ For details see Thomas C. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia: A social history of the Moscow merchants (1855–1905)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

important to recognize the dilemma facing the Tsar. As early as the Crimean War of 1854 to 1856 it had become plain that Russia needed an industrial base in order to modernize her antiquated military forces. But policy makers feared industrial growth because of its potentially disruptive social and political consequences. It is hardly too much to claim that in 1917 the Tsarist autocracy foundered on this dilemma.

One can trace a connection between the Tsarist autocracy and the Bolshevik dictatorship in the following manner. The Tsarist autocracy generated a revolutionary opposition because a democratic one was impossible. This revolutionary opposition took the form of Lenin's conspiratorial elite. Thus it was a mirror image of Tsarism. As the only effective way to fight Tsarism, the theory of a conspiratorial elite had far-reaching consequences. It formed the basis of the post-revolutionary organization of the Party, the Soviet State, and the Communist International. In my judgment all of these claims are true. But they convey partial truths that are therefore misleading.

There were contrary trends that require attention. In 1903 Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike, as good Marxists, still believed that Russians would have to pass through a capitalist and democratic phase before proceeding to a socialist revolution. Thus the Party declaration separated the ultimate socialist goal from the immediate one of a democratic republic. Two points in their democratic program are quite striking in the light of what actually happened: (a) the inviolability of the person and the home; and (b) unrestricted freedom of conscience, of speech, of the press, of association, and the right to strike.¹

There is evidence showing that for Russian Marxists these goals had an appeal in their own right even if they were bourgeois freedoms, not socialist ones. At the same Congress in 1903 G. V. Plekhanov (*not* Lenin) asserted that the good of the revolution

⁸ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Soviet Politics — The Dilemma of Power: The Role of Ideas in Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 30-31.

ought to be the supreme law of revolutionary activity, even if it meant temporary restrictions on democratic activities. Only one minor delegate supported Plekhanov. At that point there were shocked exclamations from the audience and cries of, 'How about the inviolability of the person?'

Such an episode reveals a general dilemma of which many Russian Marxists were keenly aware. On the one hand, they were trying to make a revolution on behalf of greater human freedom. On the other hand, success in making this revolution required a resort to means that would restrict and could destroy this freedom.

The theory of democratic centralism was one attempt to cope with this dilemma. The essence of the idea was summed up in a famous phrase of Lenin's, 'freedom in discussion — unity in action.' In other words, once an issue had been thrashed out within the Party and a decision reached by a majority vote at a Party Congress or by the Central Committee in the interim between Congresses, all members were obligated to support the decision no matter what their personal views might be. Failure to support the Party's official policy in word and deed was a very serious violation of Party discipline.¹⁰ Thus democratic centralism was intended as a way of softening the impact of the theory of a conspiratorial elite by permitting some discussion and debate within the elite itself and also within the framework of its Marxist assumptions.

But from the beginning, centralism and discipline were the operative terms much more than democracy. To be sure, following the seizure of power in November 1917, debates at Party Congresses continued down to 1925. Yet as early as 1921, at the Party Congress that passed the New Economic Policy, Lenin got up to say that he regarded the recent discussions of this topic as an absolutely impermissible luxury. He persuaded the Congress to out-

⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰ For more detail on the early history of democratic centralism see *ibid.*, pp. 64-71.

law factional groups in the future. A secret clause in the Party's decree, later revealed by Stalin, provided for expulsion of a member of the Central Committee who violated the new rules against fractional behavior.¹¹ Not long afterward, in the spring of 1922, Lenin again used his authority to give legal sanction to the use of revolutionary terror on a permanent basis.¹²

Thus Lenin prepared the way for Stalin's silencing of public debates within the Party and his terrorist rule over Soviet society. It is necessary to stress this point, because well-intentioned critics of Stalin have tried to glorify Lenin as a figure of contrast. About Stalin himself I will say no more than a few words at this point. His opponents accused him of packing Party Congresses with his own supporters and using the secret police to intimidate his opponents. Whatever his methods were, they worked. After the Fourteenth Party Congress, held in December 1925, public attacks on the persons and policies of the Party leadership ceased.¹³ Thus the pressure of chronic emergency combined with the will of leaders firmly committed to the concept of a revolutionary elite to tame the power of the rank and file in the Bolshevik Party. The same thing happened to the soviets, to the system of authority in the factories, and to workers' discipline. Each of these we shall discuss briefly. The subjection of the peasantry to socialist controls was one of the most brutal transformations in human history and requires separate analysis.

The taming of the soviets, or more precisely their subordination to the will of the top Party leadership, was a more complex and uneven process than the taming of the Party itself. Originally the soviets sprang up, as spontaneously as human social inventions ever do, in the Revolution of 1905 and again in 1917. Prior

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–46.

¹² Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State; First Phase, 1917–1922* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1955), pp. 188–89.

¹³ Moore, *Soviet Politics*, pp. 150–51.

to the Bolshevik takeover, soviets were, theoretically at least, elective councils with a miscellaneous set of functions and as such reasonably authentic expressions of the will of the revolutionized sector of the masses. Lenin, however, was wary of the stability of their revolutionary mood as well as their capacity —and that of the still-tiny Bolshevik organization —to withstand a counter-revolutionary coup by the Provisional Government. Hence soon after his return to Russia in 1917, he set out independently to take power over the soviets.¹⁴ In the event, the actual seizure of power went rather smoothly, encountering only minimal resistance. But it took a civil war that lasted from the end of 1917 to the autumn of 1920 to consolidate this power.

In the meantime, the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, adopted on July 5, 1918, had given expression to what we can call the Bolshevik variant of populism. Its first paragraph proclaimed that iRussia is a Republic of Soviets of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasant Deputies. All power in the center and locally belongs to these Soviets.î ¹⁵ For a brief time that may have been at best a pious wish in some leading Bolshevik circles. But the circumstances of a civil war with the need for rapid decisions and centralized authority were hardly favorable to putting such a wish into practice. For that matter, it is highly unlikely that Lenin or any other leading Bolshevik ever wanted to give all power to the soviets. At any rate, by the end of 1919 virtually all authority had become concentrated in the center, and local soviets had ceased to have any importance.¹⁶

With the tightening of Party controls, on the other hand, new problems appeared that were to be a more or less permanent feature of the Soviet regime. If the Party retained an iron hand over

¹⁴ Schapiro, *Communist Autocracy*, ch. III, esp. pp. 48-51.

¹⁵ Quoted in Moore, *Soviet Politics*, p. 128.

¹⁶ Schapiro, *Communist Autocracy*, p. 261. A later Soviet author discussing this period speaks of the icompressionî of local soviet democracy at this time and the rise of decision-making by individuals rather than broad collectives. See Moore, *Soviet Politics*, p. 129, and source cited.

the soviets and usurped their functions, there was the danger of apathy, lack of obedience and support at the grass roots, and even of outright hostility. But the opposite policy of loosening Party controls threatened even worse dangers: elements hostile to the government might get themselves elected to the soviets and distort or sabotage Party policies from within.

The Party tried to resolve this dilemma by enlivening the soviets, i.e., making their style of decision-making more democratic, and by holding new elections in the hope of infusing a more proletarian personnel.¹⁷ These devices enjoyed no more than limited success. A decree of the Central Committee of December 21, 1930, on new elections to the soviets echoed many of the complaints issued after the 1926 elections. In 1930, however, the situation was different. The USSR was in the throes of what Stalin was to call the revolution from above. This revolution transformed Soviet society through collectivization in agriculture, planning, and forced draft growth in industry. In these new circumstances the Party leaders found the soviets to be lagging badly.¹⁸

Glancing ahead somewhat at random, one finds similar complaints about major shortcomings in the work of the soviets voiced in a similar decree of January 22, 1957, or almost four years after the death of Stalin.¹⁹ There is a difference, nevertheless, in that the 1957 complaints concern mainly consumers' problems while the earlier Party strictures had to do with complaints about failure to promote production. In other words, the functions or tasks of the soviets changed in response to changes in the character of Soviet society and the strategy of its leaders.

¹⁷ The first new elections occurred in 1926. For the Party view of the results and what they were supposed to accomplish see the decree of the Central Committee of July 20, 1926, in *KPSS o rabote sovetov: sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 211–22, esp. 219–20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 298–302. For some additional details see Moore, *Soviet Politics*, pp. 136–37.

¹⁹ *KPSS o rabote sovetov*, pp. 472–82.

What then are the functions of the soviets that change in this manner while the complaints remain nearly constant? Originally the soviets seem to have been thought of as self-governing cells in a system of self-government, although I am unaware of any serious attempt to put such ideas into practice amid the flames of revolution and civil war. By the time the Party had gained control over the soviets, if not earlier, it is plain that the Party wanted to make them the enthusiastic executors of Party policy at the local level. They were also expected to be the Party's agents of supervision from below, over the bottom levels of the government bureaucracy, to prevent, for example, haughty and rude treatment of the population. However, since campaigns against various bureaucratic distortions usually start at the highest levels of the regime, it is doubtful that local soviets ever had much freedom of maneuver in opening and closing the safety valves that control the currents of popular discontent. These safety valves have always remained securely in the hands of the Party and the police. The most important element in the situation appears to be that enthusiasm at the local level tends to wither from contact with apathy or even hostility among the general population. Moreover, many local soviet officials, including no doubt some Party members, feel that there is precious little they can do about the misfortune and miseries they see around them.

In this sense the repeated complaints by the Party leadership about the weaknesses and failures indicate a general failure of authority in the Soviet regime. The Party leadership has not been able to transmit downward into the society at large the kind of enthusiastic and intelligent support it wants. Nevertheless, it would be a serious error to overestimate the importance of this particular evidence. No modern government ever gets anything like the support it wants, a result of the spread of democratic ideas. Earlier governments often did not care much about popular support so long as there were no serious revolts. A modern totalitarian regime, on the other hand, seeks total support and

total enthusiasm, so long as it is in charge of the enthusiasm. Hence signs of apathy and discontent can easily become exaggerated when they are perceived through the eyes of a totalitarian regime. Finally, the Soviet regime has survived for well over three generations with a substantial sector of the population alienated from it. During these years it has encountered severe internal crises and a devastating war. If the failure of authority is a serious malady in the body politic of the USSR, it must be a very slow-acting one and hardly a mortal illness.

The Soviets are agents of authority and enthusiasm all over the USSR. We have now to concentrate briefly on a narrower field: authority in industry and discipline over the workers in the workers' state. Once more I shall refer mainly to the earlier phases of the regime to show the experiences and ideas that led to later practices.

Shortly before the Bolshevik Revolution Lenin had claimed that capitalism had so greatly simplified the functions of management in modern society that any literate file clerk could perform them at workmen's wages. He was also in favor of planning and centralized control. For these too capitalism had supposedly prepared the ground. By the time of the Revolution centralized control was very much in the air because belligerents on both sides were resorting to it heavily during the First World War.

On the other hand, when the Revolution came, the leaders had little hesitation in setting notions of centralized control aside, at least for the time being. Bolshevik power was shaky. They could hardly make a proletarian revolution in the name of peace for the sake of installing what looked like wartime controls —at least not now. Instead, and at Lenin's instance, in the famous decree on Workers' Control, the Bolsheviks turned the factories over to the workers to run as best they could, much as they, turned over the land to the peasants to let them run that as best they could.

At the time workers' control meant little more than an official blessing for the workers' attempts to take control in other cities

besides the capital, a movement the Bolsheviks could hardly afford to discourage. General elections were to be held in each plant over a certain size to determine who was to represent the workers and who was to manage the plant. About 40 per cent of the factories in the area of Russia controlled by the Bolsheviks were affected by the system of workers' control. The workers proceeded to promote the interests of their own factories with little or no regard for the interests of society at large or the state. There was as yet no way to coordinate the production of the various factories, to make sure that if a factory turned out screws of a certain size and thread, there was some other unit in the economy that needed these screws. The role of the state fell to that of paying subsidies. Such a system could not and did not last long. By the beginning of 1918 this experiment came to an end.²⁰

In the spring of that year and in the course of a revealing general review of the immediate tasks facing the new regime, Lenin made some remarks on management and the discipline of the labor force that were to enter the canon of Soviet theory on this topic. He wrote in *Pravda* of April 28, 1918, that 'We must learn to combine the meeting democracy of the toiling masses — turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood — with *iron* discipline while at work, with *unquestioning obedience* to the will of a single person, the Soviet manager, while at work.'²¹ To sustain this turbulent enthusiasm and combine it with strict subjection to authority would be a most difficult task indeed. By the time Stalinism was well established, say about 1930, the emphasis came to be on discipline, while enthusiasm had become a public-relations product to be expressed at carefully staged gatherings in support of official objectives.

²⁰ Moore, *Soviet Politics*, pp. 159–60.

²¹ V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniye*, 4th ed. (Moscow, 1950), vol. 27, p. 241. The quotation occurs in the article on labor discipline in the *Bolishaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, 2d ed. (Moscow, 1952), vol. 14, p. 487. A very similar quotation from the same speech — Lenin had no objections to repetition for the sake of emphasis — occurs in the article on one-man management, vol. 15, p. 476.

In the early years of power the Bolsheviks were still searching for viable forms of management compatible with a fledgling socialist society. By about 1919 the prevailing practice was collegial management. Boards were set up composed of two-thirds workers and one-third engineers or technicians approved by the trade unions. Although the role of technical skill was now recognized, a great deal of confusion remained. During 1919 and 1920 there was much discussion in high Party circles of the problems of democratic management. Tomsy, a trade-union leader and member of the Workers' Opposition, argued that collegial management was the only method capable of achieving broad mass participation in the management of industry. Lenin's reply was vitriolic: 'You cannot escape . . . by declaring that corporate management is a school of government. . . . You cannot stay forever in the preparatory class of a school. . . . We are now grown up, and we shall be beaten and beaten again in every field, if we behave like school children.'

For Lenin there was only one answer: *yedinonuchuliye*, i.e., one-man management, or more loosely expressed, individual responsibility and authority. That had been the direction in which industrial practice had begun to move anyway. By 1920, 85 per cent of the enterprises in the new regime were controlled by individual managers, though their powers were weak.²² The Ninth Party Congress, held from March 29 to April 5, 1920, gave the *coup de gr^oce* to the principle of collegiality by declaring that, 'Collegiality, however much a place it has in the process of reaching a judgment or a decision, must unconditionally give way to one-man management in the process of execution.'²³

The theory and practice of one-man management did not shake down into a moderately settled form until after the Stalinist revolution from above. Shortly before Stalin's death, the second edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopediu* published a definition of

²² Moore, *Soviet Politics*, pp. 164–65.

²³ *B.S.E.*, s.v. 'Yedinonachaliye,' vol. 15, p. 475.

one-man management that put a heavy stress on the aspects of undivided authority and clear responsibility. It described one-man management as the basic method of leadership in a socialist economy and government apparatus, consisting in the fact that the person in authority bears personal responsibility toward the government for the work of the enterprise or establishment entrusted to him and is invested with the complete power necessary for the successful realization of leadership over that enterprise or establishment.²⁴

From this authoritative description one could gain the mistaken impression that one-man management had completely replaced collegiality as a principle of authority in industry. In my judgment that would be a serious error. Looking over the evidence from refugee accounts and the press about what industrial managers actually did, one can see very quickly that management retained strong collegial elements. Only the democratic and populist aspects have disappeared from collegiality. Workers played no role in industrial management. But the manager or director, as he was usually called, had to maneuver and bargain with several officials to keep production going. Any one of them could mount an effective challenge to the director. One was the secretary of the Party organization in the factory or plant. Another was the chief of the special section or secret police unit. By far the weakest of the three with outside connections was the head of the trade-union committee. Inside the plant or factory were the chief engineer, the head of the department of technical control (roughly similar to our quality control, whose job it is to make sure that the quality is not one bit better than necessary so as to avoid wasting materials), and, finally, the chief bookkeeper.²⁵ The relationship among this cumbersome set of officials exempli-

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Terror and Progress—USSR: Some Souffres of Change and Stability in the Soviet Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 63-67.

fies what I have elsewhere called the vested interest in confusion, the need to keep subordinates unsure of themselves in order to maintain control from on high. Simultaneously it probably reflects the need to put something in the place of the discipline of the market over the processes of production. Caution, however, is necessary on this score. In our oligopolist economy the discipline of the market works slowly and imperfectly, leaving in inormalî times plenty of room for maladministration and neglect of the customerís interest.

What happened to the workers and industrial discipline with the advent of socialism? By Stalinís time official doctrine had come to hold that socialist labor discipline had nothing to do with the cruel and exploitative discipline of capitalist society. Instead, under socialism there is social ownership of the means of production, and therefore the workers allegedly do their jobs conscientiously, indeed with pride and enthusiasm.²⁶ To the best of my knowledge and belief such claims are pure but necessary nonsense. In the early days of the new regime Lenin made some remarks along these lines, duly quoted in the exposition of canonical doctrine that I have just summarized. If one looks up these remarks in their original context, one sees that Lenin was not so much interested in conceptions of socialist discipline as in getting workers to work at all.

A few weeks after the seizure of power, Lenin pointed out that the Party would have to fight the workersí ihabit of shirking burdens, of trying to get as much as possible out of the *bourgeoisie*.î Newcomers who entered factory life during the war were, he complained, especially bad: î[T]hey want to treat the *peopleís* factory, the factory that has come into the possession of the people, in the old way, with the sole end in view of ëmakingí as much as possible and clearing out.î²⁷ Lenin blamed these

²⁶ *B.S.E.*, s.v. îSotsializm,î vol. 40, 153 and îDistiplina trudovaya,î vol. 14, 486-87.

²⁷ Quoted in Moore, *Soviet PoliticJ*, p. 176.

defects on the Russian experience of capitalism and the survival of petty-bourgeois individualism among the workers. There is considerable merit to such an explanation when added to the general confusion of the times. Nevertheless, it is significant that so many workers, at least in Lenin's eyes, showed such a reluctance to work hard on behalf of their government at a time of high revolutionary enthusiasm. To be sure, pockets of enthusiasm did appear later in the form of the well-known Saturday workers or free evening and holiday workers. But these remained merely pockets.

The underlying issue likewise remained. As Lenin's remarks show, from the very beginning the Party leadership was very reluctant to perceive or state openly that under socialism too there would be a built-in conflict of interests between management and workers. For a time the existence of such a conflict could be explained away with phrases about the survival of capitalist traits. As this explanation became less plausible with the passing of time and the Bolshevik variant of socialism became more firmly established, the simple ritual denial of a conflict of interests became more insistent.

To return to the early phase of the new regime, some sort of discipline had to be reestablished in industry no matter what political label it bore. The issue was a burning one for the Party and the source of organized opposition movements within it from 1918 through part of 1921. From these debates I will select a few remarks by Trotsky for the way they foreshadowed later developments under Stalin.

It is hardly surprising that Trotsky, an outstanding military leader during the Civil War, advocated a military solution to the problems created by the workers. On April 9, 1920, he announced to the Third Congress of Trade Unions that the unions did not have the task of fighting against the government in the interest of labor. Instead they ought to cooperate with the government in the task of constructing a socialist economy. Attacking the Men-

sheviks for spreading the idea that compulsory labor was inefficient he asserted, "If that is true, then the entire socialist economy is destined to crash, for there can be no other road to socialism except the compulsory distribution of the entire labor force of the country by the central economic authority, which will distribute this force according to the needs of an over-all government economic plan." The militarization of labor was necessary, he claimed, under which the unions should help in allocating workers to their posts. To the Mensheviks such proposals looked like Egyptian slavery. Trotsky replied that Egyptian peasants did not decide through their soviets to build the pyramids.²⁸

Anyone with a fondness for historical irony could claim that Trotsky was a premature Stalinist because Stalin eventually adopted so many of Trotsky's proposed policies. With the onset of large-scale industrialization in 1929 and 1930 the workers were called upon to make heavy sacrifices. The Party compelled them to give up the limited degree of independent representation of their interests by the unions that Lenin had insisted upon against Trotsky, and that was tolerated during the years of the New Economic Policy. In the spring of 1930 almost the entire leadership of the All-Union Council of Trade Unions was removed and replaced by men willing to support Stalin's programs to greatly increase labor productivity. There was hardly any pretense that the Party Central Committee's action was in accord with Soviet conceptions of democracy. One of Stalin's top administrators, Lazar Kaganovich, dismissed such objections with remarks that reveal a great deal about current Soviet conceptions of authority: "One might say that this is a violation of proletarian democracy, but, comrades, it has long been known that for us Bolsheviks democracy is not a fetish; for us, proletarian democracy is a means for arming the working class for the better execution of its socialist tasks."²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

This is not the place to discuss the further development of controls over labor, except to point out that they were always mitigated by the existence of a de facto free market for labor, which was in turn the result of a severe shortage of manpower. Factory managers who needed workers badly were disinclined to check closely whether a worker had authorization to leave his previous job.

Instead we may turn now to the Stalinist revolution from above as necessary background for the Stalinist terror —certainly a key aspect of authority in the Soviet system. By high-speed industrialization, planning, and the collectivization of agriculture, the revolution from above had a powerful impact on the lives of just about every Soviet citizen and transformed Russian society from top to bottom. All this happened between 1929 and 1934. Further changes followed after 1934 as the Soviet Union became one of the world's great industrial and military powers. But these changes were more of the same. The basic pattern had been set during those years. I cannot think of any other deliberate social transformation at any time in human history that has been so swift and so thorough. Indeed, transformation is a euphemism. In the short run the revolution from above was a man-made disaster. In the longer run it was a success in that the leaders who carried it out — except for those executed at Stalin's orders — remained in control and with the help of the Allies defeated Nazi Germany. Even the success had its ambiguities. The wounds Stalin inflicted on Soviet society very likely contributed to the initial German victories in the invasion of Russia that began in June 1941.

To understand why the revolution from above occurred, it is necessary to look briefly at the situation in the late 1920s. As early as 1926 the Russian economy had for the most part recovered to the level attained just before the First World War. However, the production of pig iron and steel —distinguishing features of an industrial economy —still lagged well below the levels reached

in 1913. Factory production, the commanding heights of the economy, remained overwhelmingly in the hands of the state.³⁰ In the sense then of a general economic recovery with the Bolsheviks still in charge, the New Economic Policy of freedom to trade and reduced pressure on the peasants looked like a success. On the other hand, the success also looked like opening the door to capitalism, an idea which troubled some Bolshevik leaders. There are reasons for thinking that this threat was more imaginary than real, even if it played a part in the decision to impose socialism from above. As long as the Party kept control of big industry, it had the means to control the flow of essential supplies to the rest of the economy. There were ways, in other words, to keep petty capitalism under control, if that is what the Bolsheviks wanted. But they wanted a great deal more.

In addition to the general problem of socialist economic recovery under capitalist auspices, there were two more specific problems facing the Soviet leaders. After 1923 the government continued to pursue a policy of price cuts for goods produced by state trusts. Since there were not enough goods to meet demand at lowered prices, the government extended price control over an ever wider portion of state industry, state and cooperative trade. The predictable result was a goods famine, i.e., there was little or nothing to be had in the market at official prices. The still-permitted private trade took on the characteristics of speculation since it was profitable to buy state-produced goods for resale. Thus one effect was to transfer resources to the private sector. Another effect was to limit the supply of goods available to the peasants, especially those in villages far from towns, since the towns swallowed up first what goods were available at low prices. Peasants had to pay more if they got anything at all.

Persistence in holding prices below the market value of goods is partly traceable to Bolshevik hostility to market forces. Partly

³⁰ Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 94, 104.

it was also due to the severe internal rivalries among Party leaders. The basic dilemma was that in order to correct the situation the Party would have to give greater freedom to market forces or else destroy the market and its manifestations.³¹

The peasants constituted the second major problem. By the middle and 'late 1920s the effect of the Bolshevik Revolution turned out to be what would now be called a variety of land reform. The holdings of landlords and larger peasants disappeared. Millions of landless laborers and ex-peasants, who had returned from town in the days of war communism, acquired land. The number of family holdings rose from about eighteen million in 1917 to twenty-five million in 1927.³² As with any land reform, the change diminished the surplus of food available to feed the towns because this surplus came in large measure from the larger holdings. Also, as the poorer peasants became less poor, they ate more, reducing further the amount of food available for the urban dwellers. The shortage of marketed produce remained chronic under the New Economic Policy. The shortages were intensified by the low productivity and technical and social backwardness of Russian agriculture. The NEP was the golden age of the Russian village community — where all decisions in the agricultural cycle were subject to collective control. The three-field system, ownership by strips, and dwarf holdings were widespread. As late as 1928 about one household in five still used a wooden plough, and half the grain harvest was reaped by sickle or scythe.³³

Drastic changes would have to take place in agriculture if Russia were going to modernize and feed its towns, no matter what the political beliefs of the modernizers. In reaching the pre-war level of output, economic recovery had gone about as far as it could. New capital investment would be needed and more food

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–42.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 122.

to feed the towns. Above I suggested that these and the other problems of the day were soluble within the framework of the NEP and continued Bolshevik control of the commanding heights of the economy. But there were certainly political risks to a slow and steady industrialization in the manner of the NEP. The state would be dependent for food on the output of well-to-do peasant proprietors with no love for the Bolsheviks. There would also be a growth of petty capitalism in the towns. Sooner or later the Bolsheviks, whose support among the industrial workers was still precarious, could find themselves politically swamped. They might have to abdicate the goal of socialism or postpone its realization to an indefinite future. The international situation of alleged capitalist encirclement would not, it seemed, permit this kind of indefinite delay. Thus fears for political survival were inextricably mingled with the goal that made survival worthwhile and necessary. Without the goal the concrete problems would have appeared much more manageable.³⁴

Important as the commitment to socialism was, by itself that was not the most important element. Among many Bolsheviks there was a commitment to the means of getting there: speedy industrial growth under centralized control, which of course meant Bolshevik control. It was the speed that carried with it the commitment to coercion, although it is highly unlikely that any Bolshevik leader, even Stalin, realized the amount of coercion that would take place. Perhaps the commitment to a furious tempo of industrialization was a matter of temperament rather than of carefully-thought-out strategy. Be that as it may, such commitment was characteristic of Bolshevik revolutionary traditions. These had always emphasized the role of a committed elite in bringing about revolutionary changes against apparently overwhelming odds.

³⁴ For an excellent review of how the Bolsheviks saw their problems see Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet industrialization Debate, 1924-1928* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

Widespread coercion began in agriculture even before the formal adoption of the First Five-Year Plan. Toward the end of December 1927, state procurements of grain began to falter. Peasants were waiting for a rise in official grain prices, for which the prospects seemed reasonably good. By January of 1928 the state had managed to buy less than three-quarters of the amount purchased the previous year. Shortages were becoming acute, indeed threatening. At this juncture Stalin took off for the Urals and West Siberia, where the harvest had been reasonably good, with a task force of officials and police. They closed free markets, threw out private traders, ordered peasants to deliver grain, and punished them as criminals if they failed to do so. Stalin denounced laggard officials who were reluctant to seize grain from the better-off peasants or kulaks by invoking a hitherto unused article of the criminal code against speculation. He also used extreme language with Party officials slow to comprehend that their basic attitude of caution toward the peasantry must change. Stalin's actions became known as the iUrals-Siberian method and foreshadowed collectivization and the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. Thus, as Professor Nove points out, the Urals-Siberian method constitutes a great turning point in Russian history.³⁵

The first Five-Year Plan was announced in May 1929. In December of that year Stalin asserted and justified the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, a process that had in fact begun in some localities before he spoke.³⁶ Other peasants were to lose their land and animals, as under compulsion they pooled their possessions to join collective farms. Rather than give up their stock many peasants slaughtered them, leaving Russia with a chronic shortage of meat that persists to this day. Collectivization was carried through amid tremendous confusion and brutality, with wide variations in its impact from one place to another. There

³⁵ Nove, *Economic History*, pp. 150–51, 153.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 166.

were also variations in the policy of the central authority, including a major but temporary retreat by Stalin. I cannot discuss these aspects here. It is enough to emphasize the chaotic and arbitrary character of authority in relation to the overwhelming mass of the population at this time. A declaration of the Party's agitation and propaganda department in January 1930 gives some idea of the situation: "If in some matters you commit excesses and you are arrested, remember that you have been arrested for your revolutionary deeds."³⁷

It is possible to form no more than a very rough notion of the social costs of this upheaval. The total number of kulaks was on the order of four and a half million people. Just what liquidation meant for these people is unclear. Many probably died, while others were deported or exiled to remote areas of Russia.³⁸ In 1933 the combination of terror, disorganization, and the state's high rate of procurements—even though these had been reduced well below the impossible figure set in the plan—produced a famine. How many died we do not know. But Professor Nove calculates on the basis of census data that between 1932 and 1939 some ten million people (demographically) disappeared.³⁹ In other words, at the previous rate of increase the population in 1939 would have been some ten million more than it actually was. This figure reflects in part a fall in the birth rate due to harsh conditions of life in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore it includes the victims of the Great Terror, which appears to have been at its height around 1936. Therefore the number of deaths due to the collectivization drive must have been well under ten million.

Although the manipulation of such grisly and not very reliable statistics is an unavoidable part of any effort to get at the truth,

³⁷ Quoted in Nove, *Economic History*, p. 165.

³⁸ The figure comes from Nove, *Economic History*, p. 167.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

I will confess to some uneasiness in so doing. The process of counting, adding, and subtracting necessarily disregards human differences and obliterates individual human tragedies. All of us who work with such figures have to remember that behind each digit there stands that many mortal sorrows.

What did Stalin and his associates get out of collectivization? At one time many scholars held that the collectivization of agriculture was a key aspect of the primitive socialist accumulation of capital. By this they meant that the new socialist state extracted from agriculture by force and fraud a substantial portion of the resources that went into the building of factories for the great drive toward industrialization. In the late 1960s and early 1970s this thesis underwent skeptical scrutiny. The most severe blow came in 1974, when James R. Millar published an interpretative review of two works by a Soviet economic historian, A. A. Barsov, who drew upon a great deal of previously inaccessible archival data in an attempt to measure directly the net material contribution of agriculture to industrialization. According to this evidence, agriculture was actually a net recipient of material resources just before and during the First Five-Year Plan. State investments in the state farm system (*sovkhozy*) and in the machine tractor system to service the collective farms (*kolkhozy*) appear to have been large enough to give agriculture a net inflow of funds. Another factor was the rise in prices for those goods the peasants were permitted to sell in the open market.⁴⁰

There are grounds for great skepticism about this last point. To be sure, prices for privately traded agricultural commodities went through the roof, rising in 1932 to some thirty times the level of 1928. But that is liable to be merely a sign that there was practically nothing to sell.⁴¹ Without knowing how many col-

⁴⁰ James R. Millar, "Collectivization and the Contribution of Soviet Agriculture to the First Five-Year Plan: A Review Article," *Slavic Review* 33, no. 4 (December 1974): 750–66. See esp. pp. 751, 754, 759, 760.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Table 3, p. 762.

lective farmers could profit from such a windfall, and by how much each could profit in the course of a year, we do not really know anything. Reservations are also in order concerning the argument as a whole because it is precisely what a loyal Soviet citizen would want to prove. On balance, nevertheless, there appears to be enough solid factual evidence now to require that we discard any theory of primitive socialist accumulation based on extracting resources from agriculture.

There is no doubt, on the other hand, that Stalin did achieve one central objective —an increase in state grain collections. In 1928, the last year before collectivization, state grain procurements were only 10.8 million tons. By 1930 they were already up to 22.1 million tons and remained in this vicinity through 1933, except for a fall-back to 18.5 million tons in 1932, a year in which Stalin decided to relax procurements somewhat.⁴² But even this victory may have come about accidentally and certainly at a very heavy price, with long-lasting effects on food production in the USSR. The entire increase in grain procurements is, according to good authority, more than explained by the drop in fodder requirements caused by the peasants' wholesale destruction of livestock herds at the onset of collectivization.⁴³ In addition to breaking the peasants' economic stranglehold on food supplies for the cities, collectivization destroyed the prospect for local peasant uprisings or more peaceful forms of concerted political action. At one stroke Stalin destroyed the peasant as the real autocrat of all Russia (a description common before the revolution). Finally, it seems likely that many peasants found they could not make ends meet in the countryside and migrated to the towns, increasing thereby the pool of labor needed for the industrial spurt.

⁴² Nove, *Economic History*, p. 180; on Stalin, p. 178.

⁴³ Millar, "Mass Collectivization," p. 763, citing Jerzy F. Karcz, "From Stalin to Brezhnev: Soviet Agricultural Policy in Historical Perspective," in James R. Millar, ed., *The Soviet Rural Community: A Symposium* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 42.

The general achievements of the revolution from above were indeed striking. Between 1927–28 and 1932 the Soviet Union laid the foundations for a mighty industrial state under centralized planning, which meant in effect control by the top leadership of the Party. Gross industrial production, measured in hundred millions of 1926–27 rubles, rose from 18.3 in 1927–28 to 43.3 in 1932.⁴⁴ Although such figures conceal shortfalls in specific industrial sectors — steel production was obviously disappointing — and give little indication of the quality of goods turned out, there is hardly any reason to doubt that in terms of the Stalinists' overall political objectives this plan and those that succeeded it during Stalin's lifetime were a success.

The costs of this use of political authority to make the Soviet version of a Great Leap Forward were painful. The most painful ones fell upon the peasants. Elsewhere real wages appear to have dropped. Housing was extremely scarce. Rationing and shortages were widespread. All in all, according to Professor Nove, the year 1933 seems to have marked the culmination of the most precipitous decline in living standards known in human history.⁴⁵

Reactions to the hardships, sacrifices, and turmoil that were part of the pursuit of so mighty a goal were diverse and contradictory. No doubt there was much grumbling to the effect that we can't eat statistics. But grumbling could be dangerous and land the discontented in a distant labor camp. At the other end of the scale were the genuine enthusiasm and faith in the future displayed by many thousands of technicians and workers, especially young people. Among others slightly higher in the scale there was a recrudescence of extreme leftism. These others were people who regarded considerations of cost as a relic of bourgeois ideology and who idealized communal living, which was in fact a consequence of overcrowding.⁴⁶ This form of radicalism, which

⁴⁴ Nove, *Economic History*, p. 191.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207; see also pp. 205–6.

⁴⁶ Nove, *Economic History*, 190–191, 202.

was also very prominent immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution, seems to flourish best in the times of chaos and shortages that are especially hard on ordinary people.

On the other hand, the drift of official policy was against any extreme leftism. Stalin dumped overboard the egalitarian elements in Marxism. On June 23, 1931, in a speech to a conference of business executives, he attacked sharply the "leftist" practice of wage equalization that was wiping out the difference between skilled and unskilled labor. He wanted to end the heavy turnover of labor, keeping a cadre of skilled workers in each factory. Other workers too were to be encouraged to stop floating from factory to factory by improvements in their conditions of life.⁴⁷ At this time too there began to flourish amid the shortages a system of special privileges for selected categories of workers and especially for officials. The privileges consisted of such things as access to "closed" stores carrying otherwise unobtainable foods and other goods, allocations of tolerable housing or even a good apartment, or a permit to buy a good suit. Under conditions of universal scarcity money could do little. But authority could reward its own with small and not so small favors.⁴⁸ Such practices, as Professor Nove points out, readily lent themselves to abuses. Here we can see the origin of the corruption that according to many observers permeates so much of the Soviet bureaucracy today. Here too in the frayed tempers that afflicted so many, we can see the source of the rudeness and arrogance that mar so much of official behavior toward ordinary citizens, especially in their role as consumers.

The deep wounds inflicted on Soviet society by collectivization and industrialization were an important cause of the Great Terror that followed shortly afterward. But the Terror was not, in my judgment, an inevitable consequence of these wounds. Conceivably a different type of leadership might have combined a

⁴⁷ Joseph Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow, 1941), pp. 371–74.

⁴⁸ Nove, *Economic History*, p. 209.

policy of healing and reconciliation with a strictly limited use of punitive weapons to achieve similar or even better results.

Before discussing these causes it is necessary to explain briefly yet concretely the meaning of terror in the specific context of Soviet society. I shall use the term very broadly to refer to a set of five punitive measures, listed in order of increasing severity. The justification for lumping all five together is that any one of them was frightening and could, especially in the atmosphere of the Great Terror, lead to other and more severe measures. The first and least severe measure was the ordinary purge, used mainly in the Party, but also from time to time in any set of administrative offices. A purged Party member lost his or her Party membership. Theoretically such a person would not lose his or her job, although this often happened. Being purged from an administrative post could mean for a non-party person transfer to a less responsible post or to unemployment. The second and third measures were arrest and confinement to an ordinary prison. The fourth measure, transfer to a labor camp, might follow. Or instead, execution might follow imprisonment. There were also executions in the camps.

Although terror existed from almost the beginning of the Bolshevik regime—a decree of September 5, 1918, authorized the establishment of concentration camps—its most intense form did not appear until 1936–38, the years of the Great Purge.⁴⁹ At first glance the delay is puzzling. By that time the Soviet system had taken its basic form. Anti-Bolshevik enemies had been thoroughly crushed. Within the Party Stalin seemed victorious and his policies vindicated. According to general theories of revolution one would expect the maximum of terror to occur shortly after the revolutionaries took power. Then the revolutionaries could be expected to destroy their opponents and settle accounts with the old regime in order to prepare the way for a new social

⁴⁹ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London, 1968), p. 543.

order. Conceivably one could make the facts fit this theory by expanding the definition of terror to include the White casualties in the Civil War. Yet even granting this point would not help to explain the Great Terror that seemed to surge out of nowhere almost a generation later.

We will come back to the timing later, after discussing factors that made the terror possible though not necessarily inevitable. One set of factors was the body of habits and traditions concerning the treatment of political opponents that grew up under Lenin's guidance in the Bolshevik Party. It was Lenin who conferred legitimacy on the use of terror and refused to set any limits on its application. So far as I am aware, Lenin encountered no serious opposition to his proposals. It was Lenin too who set an example of verbal savagery toward political opponents, especially those expressing views close to his own. This practice is almost certainly no invention by Lenin; a very similar polemical style may be found in Marx. It is also necessary to point out that in regard to Party comrades Lenin never took the step from verbal abuse to physical liquidation. It was left to Stalin to break this taboo. If Robert Conquest is correct, Stalin had a great deal of difficulty in persuading the top Party leadership to endorse this step.⁵⁰

One final aspect of the general situation prior to the drive for collectivization and industrialization deserves mention here because it must have influenced policy-making at the highest levels. As early as some time in the beginning of 1921, high Party leaders realized that they had lost the support of the industrial workers amid the sacrifices of the Civil War and War Communism. Radek said so openly in an address to War College cadets, adding characteristically that the Party must not yield to this reactionary sense of exhaustion but rather impose its will to victory upon its dispirited followers.⁵¹ Equally characteristically for that historical pe-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

riod, the Party *did* yield some weeks later and introduce the New Economic Policy. Nevertheless, this episode reveals the Party's conception of itself as a beleaguered revolutionary elite, not an elite with powerful support from the masses. Second, it expresses a clear willingness to impose the Party's will on the masses if the latter become disenchanted. From there it is not a very long step to reorganizing society in order to control the masses. That of course happened in 1929–30. But not all the consequences were foreseen or foreseeable.

Another set of causes may be found in the legacy of the drive toward high-speed industrialization and collectivization, together with the Party disputes that preceded this drive. As everyone knows, in the course of coming to these major decisions, Stalin drove his opponents out of the Party, changing his policies according to his perception of the tactical needs of the moment.

As the drive gathered speed, some of his right-wing opponents were thoroughly frightened by the prospect that Stalin was leading the Party and the country to chaos and catastrophe if he failed, to a police state if he succeeded. (On the latter score they were of course correct, although it is not easy to see what else could be expected.) Between 1930 and 1933 there were three organized opposition movements in the Party directed against Stalin. In 1934 at the Seventeenth Party Congress there was evidently some talk behind the scenes of replacing Stalin with Kirov and curbing the terror that had already begun to grow.⁵² Presumably all of the leading elements in the Party had at least some supporters in the rank and file. Furthermore, the tense situation in the country as a whole must have generated somewhat similar sentiments among a substantial number of ordinary people inside and outside the Party. Foreign Communists who visited the USSR in the early thirties and became disillusioned by what they encountered found themselves almost automatically put in touch with an organized

⁵² Ibid., pp. 27–30, 36–38.

grass-roots opposition within the Soviet Party.⁵³ Outside the Party too the revolution from above had created plenty of reasons for resentment and suspicion. Many a city dweller must have had rural relatives or acquaintances who were perceived as the victims of brutal injustice. For workers in the towns discipline had become harsh and real wages had fallen, while administrators faced heavy penalties if they failed in impossible tasks. Despite the existence of indubitable enthusiasm, there are many indications of hostility and doubt.

All such sentiments Stalin chose to excise surgically from the body politic the way a skilled ship's carpenter removes tainted timbers from a wooden vessel. To me the Great Terror remains inexplicable without the decisive cause that was Stalin's character. He was highly vindictive and suspicious almost to the point of paranoia. Yet he was no quasi-religious fanatic. Two influences permeate his writings and formal speeches: the seminary and Leninized Marxism. The latter provided some intellectual categories and simple rules for manipulating them, as in class analysis. None of his thought was profound or elevating, whatever these words might mean. An English wit remarked many years ago that Stalin frequently suffered from vertigo on the higher Hegelian trapezes. Yet neither his intellectual qualities nor lack of them seem to have been decisive in bringing on the terror. The causes lay deeper in his character in the form of sheer vindictive suspiciousness.

To summarize the factors behind an admittedly puzzling sequence of events, I suggest that the destructive Bolshevik attitude toward opposition, an awareness of their position as a revolutionary elite with hardly any mass following, fear and distrust of Stalin's Great Leap Forward in high Party circles, together with antagonisms and resentments it had created among the general population, all made the Great Terror possible and perhaps even

⁵³ Moore, *Terror and Progress*, p. 177,

likely. But it was Stalin's vindictive suspiciousness that made it happen, and made it happen when it did. Only when he had gained supreme power could he unleash the terror. For Stalin the terror was vengeance and social prophylaxis, a device to ensure that his brand of socialism would not be challenged from within.

In China, it is worth noting briefly, there has been the same anxiety among top leaders lest the revolution be subverted from within. The Cultural Revolution suggests that Mao was far more anxious on this score than Stalin. On the other hand, Mao was able to impose a code of behavior that was reasonably successful in preventing Communist leaders from killing one another over differences in policy.

Once the Soviet terror had begun it expanded rapidly. Part of this expansion was the result of pure bureaucratic inertia. The secret police had a job to do and wanted to make it as big and important as possible. They created a huge network of informers who had to prove their vigilance against spies, wreckers, and subversive elements. Rank-and-file Party members and even ordinary citizens also had to demonstrate vigilance, or so they were led to think. In fact vigilance was no guarantee of security. Then every arrest created a nest of further suspects because relatives and friends of the victims were by and large correctly suspected of turning against the government. Thus one of the consequences of the terror was to reduce sharply the legitimacy of the regime, to replace legitimate authority with naked power and widespread fear.

The primary effect of the terror was to destroy those Party leaders and their followers who might become rivals to Stalin or oppose his policies. We get some sense of the range of this slaughter by noting the fate of the 1,966 delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress that met in January 1934 to celebrate Stalin's victory in the drive toward industrialization and collectivization. Ironically, Stalin said to this Congress that there were no more anti-Leninist groupings and therefore nothing to prove and, it seems, nobody to beat.¹ In the next few years 1,108 of the

nearly 2,000 delegates who had listened to Stalin were shot.⁵⁴ A total of thirty-three men became members of the Politburo between 1917 and 1938. Under Stalin this became an extremely dangerous occupation. Sixteen of these men were shot or assassinated, and one committed suicide. All of the deaths are traceable to Stalin, except possibly that of S. M. Kirov. Conquest and others, however, have argued that Stalin plotted his death too.⁵⁵ The casualties in the Politburo and among the delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress constitute no more than a partial list of those in the Party as a whole. They are enough, however, to provide good support for the impressionistic thesis that a major impact of the terror fell upon the Party's higher ranks.

Another major effect — or should we say purpose? — was to destroy the leadership of any social formation such as the army or the police that might be able to wall itself off from pressures affecting the rest of Soviet society and thereby escape the control of the Stalinist leadership, or even form a nucleus for opposition to it. If anything, the terrorist purge struck more heavily at the military than the Party. Three of the five Marshals were victims; 14 of the 16 Army Commanders, Classes I and II; all of the 8 Admirals, Classes I and II, and so on in roughly similar proportions, down to 221 of the 397 Brigade Commanders. Below the upper echelons around half of the officer corps, some 35,000 in all, were shot or imprisoned.⁵⁶ In 1957 the eleventh edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* acknowledged that the illegal repressions of 1936–1938, carried out by mortal enemies of the people, Yagoda, Ezhov, and Beriya, all heads of the secret police and all in due course executed, who had insinuated themselves into the confidence of Stalin, . . . led to a well-known weakening of the military forces at the outbreak of the war.⁵⁷ About the

⁵⁴ Conquest, *Great Terror*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ See Conquest, *Great Terror*, pp. 538–39 for a list of Politburo members; also ch. 2 on Kirov's murder.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 484–85.

⁵⁷ *B.S.E.*, vol. 50, p. 424.

secret police we know very little more than the execution of its leaders. The top job seems to have been the most dangerous post of all in the whole Soviet system, and understandably so in the light of its awesome power. But the lightning did not strike there alone. The numerous tales among refugees about secret police officials turning up as their companions in jail suggest that there were purges in the lower ranks as well. Obviously the dictator would have to keep the secret police off balance lest it turn against him.

There was a time when students of the Soviet Union thought that the terror affected mainly the upper ranks of the Soviet order and spared the general population. Evidence that became available shortly after the Second World War, in the form of Soviet classified documents captured by the Germans and numerous accounts by refugees, made it necessary to discard this opinion completely. On the basis of this evidence I was able to form the very rough guess that among the ordinary population the threat of arrest faced as many as one man in five at some point in their lives.⁵⁸ The main social consequence of the terror among the general population was the penetration and destruction of the little cells based on friendship and cooperation that offered a limited degree of protection against the rigors of a totalitarian regime and opportunities to evade its orders. In other words the population was to a high degree atomized. A great many individuals felt alone and defenseless. As numerous refugees remarked, there was nobody whom one could trust, not even close friends or family members. The situation put a premium on hypocrisy since the only recipe for safety — and a far from dependable recipe at that — was to mouth as convincingly as possible the approved attitudes of the day.

From Stalin's standpoint of wanting to control the population and suppress overt dissent, this destruction of the basic cells in the social order had some very positive features. (I doubt very much that Stalin thought about it in these terms.) From the stand-

⁵⁸ Moore, *Terror and Progress, USSR*, p. 155.

point of Soviet society as a whole the policy had some very negative features. Cells of evasion were and are very often at the same time cooperative units that keep the system going. A friendship group in a factory administration may have pull with someone in a ministry that enables the factory to get supplies without which work would come to a stop. Lower down the hierarchy a worker in one of the factory's shops may have a friend in the stock room who can give him a part without authorization. Otherwise the shop might have to cease operations. Higher up, the man in the ministry who got supplies for the factory will have to find someone in another ministry to replace these supplies. All this semi-legal activity works through personal connections. There are professionals who do nothing else but make these arrangements. It is easy to see how these semi-legal activities would provide a field-day for the secret police and their informers, and how much confusion and damage their destruction would cause. This, however, is only one form of necessary cooperation among the human beings that make up any complex or civilized society. It takes no great leap of the sociological imagination to see that the destruction of all these cooperative cells would destroy the society. Stalin either would not or could not go that far.

Because the Soviet Union continued to industrialize rapidly under the system of widespread terror, along with other students of Soviet affairs I once thought that the terror must have contributed to this success.⁵⁹ Supposedly the diffuse anxiety produced by the terror led people to put more effort into their work and make sure that their work was both accurate and satisfactory. That may well have been the case with a substantial scattering of individuals. But I have come to doubt that this reaction to fear made any large contribution to socialist construction. Instead, this type of argument may reflect the sociologist's tendency to find

⁵⁹ Alex Inkeles put this argument most forcefully. See the long quotation in Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), pp. 105–6.

some contribution to the social order in just about any existing practice.

On general grounds I would now suggest that the contribution of the terror to socialist construction was on balance negative. One widespread reaction to fright is sheer paralysis and confusion. At the very least there is an avoidance of responsibility and the making of decisions. Neither paralysis nor the avoidance of responsibility could have served the purposes of the regime. Another reaction to danger, that takes more time to develop, is simply to get used to it to the point of ignoring it. So long as nothing happens one hopes or even believes that one will not be arrested. In the meantime the individual is likely to seek solace and security in the familiar round of daily routines. Bursts of energy or enthusiasm are something to avoid because they destroy the security of routine and make one conspicuous. That response too is hardly a useful one from the dictator's standpoint.

Although the weight of the terror is thought to have decreased somewhat after 1938, it never stopped as long as Stalin lived. With the outbreak of the war in 1941 there was a marked increase in the activity of the police.⁶⁰ Toward the end of Stalin's life the publicity given to the so-called doctors' plot gave every sign of building up to another blood bath. Only his death on March 5, 1953, cut short this prospect. On April 3, 1953, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* announced that the arrest of the doctors had no lawful basis. *Pravda* carried further details on April 6, 1953, accusing a former Minister of State Security of political blindness. These dramatic events were part of a public campaign on behalf of a new legality, a campaign through which Stalin's successors sought to secure their position. According to their assessment it was necessary to reduce the terror sharply. This they appear to have done.

Just before the Second World War there were on the order of 3.5 million able-bodied workers in the camps.⁶¹ Conquest indi-

⁶⁰ Conquest, *Great Terror*, p. 491.

⁶¹ Moore, *Terror and Progress*, p. 155.

cates that in the 1960s there were about one million inmates.⁶² I have not been able to find any more up-to-date figures. The number may well have dropped further, as other methods for coping with dissent, such as psychiatric hospitalization, have come along. Be that as it may, it is obvious that the threat of repression against political terror⁶³ still lurks not very far in the background. On these grounds it remains appropriate to call the Soviet Union a police state, even if one with considerably reduced terror.

In addition to the reduction in terror, post-Stalinist Russia has displayed at least three trends that require brief mention as a background for some concluding observations on inequalities in contemporary Soviet society. One is a tendency toward stagnation or low rates of growth in Soviet industry. The second is a shift in the position of Soviet agriculture. From being an object of exploitation in the early thirties—even if there was less exploitation than Western authorities once believed—agriculture has become an object of government subsidies and a heavy drag on the government's budget.⁶³ This change appears to be part of a policy of raising the incomes of those at the bottom of the social heap, which began to be noticeable in the 1960s.⁶⁴ As such it constitutes a limited reversal of Stalin's anti-egalitarian policies announced in 1931 and carried on during his lifetime. On the other hand, there has been another trend that is hardly egalitarian and which is also characteristic of advanced capitalist societies: a marked increase in the size and privileges of the professional stratum.

As everyone knows by now, the Soviet Union is a highly stratified society. In terms of income and social esteem there is as great a social distance between a high political official and an unskilled

⁶² Conquest, *Great Terror*, p. 516, based on unofficial claims.

⁶³ Marshall I. Goldman, *USSR in Crisis: The Failure of an Economic System* (New York: Norton, 1983).

⁶⁴ Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, stability, and change in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 156.

farm laborer in the Soviet Union as there is between a justice of the Supreme Court and a ditch digger in the United States. There are, on the other hand, some important differences between the systems of inequality in these two countries. In the absence of private property in the means of production, a member of the Soviet elite is completely dependent on official position for access to the material goods of this world. If the official loses the post, there is no economic cushion on which he or she can fall back in the form of inherited wealth. The pleasant apartment, the second home in the country, the use of a government limousine, access to special stores and high-quality closed medical services are all liable to vanish like confused images in a dream upon awakening in a cold harsh world. For high officials, tenure in office appears to be at the pleasure of still higher officials. More concretely this means adhering to a political line constantly undergoing subtle changes and getting the proper results if the post involves the administration of economic affairs.

In 1959 a Soviet sociologist concluded that there were just short of 400,000 managers of state administrative organizations and similar high-level posts.⁶⁵ Undoubtedly the number is much larger now. This is the really privileged stratum of Soviet society. Under Brezhnev they managed to consolidate their position and enjoy their privileges to the point where one trenchant analyst wrote of 'superstability' in the middle and late period of his rule.⁶⁶ For reasons to be discussed more fully in a moment, Brezhnev's rule may turn out to have been the golden age of the Soviet elite. Golden ages never last long. Quite apart from the matter of advancing age, new policies are likely at some point in the future to require new personnel.

Brezhnev's reign also coincided with a sharp rise in the number and importance of the professional stratum, a development

⁶⁵ Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (New York: Walker and Co., 1972), p. 143.

⁶⁶ Bialer, *Stalin's Successors*, p. 95; see also pp. 45-46.

that has its counterpart in advanced capitalist societies. Between 1965 and 1977 the number of specialists with higher and special middle education more than doubled, rising from a little over twelve million to more than twenty-five million. They included engineers, agronomists and veterinarians, economists, lawyers, and physicians. The proportion of specialists in the total labor force rose in these years from 15.7 per cent to almost a quarter, 23.7 per cent. The most interesting change is that for the first time this group became able to play a growing and important role in Soviet decision-making.⁶⁷ Presumably the specialists do this by providing expert advice on specific situations and the prospects for alternative policies. The political elite, it seems, still make the decisions and can reject the advice if they find it unpalatable, or perhaps more often, find another expert with more palatable advice. Although it would be as much a gross exaggeration to speak of technocratic rule in the USSR as in the USA, the Brezhnev regime did display a professional-administrative ethos.⁶⁸ To me at least, this ethos gives off an odor that recalls American schools of public administration and business schools —morally earnest and conventional, technically proficient, and politically not very acute.

About the political and professional elites one often hears that the absence of inheritable private property on any very substantial scale is no bar to the transmission of privileged status to the next generation. According to this argument the children of educated couples have a much better chance of obtaining a university education than do the children of manual workers and peasants. The cultural atmosphere of the home in elite families is more stimulating and conducive to serious intellectual work. Finally, youngsters from privileged homes develop a range of personal contacts helpful in starting and sustaining careers that are not available to children from worker and peasant families.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-77.

All this is true, and there are some signs that it may become more true. But there remain important offsetting factors. Among the incumbents of elite specialist positions the share of individuals who came from a background of manual workers was reported in 1977 to be a third or more. In the late 1960s the relative share of working-class and peasant youths in the student bodies of several universities was about 30 per cent.⁶⁹ These figures indicate a very high degree of recruitment from worker and peasant occupations. But there are important signs that the gate may be closing. In 1950–53 almost two-thirds of secondary school graduates gained admission to universities. Twenty years later the proportion had dropped to fewer than one in five.⁷⁰ On this account there have been substantial disappointment and discontent among students whose aspirations for higher education and a corresponding career were blasted at an early age.⁷¹ Should this trend continue, the elite might really turn into a mandarinat. On the other hand, the Party remains a channel for upward mobility for the politically ambitious with limited educational attainments. In 1976 slightly more than 30 per cent of the members of provincial and republican Party committees came from worker and peasant backgrounds.⁷² Many of these may have been nominal or honorary workers and peasants. Yet 30 per cent is a goodly proportion, in fact the same as that of worker and peasant students in the universities.

Directors of large industrial enterprises in the late 1960s received 450-500 rubles a month in the Leningrad area. These were what is known as *personal rates*, that is, not a rate set for a particular job title but one granted to a particular individual with

⁶⁹ Murray Yanowitch, *Social and Economic Inequality in the Soviet Union: Six Studies* (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1977), pp. 114, 88.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷¹ Walter D. Connor, *Socialism, Politics, and Equality: Hierarchy and Change in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 200–7. See also Matthews, *Class and Society*, p. 298; Yanowitch, *Inequality*, p. 131.

⁷² Bialer, *Stalin's Successors*, p. 188.

outstanding knowledge and experience in the field. By this time such rates, set in excess of officially authorized ones for specific occupations, had become a mass phenomenon for directors of large industrial enterprises.⁷³ Evidently the Soviet Union has been facing the same problem of attracting and holding first-rate managerial talent as that encountered in the United States. But the gap between managerial earnings and those of manual workers in the USSR is only a fraction of that which exists in the USA. Thus in the USSR the personal rates of factory directors were around seven or eight times the legal minimum of 60 rubles a month at which clean-up personnel were paid. Skilled workers were paid 141 rubles a month or between a third and a quarter of the director's earnings.⁷⁴ That is of course a very substantial set of inequalities, which have probably increased since the date of the study cited. But in the United States in 1981 higher paid executives received over 1.5 million dollars a year and skilled workers on the order of \$30,000 a year, which works out to a ratio of 50 to one.⁷⁵

Soviet wages for manual workers in industry display considerable variation. In this area of the economy payment is mainly for the quantity and quality of work performed rather than in accord with the political and ethical considerations that govern payment at higher levels in the social system. Skill is rewarded by higher wages as is work in an industry granted high priority by the government.

Between 1955 and 1973, almost a generation, there has been a steadily declining relative advantage in the earnings of engineering technical personnel over those of manual workers. Dur-

⁷³ Yanowitch, *Inequality*, pp. 38–39.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

⁷⁵ Executive pay from *Business Week*, May 9, 1983, pp. 84–85. According to the *Statistical Abstract* (1982), Table 664, p. 400, the average annual total compensation for all domestic industries in 1981 was only \$20,372. Both mining and communications, however, ran over \$30,000. Average includes managerial salaries and workers' wages.

ing this period the average monthly wages of manual workers nearly doubled, rising from 76.2 to 145.6 rubles a month. Engineering-technical personnel's earnings rose from 126.4 to only 184.9 rubles per month. In 1955 they earned 166 per cent of workers' wages. By 1973 the figure was down to 127 per cent. For an especially privileged set of workers, those in coal mining, their average earnings in 1969 were higher than those received by the engineering-technical personnel in most of the other industries. The range of variation over all industries was from 210 rubles a month in coal mining down to 100 rubles a month in light industry.⁷⁶

There was a reform of pay scales in 1964–65 that attempted to bring about a closer connection between remuneration and skill. The differentials between the lowest and the highest levels of remuneration after this reform came to 1:1.8 and 1:2.6, depending on the scale.⁷⁷ Thus it became possible for a skilled worker to earn nearly three times as much as an unskilled worker. Somewhat randomly chosen figures for Leningrad in the late 1960s and 1970 show a very much smaller differential, one that might be exceptional. Skilled workers made 141 rubles a month and the unskilled 106.⁷⁸ A detailed analysis of official wage scales and the methods used in drawing them up again reports a much wider disparity, with skilled workers receiving two to three times as much as the unskilled. But it is not clear to what extent these differences corresponded to actual practice.⁷⁹

There are some bits of evidence suggesting that in the early 1760s about a third of the urban working class was poor by Soviet standards, i.e., their income was below 50 rubles per capita a month. As in capitalist societies such people were concentrated

⁷⁶ Yanowitch, *Inequality*, pp. 30, 32.

⁷⁷ Matthews, *Class and Society*, p. 113.

⁷⁸ Yanowitch, *Inequality*, p. 39, Table 2.6.

⁷⁹ Leonard Joel Kirsch, *Soviet Wages: Changes in Structure and Administration since 1956* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1972), ch. 4, 5.

in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations.⁸⁰ It seems likely that the proportion of the poor diminished with the rise in living standards that took place under Brezhnev.

Although wages are crucial for a worker, they are not everything in life. The job also includes relationships with other workers and especially with the boss. In Stalin's day the boss tended to be a hard-driving figure contemptuous in his language toward the workers. There are signs that this situation had begun to change sharply in the 1960s. Ever since Lenin's flirtation with Taylorism's time and motion studies, Bolshevik leaders have displayed a strong interest in adapting capitalist techniques of industrial management to socialist purposes. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Soviet writers on factory management displayed a strong interest in the American "human relations" approach. How much of this approach seeped into actual Soviet practice is difficult to discern.⁸¹ Yet if it does no more than reduce sharply the crudity of the Soviet boss's treatment of workers — a crudity that, as Lenin said, comes from turning ex-serfs into factory workers — it will make life a lot pleasanter for industrial workers and probably raise their productivity.

To a Western observer it may be somewhat surprising to learn that in the USSR clerical and office positions, along with occupations such as sales clerk that we label as white-collar jobs, rank for the most part below manual labor in terms of both income and prestige. Thus the wages of clerical and office employees in the Leningrad area in the late 1960s were only 90 rubles a month as against 106 rubles for unskilled manual workers and 141 for skilled manual workers.⁸² In what appear to be index numbers for the USSR as a whole in 1973, workers' pay was rated as 100 and that of routine non-manual workers at 84.5.⁸³ There is, how-

⁸⁰ Matthews, *Class and Society*, pp. 88–89.

⁸¹ Yanowitch, *Inequality*, pp. 141–46, 151.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸³ Connor, *Socialism, Politics, and Equality*, p. 231; for occupational prestige ratings see *ibid.*, p. 93, and Yanowitch, *Inequality*, pp. 104–5.

ever, evidence of considerable geographical variation in the pay-ment of white-collar workers as well as those in other occupa-tions. A Soviet study published in 1970, again using index num-bers and this time with unskilled manual workers as 100, reported the earnings of 'other mental workers' (i.e., *not* skilled ones) as 85.7 for Leningrad, 102.6 for Kazan, 123.1 for Alimétievsk, and 115.9 for Menzelinsk. The last three cities are in the Tatar Re-public. If the 'other mental workers' were better paid than un-skilled manual workers in these three cities, they nevertheless earned substantially less than skilled manual workers in all four cities.⁸⁴

There appear to be two reasons for the lower position of the white-collar workers, or routine non-manual workers as Walter D. Connor calls them. First the relatively higher wages of man-ual workers, and especially skilled manual workers, reflect the long-standing Socialist preoccupation with the construction of heavy industry and the need to create incentives for this task. The second reason is that the routine non-manual jobs are for the most part filled by women.⁸⁵ Although this situation may be partly due to male prejudice, I do not think that is anything like the whole story. The workings of the labor market provide a better explanation. Routine non-manual tasks do not as a rule require as much physical strength as most forms of manual labor. Second, and most important, the women who do this work are often young and not yet married, or if they are married, they have husbands who earn more than they do. Rarely are these women heads of households. Since their earnings are merely auxiliary to those of a household, these women are willing and able to work for less. That of course is an old story under capitalism, an early phase of which is recapitulated here under socialism.

The degree of inequality in agriculture is very great too. A study of rural earnings in the Ukraine in 1970 found that collec-

⁸⁴ Connor, *Socialism, Politics, and Equality*, p. 235.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 263-66.

tive farm chairmen earned 2,700 rubles a year while ordinary farm laborers earned only 531 rubles a year, a spread of about five to one. Soviet sources disagree as to whether earnings from the private plot diminish this inequality. Yanowitch estimates that such earnings could at most diminish the spread to three to one.⁸⁶ It is also likely that the peasants have been helped by the government's general policy of raising incomes at the bottom levels of Soviet society. Peasants are now included in the social security system. In addition, collective farms are now covered against bad harvests by a state insurance system.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, as the figures on rural income show clearly, socialist agriculture is burdened by very heavy administrative costs. In addition to the chairman (2,700 rubles) there are chief specialists (1,935 rubles), work brigade leaders and heads of live-stock departments (1,268 rubles), agronomists (1,260 rubles), tractor operators and motor vehicle drivers (1,081 rubles), and office and store-keeping personnel (780 rubles). All of these may in some sense be necessary for agricultural operations. Clearly the tractor drivers are. Nevertheless they add up to a very large overhead, all of which eventually comes out of peasant earnings and serves to depress them. The old saying that the Russian peasant pays for everything is no longer true in an industrialized economy. But he still pays for a great deal.

III. CHINA*

The comparative themes of these lectures makes it appropriate to use the Soviet Union as a grid for viewing China. Therefore I shall emphasize the ways in which China resembles and

⁸⁶ Yanowitch, *Inequality*, pp. 52-53.

⁸⁷ Bialer, *Stalin's Successors*, p. 156.

* In transliterating Chinese some of the authors cited use the Wade-Giles system while others use the contemporary *pinyin*. I have used whichever system the cited author used.

differs from the Soviet Union. At the same time the comparative emphasis should not become a Procrustean intellectual posture that obliterates unique yet crucial features of the Chinese experience.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century both Russia and China were huge continental powers, each governed by a bureaucracy nominally under the control of an autocratic emperor. In China, much more than in Russia, access to the bureaucracy was a function of merit. In China merit was demonstrated in the form of literary skill. To acquire this skill took time freed from other work, especially manual labor, which in turn implied the ownership of a substantial amount of landed property by one's parents or sometimes an unrelated benefactor. In the Russian bureaucracy there was an emphasis on military qualities and manners quite lacking in the imperial Chinese bureaucracy.

The imperial authorities ruled over populations that were overwhelmingly peasant. In both societies peasant rebellion was endemic, a fact which suggests that many peasants did not perceive their overlords as performing any necessary or useful social function. Beyond the similarity of an intermittently turbulent peasant mass, there were very significant differences. To my knowledge no one has yet explored the consequences and meaning of these differences. I can only report them very briefly. Russian peasant agriculture was extensive and inefficient in the sense that large amounts of land were used for relatively small yields. Wheat was the principal crop. In many parts of Russia the peasants also had in the village community a strong collective organization. By contrast, Chinese agriculture was intensive and very efficient in its use of labor. One reason may be that only some ten per cent of the area of China is suitable for cultivation.

The town dwellers present some puzzles that make generalization difficult. Modern research has, so far as I can see, come close to destroying the notion that imperial China was, like imperial Russia, a land without a bourgeoisie, or more precisely without merchants. China had a great many merchants, and many cities

were commercial centers. Urban centers of varied size and importance dotted large parts of the Chinese countryside. They were not confined to the coastal areas.¹ Scholars now point to an urban medieval revolution that occurred between A.D. 900 and 1300 in different parts of China, evidently fueled by merchant activity. It resulted in the expansion of some walled cities, the growth of commercial suburbs outside their gates, the emergence of numerous small and intermediate towns, and other changes.²

On the other hand, in China this mercantile class had neither the cultural nor the political effect that its counterpart had in Western Europe, or even to a considerably lesser extent in Tokugawa Japan. In China distinctive cultural traits appear to have been minimal or altogether lacking, as the bureaucratic and landholding elite accepted and absorbed the merchants.³ Another authority tells us that no Chinese communities ever established themselves as municipalities possessing defined powers of independent jurisdiction.⁴ That of course stands in the sharpest possible contrast with urban developments in the West toward the end of the Middle Ages. Indeed the absence of separate urban jurisdictions is enough to render the term bourgeoisie inapplicable to China.

There is a great difficulty here in trying to explain why the Chinese merchants —and artisans, another important element in the urban population —failed to undertake any serious drive to share in political power when their economic base apparently made such an attempt quite feasible. Two considerations come to mind. First, the merchants may have won as much power as they

¹ G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 233–34. See also the map of Chinese cities in the form of endpapers. Further citations to articles by the editor will take the form of Skinner, *City*; other contributors will be identified.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 268–69.

⁴ Sybille van der Sprenkel, "Urban Social Control," in Skinner, *City*, p. 609.

wanted at the local level through the absorption of the wealthier elements into the local gentry.⁵ On the other hand, there were, it seems to me, limits to this process of absorption. The landed bureaucratic elite tended to be quite jealous of any system of social ranking, such as money, that could challenge the basis of their own system of rank and precedence, which was based on intellectual merit as demonstrated by success in examinations. For this reason they opposed, and generally successfully, other sources of prestige, including doctoring. Only when the imperial system as a whole began to break down in the nineteenth century did this resistance gradually cease to be effective. This mixture of resistance and limited absorption by an elite of scholar-bureaucrats and wealthy landholders may have been one reason why there was no bourgeois political impulse and no drive for liberal democracy in imperial China.

In Tsarist Russia peasant rebellions had been put down by force of arms. In China such rebellions might help to overturn a dynasty; but they could not or would not on their own introduce a new social order. With the coming of the twentieth century the peasants in China gained leadership from disaffected urban intellectuals and some help from workers in the cities. In combination with other historically unique factors to be discussed shortly, these new elements enabled a revolutionary movement to take power and keep it.

In reviewing the pre-modern social development of the Russian and Chinese empires we can see that the institutional seedlings that in Western Europe were to produce liberal democracy were stunted or nearly altogether absent. But in China there were some different seedlings that faced different obstacles. As already pointed out, in China the merchant influences had long been held in check by the scholar gentry state which feared the morally corrosive effects of mere wealth on the system of status and social

⁵ Skinner, *City*, p. 336.

inequality that supported the whole edifice. As the Chinese state crumbled in the latter half of the nineteenth century, commerce and industry passed to a great extent into foreign hands.

In the Chinese countryside there is, at least in Western sources, hardly any sign of the vigorous village community and its assembly that was so important in managing peasant affairs in Russia. What clues there are refer to the situation in quite ancient times, long before the establishment of the Empire. A Soviet scholar referring to events long before Confucius (d. ca. 468 B.C.) claims to have found evidence for a village assembly, consisting of the heads of groups of five households, and a council of elders. Both bodies were chosen by the community as a whole and served as the main local authority.⁶ I suspect that this claim may reflect the myths of Engels and Chinese tradition more than ancient Chinese social realities. Nevertheless, it is plain that the general *idea* of ordinary people coming together to discuss critically the policies of the ruler did exist in ancient China. A well-known chronicle purporting to report events of 542 B.C. reports: 'The people of Cheng were in the habit of discussing the administration of the state when they gathered at leisure in the village schools.' For this reason someone suggested to the ruler that it might be a good idea to close the schools. But the ruler rejected this proposal, saying in effect that popular criticism helped him to encourage good policies and correct bad ones.⁷ Like so much Chinese political discussion right down to the present day, this little report has a didactic and moralizing tone. It is almost impossible to tell what social practices if any lay behind it. But it does demonstrate the existence of democratic ideas in some quarters that included the peasantry.

For reasons about which I have to confess ignorance, this tradition of peasant self-government, never apparently very strong, died out. There is scarcely a trace of it in classical Chinese phi-

⁶ L. S. Vasiliev, *Agrarnye Otnosheniya i Obshchina v Dreunem Kitne* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 210–11.

⁷ Tso Chuan, Duke Hsiang 31 [542 B.C.], as translated in Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 63.

losophy, which is mainly political philosophy that began with Confucius and ended with the founding of the Empire in 221 B.C. Bounding forward through the centuries to the Southern Sung (1127-1279), about which we have a first-rate monograph, we learn that village affairs were run by well-to-do and literate landowners appointed by the state. Appointment to this form of state service was a highly unpopular burden, partly because the main task was collecting taxes.⁸ There is no indication of participation by the peasants. Under the last dynasty, the Ch'ing (1644-1912), there was, on the other hand, at least minimum token representation in the form of a supposedly elected headman or set of headmen for the village as well as for the basic rural division (*hsiang*) and town (*chen*.) In an attempt to prevent undue autonomy on the part of the headmen, the central government also imposed its own tax collection and local security system on the villages and other localities. Since the district magistrate, the bottom official on the bureaucratic ladder and the local representative of imperial authority, had responsibility for from 100,000 to more than 250,000 people, it is highly probable that the headman had a good deal of freedom of action.⁹ How many were peasants is another matter, since the government wanted to rest its authority on men of *Besitz und Bildung*, just as most governments do sooner or later. But there are seldom enough of such men to go around, and a scattering of the more prosperous peasants with political talents may well have found room to exercise them locally. If, on the other hand, they were really ambitious, with some talent for book learning, they would find support for the route that led to the examination hall and the imperial service rather than strictly local intrigues.

If we turn our eyes from the mass of the population and look instead at the imperial institution, we do find some ideas and

⁸ Brian E. McKnight, *Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 5, 83, 142-47, 181-85.

⁹ Richard J. Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage: The Ch'ing Dynasty, 1644-1912* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), p. 45.

practices that contained a liberal democratic potential. One is the familiar Mandate of Heaven, under which the Emperor ruled, and which included the right of rebellion in case of severe misrule, along with political and natural disasters. One excellent scholar has remarked, "The idea that the people had the right to rebel against oppressive rule remained at the heart of Chinese dynastic politics until the twentieth century . . ." ¹⁰ It is important that this was a right of rebellion, not of revolution. There was no idea of changing the political system or the social order. The idea of revolution took a long time to develop in the West and would have been anachronistic in imperial China. Nevertheless a right of rebellion obviously implies a right to resist unjust and arbitrary authority under roughly specifiable circumstances.

There is another aspect of the Chinese imperial system that does have strong theoretical affinities with Western liberalism, although there is almost certainly no historical connection between the two. That is the Right of Remonstrance, which evidently existed as early as the Book of Odes, composed around 600 B.C., or nearly four centuries before the founding of the Empire. The essential idea was that an adviser to a ruler had both a right and an obligation to give the ruler unpalatable advice. The general content of such advice emphasized policies that would bring material benefits to the underlying population. Hence a ruler should avoid policies of military aggrandizement and glory as well as heavy expenses for parks, imposing buildings, and other forms of luxurious display. All these ideas may be found in Mencius (372–ca. 288 B.C.) and in sketchier form in other classical philosophers.

The tradition remained alive down to the end of the Empire, undergoing changes in response to changing circumstances. The difficulty was that the right of remonstrance was little more than an ethical tradition. There was no interest group to back it up or

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

to force an unwilling Emperor to follow advice against his own inclinations. Nevertheless, occasional advisers with more courage than sense of self-preservation tried to put the idea into effect.¹¹ Much later the idea of legitimate dissent and the myths that had become attached to dissenting acts turned into a harmless romantic and self-pitying symbolism that could comfort those exiled from the court.¹² Finally under the last dynasty, the Ch'ing, the Censorate, a body theoretically bound to guide and admonish even the Emperor himself, became in practice little more than a body of secret agents providing him with secret information on civil and military officials at all levels.¹³ Thus, what might have been the origin of a system of loyal opposition, the keystone of liberal democracy, under the specific conditions of imperial China became a form of secret police. Further comments on the prospects for liberal democracy in traditional China are superfluous.

In recent times we can see that the road to power for the Russian and the Chinese Communists was also quite different, a set of differences that had important consequences for their subsequent methods of rule. Taking advantage of a surge of support among the urban workers, a tiny but strategic minority of the population, the Russian Bolsheviks carried out a coup and took control of the capital. From there they extended their power outward, neutralizing the peasantry with the promise of land and putting down organized opposition by force of arms. There is no sign that the Bolsheviks ever enjoyed widespread support.

The Chinese Communists came to power in 1949 through victory in what amounted to a prolonged civil war with the Kuomintang. The fact of war meant that the Chinese Red Army,

¹¹ For a valuable case study see Howard J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of Tang Tai-ti Jung* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹² Laurence A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'iu: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), provides a valuable history of this set of ideas.

¹³ Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage*, p. 42.

later known as the People's Liberation Army, was the decisive instrument of victory. As a highly politicized army, it was a very remarkable instrument, although we have precious little information about its internal workings for this early period. Somehow Mao Tse-tung was able to take the rag-tag semi-bandits, the men torn loose from their social roots who furnished recruits for warlords and the Kuomintang as well, and transform them from anarchistic plunder-hungry brutes into a highly disciplined fighting force. As part of this training the soldiers learned not to copy the brutal Kuomintang treatment of the peasants. Instead, by and large they treated peasant property and persons with respect. It seems to me that this transformation of the soldiery from the most unpromising raw material into a politicized yet effective fighting force must have contributed heavily to Mao's subsequent faith in the possibility of transforming human nature in accordance with socialist ideals.

By the late 1940s, the Kuomintang in its decay toward a regime of near-gangsters had come to alienate nearly everybody. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party enjoyed some support among all sectors of Chinese society: peasants partly because the Party soft-pedaled land reforms while offering protection from landlords and officials under the wing of the Kuomintang; intellectuals, workers, and even some capitalists tired of Kuomintang thuggery and disenchanted by the apparent weakness of its resistance to Japan. This combination of factors makes it appear that the Chinese Communists triumphed because they offered a more appealing social program and were more honest and fair in their relationships with the population. That is an important part of the truth. But it is only a part.

First of all, during the war the Japanese gained control of the coastal (and modern) areas of China where the Kuomintang had been strongest. Thereby the Japanese deprived the Kuomintang of its main base of social support and of its revenues. This fact alone goes a long way toward explaining the increasingly exploit-

ative behavior of Kuomintang officials in the parts of China still under their control.

Elsewhere, in response to the Japanese occupation Kuomintang officials and landlords moved out of the countryside and into the towns, leaving the peasants to their own devices. Then the Japanese army's intermittent mopping up and extermination campaigns tended to weld the peasants into a solidary mass. Thus the Japanese helped to perform two essential revolutionary tasks for the Chinese Communists: the elimination of old elites and the forging of solidarity among the oppressed.

Turning now to straightforward military factors, we learn that the Kuomintang armies did suffer very heavy losses in their occasional battles with the Japanese. At this point we begin to perceive the Kuomintang as a "ruling" party deprived of troops, money, and social support, mainly as a consequence of Japanese actions. Finally, in the closing stages of the war the Russians turned over to the Chinese Communists a large amount of arms and supplies they had taken from the Japanese in Manchuria. According to Max Beloff, ". . . these arms . . . must supply the reason why the [Chinese] Communist forces, so poorly armed before the autumn of 1945, appeared to be so well provided in the subsequent campaigns."¹⁴

Thus the Chinese Communists were very fortunate in having the unintentional assistance of the Japanese in destroying their main rival and at the end of the war obtaining through the Russians Japanese arms to finish them off. I can see no way to assess the relative importance of this Japanese assistance in relation to their own program and efforts to establish a foothold except to notice one important fact: the Chinese Communists were unable to take and hold a territorial base until after the Japanese conquest was far advanced. On balance, then, it seems that the Chinese Communists' political and military strategy was a far less

¹⁴ *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 55.

important ingredient in their success than the unwitting help they received from the Japanese. It is also important to stress, as the Chinese Communist leaders themselves have done, that the final stage of the Civil War was one of full-scale battles, with history if not God on the side of the better-armed troops. This set of considerations suggests the conclusion that Communist-Nationalist guerilla movements have not yet uncovered a foolproof political and military formula for overthrowing even a decayed and oppressive *ancien régime*. More succinctly, popular support by itself cannot guarantee revolutionary success.

When the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, their administrative apparatus was a highly decentralized one, reflecting the military situation during the Civil War. There were seven liberated areas, each ruled by a military control committee. Although the Party guaranteed unity of a sort, such a loose structure obviously would not do for a Party dedicated to introducing a new social order, even if the date of the beginning of the new order was at this time uncertain. It took a surprisingly long time to hammer out a new set of political institutions amid very keen competition for a much smaller number of much more important posts than had existed under the system of regional military control commissions. After five years, or in 1954, however, the transformation began in earnest.¹⁵

The political institutions that emerged were a rough copy of those in the Soviet Union. For the purposes at hand there is no use in attempting a complete list, partly because a good many changes have occurred, and more significantly, because our interest is in issues that persist despite such changes. Nevertheless, a brief sketch of the major institutions that have displayed a moderate shelf-life so far may make the subsequent analysis easier to follow.

First and foremost is of course the Communist Party, which runs or sets policy for practically every aspect of social life. The

¹⁵ Richard C. Thornton, *China: A Political History, 1917–1980* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 231, 234.

Politburo is the decision-making nucleus for the Party, dealing with all big issues and many small ones. The role of the Central Committee, a much larger body, is less clear. To some extent it seems to be a necessary source of legitimacy for decisions by the Politburo and thus a potential check on the Politburo. It may also issue some policy decisions and recommendations on its own.

The State Council stands between the top Party leadership and the government ministries and possesses a set of departments corresponding *to* these ministries. (The arrangement recalls Stalin's secretariat, which was a miniature of the Soviet government, although China's State Council is probably more independent.) It has on several occasions issued orders jointly with the Party's Central Committee. In 1957, at the height of the brief experiment in freedom of criticism known as the Hundred Flowers movement, critics asserted that the State Council was the root of bureaucratism in the new state.¹⁶

The State Council is not formally a Party organization. Neither of course are the government ministries (and commissions such as the State Planning Commission) that the State Council presumably supervises—or at least several of which it presumably supervises. These ministries are at least formally in charge of a wide range of economic and political functions such as agriculture, several branches of industry, national defense, police, and many others. The control of a ministry is assured after a fashion by the appointment of Party members to key posts and by the Politburo's efforts to keep an eye on what is going on everywhere. Competition and jealousy on the part of other ministries almost certainly provides a flow of information upward, most of it hostile, which the top Party leaders can use in deciding whether to beef up a specific ministry or clip its wings.

In theory the National People's Congress is the supreme legislative authority, although it is hard to conceive of that body act-

¹⁶ Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Pargies in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950–1965* (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1979), pp. 199, 271.

ing in any way contrary to the wishes of a resolute majority of the Party Politburo. The first such Congress was held in 1954. As part of the establishment of the new political apparatus just described, it created what appears to be a quite important body, the Standing Committee. This act seems to have been an early attempt to set limits on Mao's exuberance and impetuosity. No longer could Mao enact and interpret laws, promulgate decrees and supervise their execution on his own. Henceforth he could promulgate laws and decrees only in accordance with the decisions of the National People's Congress or, when that was not in session, the Standing Committee. According to the new system the Standing Committee was interposed between Mao and the major administrative organs that had just been created. Thus the Standing Committee became responsible for supervision of the day-to-day workings of the Cabinet, the Defense Council, the Supreme Court, and other offices. Since such an important figure as Liu Shao-ch'i was chairman of the Standing Committee, it is plain that top Party leaders took on this task of daily supervision.¹⁷

The National People's Congress is not elected directly. It is chosen by the next-lower level of congresses and is thus twice or thrice removed from direct popular election. Only the basic-level congresses are directly elected by the people. They hold an impressive list of formal powers, similar to those of local soviets in the USSR, of which they are the approximate counterpart. But as in the USSR they are not at all independent bodies. Their task is to carry out tasks assigned by higher councils. They are subordinate to and under the direction of the State Council.¹⁸

If in theory the National People's Congress is the supreme legislative authority, what is it in practice? My impression is that its power to initiate important legislation or policy on its own is null. Apparently the function of this Congress has been to cast a

¹⁷ Thornton, *China*, pp. 240–41.

¹⁸ James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*, 3rd ptng. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 105.

cloak of legitimacy over policies and institutional changes that have first been thrashed out among top Party leaders elsewhere. When a predominant faction in the Party has wanted to do something, its leaders go ahead and do it, using all levers of persuasion and coercion at their command, but without bothering about the National People's Congress. When the dust has cleared, they may or may not call a session of the National People's Congress to ratify the policy if it has been moderately successful or to patch up the tattered rags covering the nakedness of autocratic power if the damage has been severe, as it was following the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹

This set of political innovations added up to the deliberate creation of an imposing bureaucratic edifice. By 1958 there were almost 8,000,000 state cadres in China. Ten years earlier the Kuomintang, which never managed to control the whole country, had employed some 2,000,000 state functionaries.²⁰ The Ch'ing empire in the nineteenth century had had only about 40,000 official posts.²¹ Presumably for good and sufficient reasons the Chinese Communists, after a long and bloody struggle, replaced the bureaucratic apparatus of premodern China with their own version, some two hundred times larger.

If the reasons were good and sufficient, they were not necessarily compelling to all the top Party leadership and especially not to Mao. Although he was often very pragmatic, there was also a strong egalitarian and populist streak in him. By 1957 his greatest concern — and a long-standing one — was with human relations between rulers and ruled. He was "primarily critical of bureaucratic distance from the people and failure to deal adequately with

¹⁹ This impression is based in large measure on the detailed history of Chinese politics to be found in Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*.

²⁰ Richard Curt Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 5.

²¹ C. K. Yang, "Some Characteristics of Chinese Bureaucratic Behavior," in David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright, eds., *Confucianism in Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 145.

their needs.²² These concerns set Mao sharply apart from Stalin. In the 1930s, as we have seen, Stalin came out bluntly against equality-mongering. In his famous and endlessly repeated slogan, "Cadres decide everything," Stalin came out equally bluntly in favor of bureaucracy. Not until after Mao's death would a similar slogan put in an appearance in China.²³ In the USSR if bureaucrats were to be criticized or shot, that was because Stalin or one of his close associates wanted them removed from the scene. There was to be no attack on bureaucracy as such. Stalin resolved the moral dilemma of socialism so decisively that he almost made it disappear. On the other hand, Mao's uneasiness enables us to see the issue much more clearly, as well as the near-impossibility of an egalitarian and populist resolution.

Since Mao's hostility to bureaucracy, along with his failure to do much about it, help us to see more clearly the reasons behind the growth of a huge and powerful bureaucracy in socialist societies, we may profitably pause briefly to set down these reasons in general terms. First of all, in order to carry out the transition to socialism in an economically backward country, it is necessary to establish and set in motion a large bureaucratic apparatus of persuasion and coercion, Marx, it may be remarked parenthetically, did not perceive the need for this apparatus of persuasion and coercion because he expected the natural evolution of capitalism to generate revolutionary mass support for a socialist society. Furthermore, the concentration of capital into ever larger units would create the necessary machinery and levers of command for "the people" to step in and run them as a socialist society. Instead, it has been necessary to create the industrial base under the auspices of a command economy.

Is it possible, on the other hand, to dismount the command economy once socialism has been established? The answer, I believe, is that it is just barely possible, but highly unlikely, and that

²² Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 238.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 631.

the result would be the end of socialism. In any modern economy it is necessary to find ways to produce a specific mix of goods and services and to distribute these goods and services among the population. There are really only two ways of doing this. One is through the mechanisms of the free market, or, if one rejects the workings of the market on moral and political grounds, it is necessary to use a system of bureaucratic commands to oversee and coordinate production and consumption throughout the society. As one economist put the point in arguing against the youthful rebels of the sixties and seventies, one can be against the market *or* against bureaucracy. But if one is against both of them, one is in real intellectual trouble.²⁴

In static pre-industrial and pre-commercial societies there is a third way of coordinating economic activities that we can call custom. Examples are available in the practice of medieval peasants who performed labor services on the overlord's land and perhaps brought him a chicken at specific times in the year. The exchanges of the Kula ring in the Trobriands, made familiar by Bronislaw Malinowski, are another well-known example. But custom can only be an effective guide to behavior in a society that changes very little over long periods of time. Otherwise custom ceases to be effective, as groups and individuals struggle to preserve or improve their position. Hence custom as such cannot provide a guiding mechanism for production and exchange in a modern economy.

If we are left with the choice between coordination of the economy through the market or by bureaucratic command, what are the possibilities of combining the two systems? More specifically, how should we assess China's current attempts to use the market to eliminate or circumvent the shortcomings and inefficiencies of socialism?

²⁴ Assar Lindbeck, *The Political Economy of the New Left: An Outsider's View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 32–33.

As in the Soviet Union, these reformist programs arouse the hostility of Communists with strong feelings about the general wickedness of markets and of bureaucrats who fear that their functions may become superfluous under the proposed changes. Opposition from such sources will inevitably be very powerful, although not necessarily insuperable. Fundamentally this opposition is correct from the standpoint of a commitment to socialism. At bottom the issue is one of power, what Lenin called tersely *who beats whom*.¹ If a really important section of this bureaucracy were to break loose from socialist controls and follow market cues, all the other sections would be affected. We can imagine what would happen if the section of the bureaucracy responsible for oil production and marketing went its own way in search of domestic and foreign markets. Socialism as a whole would begin to unravel. Hence it is plain that socialist bureaucracies are here to stay with relatively minor modifications in the foreseeable future.

The purpose of this bureaucratic apparatus in China and elsewhere is not merely to control the economy but also to control and remold the day-to-day behavior and even the thoughts of the people. To this end the Chinese Communists have used a system of mutual surveillance and enforced indoctrination by means of small groups of between eight and fifteen members — large enough to exert strong pressure on the individual but small enough to remain a face-to-face group — that have no real parallel in the Soviet Union. Pre-figurings may be found at times in systems of mutual responsibility for reporting and limiting undesired or criminal behavior in imperial China, especially toward the end of the last dynasty. However, the imperial measures seem to have been quite ineffective. Therefore the modern system of small-group control, which extends Big Brother's influence down to the grass roots, appears to be an adaptation of an old unsuccessful social device, with its stricter supervision from above and its greater emphasis on thought control. From what takes place in

these small groups as now organized in China, we can safely infer that the small-group controls are an attempt to apply populist ideas to the problems of domination and management of the underlying population.

So far as possible, the Chinese authorities try to insert every individual into a small group based on mutual surveillance. It is not very difficult to keep them there because migration and job-changing are subject to strict controls. If one or more individuals need to have their thoughts remolded, something that happens very often as a result of incessant political campaigns and frequent changes in the Party line, suitable *study* materials are provided, namely, authoritative government pronouncements and more rarely something comprehensible from the Marxist classics. The group leader reads the text and then calls for questions. Here occurs the sticky point. Everybody has to say something, but anything one says is likely to reveal *bad* thoughts. Bad thoughts may also come out in the most casual conversation or piece of unintentional behavior that seems anti-social. Then comes a hail of criticism from other group members. The victim feels at the very least utterly humiliated and bereft of all social support. There is nothing to be done except to stand quietly and confess guilt. Curiously enough, none of the group members may believe what they say. But the group pressure is enough to make them go through with the ritual. At most, one of them may say later and privately —if possible —the equivalent of *Sorry, old chap; we gave you a hard time,* to which the accepted reply is a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders.

A relatively severe and humiliating hail of criticism is called a *struggle meeting*. The struggle meeting also occurs outside the context of the small group, in which case the victim has to face a large crowd hurling insults and invective. Although most struggle meetings stop short of physical abuse, quite a number, especially during the Cultural Revolution, have gone on to the point where the victim has been beaten and killed. Psychological collapse and

subsequent suicide have also been common. Partial statistics on the number of deaths during the Cultural Revolution, released as part of the attack on the Gang of Four, claim 34,000 fatalities in Yunnan and Inner Mongolia, with a figure of 12,000 for Beijing alone.²⁵

To return to the small group, any Western person who was subjected as a youngster to intense bullying is likely to recognize the fear, loss of self-esteem, and at least temporary willingness to accept the moral standards of the bullies that such an episode can produce. But because bullies are in some sense foreigners and outsiders for the victim, that experience is easier to bear than savage criticism by work-mates and neighbors. The main factors that make the system of small-group controls effective are (1) the threat of withdrawing group support, leaving the individual, so to speak, naked and afraid, and (2) active punishment by the group for violation of its rules. The viciousness of the struggle meeting recalls the remarks of the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn about the way human beings enjoy the luxury of legitimate aggression. If the Chinese Communists have not been able to provide luxury for the masses in the form of food, they have deliberately and freely provided it in the form of legitimate aggression.

The effectiveness of small-group mutual surveillance depends upon the effectiveness of larger groups in encapsulating the individual. In the jail where Bao Ruo-Wang (Jean Pasqualini) was incarcerated for some time, its effectiveness was remarkable in preventing the development of an inmates' subculture of the kind that prevails in Western jails. There appears to be a sharp contrast too with Stalinist jails. Former inmates of these have observed that the jail was the freest place in Russia because the guards paid no attention to what inmates talked about. Apparently the little group of Bao's cellmates indoctrinated one another

²⁵ Steven W. Mosher, *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese* (New York: Free Press, 1983), p. 276.

to the point of complete compliance with the authorities' demands and even considerable internalization of the required norms.²⁶

At the opposite extreme, these small groups temporarily atrophied during the Cultural Revolution when the supporting bureaucratic framework disintegrated.²⁷ The Cultural Revolution was of course a time when large struggle groups burst out all over. In a rough sense and for a limited time they replaced the mutual surveillance groups, which, however, returned as the Cultural Revolution subsided. Between these extremes of nearly perfect effectiveness and rare atrophy there are many degrees of effectiveness. By and large small groups seem to work quite well in maintaining social control over behavior even when little thought reform takes place.²⁸

Corruption has been rife in the Chinese Communist bureaucracy practically ever since the Party came to power. The distortions of bureaucracy were already a focus of major political campaigns in 1950 and 1953. In 1951 there was a scandal about two Party secretaries in Tientsin who lived a decadent life and engaged extensively in illegal business with state funds.²⁹ Such scandals have remained a prominent part of the political landscape down to the present day.³⁰ Around 1962 corruption in the countryside was still a serious problem. This was the kind that affected most people, since it had to do with collective farm accounts and work points or, in other words, a basic source of the peasants' income.³¹

Some of the main sources of this corruption, to be described in further detail shortly, are not difficult to discern. They afflict

²⁶ Bao Ruo-Wang (Jean Pasqualini) and Rudolph Chelminski, *Prisoner of Mao* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), chs. 1–4.

²⁷ Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 231.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁹ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 115, 121.

³⁰ Cf. Mosher, *Broken Earth*, pp. 78–79.

³¹ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 513, 603.

all economically backward socialist societies, although in varying degrees, and for that matter not just the socialist ones. In the first place the Chinese Communists created a very big bureaucracy very rapidly, without adequate training or suitable traditions. A high proportion of bureaucrats are still technically incompetent *apparatchiki* and superannuated guerilla leaders.³² In outlook and behavior they are practically as far as possible from Max Weber's scrupulously objective bureaucratic official. Instead, their behavior is based on personal connections and gifts from applicants seeking some kind of authorization. Based on these personal connections, but also with an eye on the ever-changing Party line, the bureaucrat has to determine whether granting or refusing an authorization would be most helpful to his status in the bureaucratic hierarchy.³³ Although there are tendencies toward venality, favoritism, and keeping an eye on the main chance in even the most incorruptible bureaucracies of economically advanced states, such tendencies are especially blatant in China. At any rate the top leaders think so. In August 1964, Mao made a disenchanting comment on these traits that has often been quoted. Asserting that the enemy, i.e., bureaucrats, had taken over a third of the state, he went on to claim, "At present you can buy a [Party] branch secretary for a few packs of cigarettes, not to mention marrying a daughter to him."³⁴ Mao was concerned primarily with low-level corruption, which of course affected the people most. Around the same time, Liu Shao-chí asserted that Mao's estimate of the situation was too cheerful. According to Liu, 30 per cent of all cadres were bad and another 40 per cent mediocre. In a large number of rural areas they waved the Communist flag but in reality served the Kuomintang.³⁵ Since Liu was much

³² Mosher, *Broken Earth*, p. 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

³⁴ Quoted in Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 536.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 539; see also p. 543.

closer to day-to-day administrative problems than Mao, his remarks, even if exaggerated, deserve attention.

Another reason for corruption in addition to the shortage of adequate personnel, and one that afflicts non-socialist states that are economically backward as well as socialist ones, is the bureaucracy's near-monopoly of the good things in life. In a situation of widespread scarcity, where the bureaucracy controls the allocation of goods and services, rewards and penalties, almost the only way to get material goods and improved social status is through or in the bureaucracy. As the American sociologist William Graham Sumner said around the turn of the century, if you live in a country run by a committee, get on the committee.¹ Not every ambitious and inventive individual can hope to succeed in this aim, even if he or she is very skilled at social manipulation. Capitalist societies have tried with no little success to make socially constructive use of the somewhat unattractive traits of acquisitiveness, personal as opposed to collective ambition, and aptness for social manipulation. In a socialist society these traits, especially acquisitiveness, are in bad odor, while a bureaucracy provides temptation for their display. Hence, especially though not exclusively in a socialist society these traits flourish like cockroaches in the damp cracks and dark interstices of the prevailing morality.

To combat the major defects of their bureaucracy —corruption and commandism,¹ or the use of orders backed up by brute force instead of persuasion —the Chinese Communists have developed a number of practices that reflect their anti-elitist sentiments. One of these is a stint of manual labor, sometimes combined with demotion, for erring bureaucrats. Speaking of cadres, Mao asserted, 'The problems of corruption and enjoying more benefits can be resolved only when there is participation in labor.'³⁶ For Maoists manual labor and mixing with the masses, is

³⁶ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 514. The quotation appears to be taken from a statement by Mao made in May 1962, but one cannot be certain of the year since Teiwes does not give that information.

supposed to be uplifting and morally purifying. Such ideas may be a deliberate or unconscious revolutionary reversal of those held by the dominant classes in imperial times.³⁷ However, there is also a practical side to this moral injunction. Direct contact with the masses can enable a bureaucrat to see the problems ordinary people face and the real obstacles to executing official policies. On this score the difficulty of course is that officials are so overloaded with tasks and paperwork that they can seldom if ever get out of their offices.

After the victory of 1949, the first official mention of this device of participation in labor that I have come upon is a directive of the Party Central Committee of April 27, 1957, that called for the systematization of participation in labor by leading Party, government, and army personnel.³⁸ Shortly afterward, in February 1958, the total number of cadres demoted to production or lower-level leadership posts reached 1.3 million. In the spring of 1958 another million cadres were sent off for a year's labor.³⁹ Evidently the Party leaders were deadly serious about using this device, at least at this moment. On the other hand, so far as I am aware, the experiment was not tried again on this scale for some time. The next major attempt to enforce such policies came with the establishment of the May 7th Cadre Schools, named after Mao's directive of May 7, 1966, during the Cultural Revolution. Part of the idea behind the directive was an attempt to overcome rigid occupational specialization by compelling individuals to experience at least temporarily a different working environment. But in practice the schools seemed to have been a ritualized farce. Urban officials when sent down to May 7th Cadre Schools retained their high incomes as they steeped themselves in revolu-

³⁷ For Mao's account of his own change of heart see Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art, A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies 39 (Ann Arbor, 1980), p. 61.

³⁸ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 245.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

tionary spirit by working temporarily in the countryside.”⁴⁰ To judge from continuing complaints about corruption and other evils, the device of temporary participation in manual labor has had virtually no effect.

Another major device is the theory and practice of the “mass line.” To call it a device is somewhat of an understatement since it is really a theory of how the Party ought to rule. As such it sharply distinguishes the Chinese from the Russian Communists, as does the emphasis on purification through labor. To be sure, hints of similar ideas can be found scattered in Lenin’s writings, especially his repeated admonitions to the effect that the Party must not run too far ahead of the masses. But in fact the Bolsheviks did gallop ahead.

The essence of the concept of the mass line was codified in a resolution of the Party Central Committee dated June 1, 1943, when the Party was still in Yen-an. The main principle appears in the famous slogan ifrom the masses, to the masses.íí This means that the Party should find out what the masses need and want, then take these “scattered” views and bring them into systematic order. Then the task is to persuade the masses to accept the systematized views and “translate them into action.” The process is, or at least then was, expected to go on over and over again. This 1943 version became canonical and remained in effect after the victory of 1949.⁴¹ The immediate purpose of the resolution at the time of its adoption was to undermine the authority of Party intellectuals.⁴² Mao was generally distrustful of intellectuals and often criticized them for lack of contact with the masses. Presumably he was not alone in these views. Once again we come across the notion, satirized by Bertrand Russell, of the superior virtue of the oppressed.

⁴⁰ Kraus, *Clars Conflict*, p. 151.

⁴¹Townsend, *Political Participation*, p. 57, gives the text of this part of the resolution.

⁴² James Pinckney Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–72* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 346.

The source of the concept of the mass line was experience in trying to make a revolution under Chinese conditions. As early as 1925 and 1926 the Central Committee issued statements emphasizing the importance of mass support and the need to know and examine the opinion of the masses, which is necessary in guiding them.⁴³ These statements were part of the Party's assessment of a spectacular upsurge of urban popular radicalism known as the May 30th [1925] movement. But it took a long and painful time for the Chinese Communist leadership to realize that they needed first of all an army to protect areas under their control and, of nearly equal importance, methods to gain popular support both in areas they controlled and behind enemy lines. During the late 1920s and even as late as 1938 there were frequent complaints in high Party circles about the almost total absence of mass support. But during the Communists' sojourn in Kiangsi in the early 1930s, this situation changed dramatically, in response partly to recruiting on the basis of ascertained local grievances. By the early 1930s the Communists had organized activists among several million people in about a half-dozen areas.⁴⁴ In Kiangsi the Chinese Communists had learned the essence of their strategic lesson and the crucial importance of the mass line. The Yen-an period was in this respect one of codification and further application.

It is clear that experience prior to taking power imparted a democratic and populist twist to Chinese Communist politics, an emphasis that appears most clearly in the theory and practice of the mass line. At this point the question that concerns us becomes: against the oppressive aspects of bureaucracy, how effective a weapon has the mass line been since the Chinese Communists took power? Since nearly everything that the Chinese government has done in the area of domestic politics has taken the form of a propaganda campaign, it is fair to say that the mass line has to some degree entered into almost every phase of Chinese domes-

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-9; quotation from 206.

tic politics. Yet it is very hard to discern any sign that in practice the mass line has served as a popular check on the abuses of bureaucratic power. For one thing, the idea of the mass line was never really intended as a check on those in authority. Instead it represents a way of stirring up the masses to get them to do what Party leaders believe needs doing. That is the purpose of going to the masses to find out what grievances exist. I do not mean to imply that the grievances are fabricated by the Party. But it is reasonably clear that the Party selects grievances for reasons of higher politics and policies.

The selection of grievances and objectives for mass action comes out very clearly in the case of the Great Leap Forward of 1958 to about 1961, a campaign that failed disastrously. As is quite widely known, the leap was an attempt to achieve super-collectivization in agriculture along with great industrial growth on a local basis, the famous back-yard furnaces. There is no doubt that masses of the Chinese people drove themselves relentlessly to exhaustion and beyond in what amounted to a Chinese variant of the Russian construction of socialism in the 1930s. What is less well-known about the Great Leap Forward is its cost in human suffering. Chinese sources at the time reported no more than local areas of hunger. In 1971 a German scholar cited estimates of at least ten million deaths from famine in 1961–62. Bad weather added to mistaken policies to produce these grim results.⁴⁵ At the time ten million was regarded as an outrageous overestimate. But recently released demographic data have enabled Western scholars to compute a net loss of population during those years of at least 16 million.⁴⁶ Presumably, as in the case of the statistics on the loss of population from Stalin's collectivization of agriculture, these 16 million include people who were

⁴⁵Jürgen Domes, *The Internal Politics of China 1949–1972*, trans. by Rüdiger Machetski (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), pp. 114–15.

⁴⁶Nicholas R. Lardy, *Agriculture in China's Modern Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 151.

never born, due to a precipitous drop in the birth rate. Nevertheless, that total, the most conservative of the estimates made on the basis of the newly released data, is grisly enough evidence of what can happen when those in authority use all the forces at their command to pursue a disastrous policy.

These figures convey a simple and important message. The Chinese variant of collectivization, for all its contact between leaders and led, Party and masses, may well have caused as much human suffering as did Stalin's brutal and authoritarian isolation of the Soviet Union's peasant problem. Differences of a sort there were of course. The most important one, according to an excellent comparison of the two experiences by a scholar who knows both Russian and Chinese, rests in the fact that Stalin regarded his program as outright war against the peasants, whereas there is no evidence that Mao thought about the peasants in this way. Instead, the Great Leap Forward was a tragedy in self-deception based on the belief that a breakthrough had occurred in agricultural production that made increased extraction of grain compatible with peasant welfare.⁴⁷ But for the peasants in Russia and China who died in these campaigns, the distinction between overt policy and tragic self-deception did not make a particle of difference.

For our immediate purpose, the analysis of the mass line, it is worth noting that there may well have been some mass support for the Great Leap Forward, especially in its early stages. Most of this probably came from cadres who stirred up the peasants with visions of a happy and prosperous future after one gigantic effort. Soon, however, cadres got caught up in competitive raising of production targets by pseudo-democratic means, or approval by forced acclamation. Elsewhere there are indications of passivity among the peasants. Later it came to light that numerous

⁴⁷ Thomas P. Bernstein, *Stalinism, Famine, and Chinese Peasants: Grain Procurements during the Great Leap Forward*, Pamphlet, East Asian Institute, Columbia University (Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1984), p. 370.

peasants died because local cadres prevented reports of famine from reaching Peking.⁴⁸ As Bernstein points out, such evidence sharply contradicts the stereotype of the Maoist cadre oriented to the well-being of the masses. A problem emerges here that deserves careful investigation. Perhaps the stereotype never was all that true even in the days of Yen-an. Another possibility is that a sharp transformation in the relationship between officials and ordinary citizens took place in the years following the Communist victory.

Throughout most of his life Mao was trying to turn on its head the gloomy and fearful view of Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) concerning the menace of the masses, though I doubt very much that he had ever heard of Le Bon. For Le Bon the masses were irrational and destructive. For Mao they were creative and, as we have seen, a source of moral purity and simplicity. Both views now look like caricatures in the light of now-numerous investigations of mass and crowd behavior.

Partly on the basis of such investigations I will now make two suggestions that may be especially helpful in understanding what follows. When accepted rules of behavior cease to make sense and break down for a variety of reasons that include economic hardship but are not limited to economic hardship alone, large numbers of individuals escape from social bonds and become available for political, or in earlier times religious, movements. There is then a lot of social tinder lying about, available for a wide variety of purposes, although not just any purpose, as Mao apparently believed in a moment of exuberance when he spoke about the people of China as a piece of blank paper.⁴⁹ Such tinder is not yet a mass that is politically useful. The Chinese Communist leaders learned this fact very painfully in the earlier stages

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 350, 365.

⁴⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Great Leap Forward 1958-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), vol. 2, p. 28 with reference to sources.

of their movement down to the period of the Kiangsi Soviet (1931–34). What then do the Chinese Communist leaders mean when they are talking about the masses as an active historical force? It seems to me that not only the Chinese Communists but anti-establishment radicals in general have two things in mind, of which the first is in practice by far the most important. In simple terms they mean that it is easy to get a crowd into an auditorium — or its rural equivalent — and work it up to a high level of excitement. Those who do not come to the auditorium — and these are the overwhelming majority even in periods of intense political excitement — can be labeled as politically backward. The other part of this conception of masses and mass movements holds that the leaders of the movement must have programs and policies that will gain at least a minimum allegiance from the passive onlookers and in due course attract more active support.

This point of view helps to bring out the significance of the query that scholars sometimes put to Chinese Communist rhetoric about the masses: *Whose masses, and who controls them?* Especially in a very fluid situation such as the Cultural Revolution, rival leaders look for different masses to legitimate their ambitions and their policies. The rivals do not of course all start from an equal basis. Some, such as Mao himself, may be so situated in the bureaucratic structure and so surrounded by an aura of prestige — perhaps the more important factor in Mao's case — as to be nearly invulnerable. The same search for mass support goes on under relatively peaceful conditions, although in much more muted form. Just before the decision to undertake the fateful Great Leap Forward, the whole Politburo toured large parts of China. Mao was especially fond of testing what we would call grass-roots sentiment. Although MacFarquhar's instructive and detailed account of this episode has little or nothing to report on this aspect, it is plain that the whole point of the trip was to settle differences of opinion in the Politburo, cut down the opponents of

inadventurous policies in high government offices such as the Finance Offices, and feel out what the peasants would do if the Party leaders did take up an inadventurous policy. The masses are there to applaud whatever the dominant clique has decided.⁵⁰

It is also plain that under this variant of socialism the mass of the population does not and cannot serve as much of a check on the bureaucracy or its policies, even if rivals do have some sort of a popular constituency. For all their inadequacies, free elections in the liberal democracies do provide a mechanism for coping with inevitable rivalries and, on occasion, getting rid of leaders with disastrous policies.

There is one other anti-elitist device in China, the public criticism of cadres, which deserves discussion because it has had a powerful effect on the tone and character of the regime. Although this public criticism resembles the Soviet institution of self-criticism, I suspect that almost every Soviet bureaucrat would shudder at the thought of the strong medicine ladled out in the course of officially sponsored criticism of cadres by the Chinese masses.⁵¹

From the available materials it appears that organized public criticism of cadres has been most common in the countryside. The standard objects of criticism have been basic-level cadres, that is, the lowest level of the bureaucracy and the personnel in direct contact with the peasants. The usual procedure is for the higher authorities to send down to the village a small group of reliable officers, known as a work team, to straighten out or rectify village and peasant affairs.⁵² One purpose in sending down a

⁵⁰ Ibid., ch. 2.

⁵¹ For a brief official description that gives the flavor of the Stalinist period see *Kratkaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* (Moscow, 1943), pp. 1279–80, s.v. *isamokritika*.

⁵² By no means do all rectification campaigns involve public criticism of cadres. The first large-scale rectification campaign occurred in 1940, according to Harrison, *Long March*, p. 271. There was another big one in Yen-an in 1942. For some revealing documents see Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank,

work team was to give the peasants a shield against retaliation by local cadres whom the peasants might wish to criticize. Naturally the peasants were often reluctant to speak out even against a corrupt petty tyrant on whom their fate might depend. Peasants would say 'Work teams come and go but the cadres remain. Who will protect us then?'⁵³ Nevertheless, after a certain amount of cajoling and reassurance by the work team some peasants did speak up. Without going into procedural details it is enough to say that a few cadres had to undergo mass 'struggle meetings' or 'organized and controlled but nevertheless extremely emotional public defamation and abuse.'⁵⁴ Suicide was a not uncommon response to such abuse.⁵⁵

Rectification campaigns have occurred quite frequently, generally every three years or less, although not necessarily with public humiliation of cadres each time.⁵⁶ The one that followed the failure of the Great Leap Forward, and was part of the Socialist Education Movement of 1962–65, appears to have been especially severe. At points specially selected as targets for work teams, some 60 per cent or more of all local cadres were subjected to criticism that often involved struggle and public humiliation.⁵⁷

A Documentary History of Chinese Communism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 372–419. Public criticism of local cadres did take place before the Communist victory of 1949. William Hinton, *Fanshen; A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), describes the events in Long Bow during the spring and summer of 1948 in fascinating detail. Thus all the main features of rectification — originally a Confucian concept — were in place by the time the Chinese Communists took power. For a good brief exposition of their place in the new regime see Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, ch. 1.

⁵³ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 532. Good account in Anita Chan et al., *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), ch. 2.

⁵⁴ A. Doak Barnett, with a contribution by Ezra Vogel, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 171.

⁵⁵ See also Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 549–50, for further mention of suicides.

⁵⁶ Barnett, *Cadres*, p. 169.

⁵⁷ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 546–53, esp. p. 549.

This type of behavior appeared again in the Cultural Revolution at its height during 1966 and 1967. That was a violent explosion against practically all forms of authority. In contrast to the campaigns discussed above, the Cultural Revolution was mainly an affair of the cities. The targets were also much more highly placed; some of its publicly humiliated victims were near the apex of the regime. And at least some of the militants expressed frustration at the limitations of the Cultural Revolution because the movement held back from a structural solution of China's political problems. Some militants even went so far as to describe Mao's extensive concessions to the bourgeoisie in the form of high salaries and special privileges for high officials as a pure expression of the forces they sought to overcome.⁵⁸

The attacks on local cadres that began shortly after the establishment of the new regime have uncovered abuses. But they have also demoralized local cadres on a very wide scale. The position of a local cadre is in any case exposed and difficult. Such an official stands between the irresistible force of Party pressures and the immovable object of local habits, customs, and personal connection. To reach a *modus vivendi* with both worlds is far from easy. The Party line of today may become the deviation of tomorrow, as has so often happened in the past. Lower-ranking cadres frequently get the blame for whatever goes wrong with the leaders' policy. Hence for a cadre the wisest course of action may be to limit one's zeal for the revolutionary cause to purely verbal incantations. In this way the Party's main instruments for the execution of policy lose their edge and become corroded.

Public criticism of cadres has provided ordinary citizens an opportunity to fight back at the bureaucracy and correct abuses. However, up until the Cultural Revolution the Party carefully selected the abuses and the human targets for public criticism. In other words, the Party made the basic decisions about what

⁵⁸ Kraus, *Class Conflict*, pp. 148-49.

people could complain about. For this and other reasons ordinary citizens might display a disturbing lack of spontaneous enthusiasm for organized public criticism.⁵⁹ During the Cultural Revolution the Party's control over public criticism temporarily broke down, mainly because Mao wanted to break the back of the Party bureaucracy. But this anarchic situation was hardly conducive to what we might call freedom of complaint. A semi-spontaneous radical tornado swept over large parts of China. People who could not bend with the wind like grass or were caught in an exposed position found themselves swept toward destruction. If there are limitations on the opportunity to express grievances in public criticism, there are evidently at least equal limitations on the effectiveness of this device in rooting out abuses. All the old ones remain, according to current complaints and reports. The main effect, as mentioned above, has been to paralyze the lower-ranking cadres.

It has often been said that Mao unlike Stalin did not resort to killing his opponents. That appears to be only a partial truth. In 1930 he suppressed a military rebellion in what became known as the Futien incident. His opponents in the Party accused him of widespread executions and indiscriminate use of torture. Although the accusations are undoubtedly exaggerated and the incident obscure, it does seem reasonably plain that Mao —and other leaders at this time —did resort to killing their opponents.⁶⁰ Even if we set aside this partial limitation on Mao's alleged lack of cruelty, a troubling question remains. How much worse is death by execution than public humiliation that can drive a person to suicide?

Since so many of the present leaders of China have returned to power after various forms of disgrace, it is obvious how they would answer the question. But it seems likely that their own experiences combined with a political need to restore order made

⁵⁹ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 549.

⁶⁰ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 62, provides a good summary of what is known. For more detail see Harrison, *Long March*, pp. 212-17.

them decide to put public criticism of cadres on the shelf. Mao left this earth to go talk with Marx, as he often put it, in 1976. In 1977 his successors moved gingerly to eliminate the disciplinary role of the masses, although the masses were still to help keep the Party on its toes.¹ There was to be a return to the traditional mass line form of popular participation. What the leaders apparently wanted was mobilized yet orderly masses.⁶¹ That of course is the dream of every twentieth-century political leader in every kind of political regime. Unlike other dreams, this one has come true only too often for the ones with repressive objectives.

Because the changes in official policy since Mao's death in 1976 shed a revealing light backward on Maoist attempts to transform Chinese society, it will be useful to close with a brief review of these changes. Their main thrust has been to dismount egalitarian socialism and replace it with a meritocratic socialism that includes capitalist features. In more concrete terms, the government has been trying to establish a much closer connection between effort, ability, and material rewards. The main reason appears to be that egalitarianism, together with the absence of a visible connection between effort and reward, has prevented badly needed increases in the productivity of both industry and agriculture. This threat to productivity is not merely a matter of Chinese national pride or whether China will someday become a modern industrial power. It is also a question of whether the Chinese will ever have enough to eat.

The journey toward meritocracy and away from socialist purity, which promises to be a very long journey, has already displayed twists and turns, as well as temporary reversals of direction. These twistings about reflect not only vested socialist interests in incompetence but also genuine crises of conscience. It seems that these crises occur throughout the society, from the poorest peasants up through committed cadres all the way to the

⁶¹ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 630-31.

real rulers of China in the top Party elite, where it is clear there have been stormy debates. 'Why did we give the best part of our lives to the struggle for Communism,' they seem to be saying, 'if the government wants to restore capitalism?' The most important or at least the most visible of these attempts to restore socialist purity was the Campaign against Spiritual Pollution. The pollution supposedly came from the Western bourgeoisie (more specifically Hong Kong) and took the form of clothes, popular music, sunglasses, etc., all with an erotic tinge. (It is interesting that socialist youth in China, as in Russia, whenever it gets a chance, stampedes in search of the trashiest elements of Western culture.) The Campaign against Spiritual Pollution was thus a reassertion of socialist morality in its more puritanical version. It began in September 1983 and ended only six months later. The end is revealing. The top Party leadership became unenthusiastic about the campaign because it was distracting attention from Party rectification and economic work. Therefore they issued a decree asserting that pollution was not to be found in the countryside, the factories, or the natural sciences.⁶² Hardly a great event in its own right, the fate of the Campaign against Spiritual Pollution reveals how swiftly major policies and the political atmosphere of daily life can change.

The changes in agricultural policy and organization have been the most far-reaching and startling. They began in 1978 with the first increase in twelve years of state procurement prices for major farm products. By 1981 these prices, paid to collective farms for compulsory deliveries as in the Soviet Union, had risen by an average of 42 per cent over the level of 1977.⁶³ But apparently the authorities concluded that merely increasing the financial re-

⁶² Stuart R. Schram, 'Economics in Command? Ideology and Policy Since the Third Plenum, 1978-84,' *China Quarterly*, no. 99 (September 1984), pp. 437-49. Schram's whole article, pp. 417-61, is a perceptive review of the doctrinal discussions accompanying what I have called the course toward meritocracy.

⁶³ Lardy, *Agriculture*, p. 89.

wards was not enough and that a thorough reorganization was necessary. In 1979 they introduced what is known as the responsibility system,⁶⁴ and by 1981 had managed to get it adopted in more than 80 per cent of China's agricultural units.⁶⁴ Under the new system individual households take responsibility for growing a certain amount of produce. Formerly this responsibility or obligation rested on the production teams, which have now, in some areas at least, broken up for lack of anything to do. By the new system, peasant families plant and work separate fields and profit separately from their own crop yields. Most of the collective property in tools has been distributed to individual families. By 1982, according to one excellent account of a village near Canton, the village's fields had become tantamount to private landholdings, since the allocation of land was on a semi-permanent basis.⁶⁵

If official statistics are to be trusted, the government's new policies have produced a remarkable improvement in the peasants' material situation. A nationwide sampling of peasant incomes in 1978 found that poor peasant families with an annual income of less than 150 yuan per person came to 65 per cent of the sample. In 1983 the proportion of the poor fell to 7.6 per cent. The more prosperous families with an annual income of over 300 yuan per person made up only 2.4 per cent of the sample in 1978, but by 1983 the proportion of the well-to-do rose to 46.4 per cent.⁶⁶ These figures seem too good to be true. They remind me of the exaggerated claims made for the opposite kinds of policies under the Great Leap Forward. Nevertheless, other evidence suggests that they represent the general direction of present-day change and that a great many peasants have been able to improve their situation.

⁶⁴ Chan et al., *Chen Village*, pp. 268–69 for date; Lardy, *Agriculture*, p. 217 for spread of system.

⁶⁵ Chan et al., *Chen Village*, pp. 268–69, 274,

⁶⁶ *China Aktuell*, September 1984, summary #40, p. 500, citing *Xinhua News Agency* (London) September 9, 1984. *China Aktuell* is a German press- and radio-monitoring service concentrating on Chinese affairs. It is especially valuable for its coverage of the provincial press and radio in China.

The government's agrarian policy amounts to a partial dismantling of socialism and a partial return to private property in farming. The transformation is important enough to explode widespread Western notions about socialism being the inevitable next stage of human history. Even such a familiar phrase as late monopoly capitalism, with its implication that socialism will soon replace a faltering capitalism, becomes nonsensical when we can see socialism turning into capitalism under our own eyes. Nevertheless there are certain qualifications and limitations to this transformation that we have to perceive in order to appraise it correctly. The peasant's private property exists still within a bureaucratic socialist framework that sets production targets, prices, taxes, and controls the supply of inputs into agriculture, such as fertilizer.⁶⁷ Production teams seem to be necessary for this bureaucratic machinery to work, and one wonders what will happen if they wither away on a wide scale.

In the second place, by no means are all peasants enthusiastic about the new capitalism. Some regret the change from the way the old production teams guaranteed a minimum of food in case of extreme poverty and can see that some undertakings, like improvements in irrigation, impose demands for labor and materials far beyond the capabilities of individual households.⁶⁸ Finally, it is well to remember that this is not the first case of a socialist regime's return toward capitalism. When the Soviet Union adopted the New Economic Policy in 1921 there were those who thought that socialism was finished because it had already demonstrated its inherent failures. Instead, as we know, socialism went on to greater and bloodier triumphs.

In turning from changes in rural policy to those affecting the urban population, especially the workers, one realizes that the fundamental inequality in Chinese society has for some time been that between the urban and the rural inhabitants. The city

⁶⁷ Lardy, *Agriculture*, p. 217.

⁶⁸ Chan et al., *Chen Village*, pp. 270-71.

dwellers, only about one-fifth of the total population, have come to form a relatively prosperous and protected enclave. In 1958 the government passed a series of tough laws to stop rural migration into the cities. The Chinese Communists did this to prevent the emergence of standard urban social pathologies such as a crime-prone slum population. On this score they have been quite successful, although in recent years educated and jobless youth have furnished another social base for criminal activity.

The prohibition on moving to the city works through denying ration cards to illegal immigrants. Without the shortages that make ration cards necessary the prohibition would be unenforceable. This situation strengthens the thesis that shortages of material goods are necessary to make socialism work and that under socialism the power to ration is the power to rule. Socialist governments do not sit on bayonets so much as on ration books.

Meanwhile, government policies and prevailing circumstances produced a protective wall around the urban workers, at least those in state-run enterprises, to shield them against many of the vicissitudes of economic life. The most important element was de facto permanent employment, known as the iron rice bowl.⁶⁹ If wages seemed low and were kept down by government decree, nevertheless they constituted a regular and predictable source of income.⁶⁹ This the peasants lacked since the ordinary peasant depended on the fluctuating value of workpoints on his particular farm. Thus the city workers in state-run firms had at their disposal a set of medical services for minimal fees. Finally, there were pensions, disability benefits, and a variety of other social programs. In the 1970s, it is claimed, the funds set aside for welfare benefits amounted to 17 per cent of the wage bill.⁷⁰

According to careful and objective Western scholars, there were some heavy costs to this program of protecting the workers.

⁶⁹ Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 33, 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-68, 71, 73.

In the course of time the egalitarian incomes policy, the official wage freeze, and high job security generated absenteeism, shoddy work, and sheer laziness on a wide scale. So far the government's response to this form of behavior has been cautious. Nor is this caution surprising. Urban workers resemble a praetorian guard for socialism, and it is risky to discipline the praetorian guard. Still the government has done something. It has addressed the issue of the workers' motivation by increasing material incentives, encouraging piece rates and cash bonuses. It has also encouraged the authorities in some work units to "break the iron rice bowl" by discharging employees who create serious problems in the shop.⁷¹

The government has also tackled the problem of an industrial management stifled by its bureaucratic environment or content to rest on its oars while making the correct political noises in time with the ever-shifting forms of Party indignation. Since 1981 there have been experiments linking rewards to the profits earned by each enterprise, a long-established practice in the USSR. More recently there has been an effort to get the Chinese manager to emulate the capitalist entrepreneur by replacing the "big pot" system of egalitarian wages with wages tied to output and by using Japanese methods of building community spirit in the factory. More important is the practice of contracting out, as in agriculture, small and medium-sized enterprises to individuals and collectives. Just what contracting out means in the industrial context is not clear, but if it means anything, it means greater autonomy *and* responsibility for the individual manager. He has to scare up the necessary raw materials on his own, keep the workers reasonably happy and working effectively, and turn out useful products of satisfactory quality. None of that is easy in any society.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 55, 56.

⁷² On changes in industrial management see also Schram, "Economics in Command," pp. 454–56.

On October 20, 1984, the Party Central Committee issued a major statement on economic policy for the foreseeable future that codified these practices and announced other policies of the same type. The main thrust of these measures is to introduce a series of capitalist practices in order to make socialism work and raise the standard of living. For the time being, at least, there is to be no more talk about the superior virtues of the poor and the transformation of human nature by communal living. The capitalist practices include inequalities in income as an incentive to work, freeing plant managers from political supervision, and most important of all, the widespread introduction of the market as the device that regulates the economy. Many —perhaps most — plant managers will have to cover the costs of production in turning out goods that will sell at a price customers will be willing to pay. Such measures imply, as the Party recognizes, an overhaul of the existing price system, in which prices frequently fail to reflect either costs of production or effective demand.

Two major socialist safeguards form part of the new economic order. Certain major industrial products of national importance — coal, oil, steel, and cigarettes are among them — remain subject to the command economy of compulsory plans and quotas for delivery. Plant autonomy in the form just described is supposed to go into effect in the next lower tier of the economy: the large and medium-sized urban plants. There are more than a million of these that employ more than 80 million manual and clerical workers. But this autonomy has strict limits since the government will continue to regulate prices. Autonomy is supposed to exist within limits set by the government. In addition the manageris authority is to be limited by elected representatives of the workers and clerical personnel, because, says the Party decision, the plant will be a modern socialist plant. This limitation, of course, exists in liberal capitalist plants too, and it remains to be seen what powers these elected representatives will have in practice. Hence, as one looks more closely at the details, it becomes

apparent that the Chinese variant of the New Economic Policy could develop in either of two directions. The market could assume major importance, or the situation could remain pretty much the same as it has been. According to present plans the market will be allowed full play only for certain agricultural products and the vital service sector, where as of 1983 there were already more than 5 million private households engaged in economic activities.⁷³

To repeat, then, meritocracy, in the sense of being able to turn out the goods, has become the order of the day in industry as well as agriculture. That at least is the official rhetoric. Whether the government can really introduce meritocracy in opposition to entrenched socialist practices as well as those inherited from the Chinese imperial past and make it the essential basis of the social order remains to be seen. I doubt that this can happen in China or anywhere else for that matter. Nowhere to my knowledge do human beings like to be tested for competence, especially not at frequent intervals. A great deal of the resistance to industrialization has been resistance to the demands for old and new forms of competence. At all levels of the social order and in all societies that have faced these demands human beings have shown themselves adept at evading the requirements for competence and clothing their evasion with assorted garments of ethical principle.

The urban school system is the social sector where the repudiation of egalitarianism and the attempt to establish a meritocracy are most visible. Equal access to neighborhood schools has given way to a hierarchy of schools of varying quality. Acceptance as a student in a good school depends primarily on scores in entrance examinations. At the secondary level a series of “keypoint schools” receives the most resources, the best teachers, and as students the top performers in examinations. Christopher Jencks, as

⁷³ *China Aktuell*, October 1984, pp. 579-83, gives an excellent commentary on the decision, and a translation of the text on pp. 584-89. My comments are based mainly on the commentary and on Section III of the text.

mentioned in the first lecture, tells us that in the United States all these measures are pretty much a waste of time. It would be interesting to know whether this kind of meritocratic policy is equally futile in China. I suspect not. The current Chinese assumption is that higher education imparts knowledge and skills useful for policy-making. It seems to me that higher education is more likely to create and hone skills useful for medium-grade administration than for getting rich. In any case, the successors to Mao have put all their chips on educational inequality. The content of the schooling would cheer the most conservative Western pedagogue. Politics and education through labor have been cut back substantially. The emphasis is on academics again “with a vengeance.” Strict tests and grading are once more in vogue, with the authority of the teacher restored. Those who do best in entrance examinations can now proceed directly to a university without any intervening stint of labor in the countryside.⁷⁴

The conservative restoration in the educational system can succeed only if the youngsters — or at least a good many youngsters — can find acceptable jobs upon completing their education. Otherwise, if the effort does not pay off in a way they regard as satisfactory, many will cease to accept the whole ethic of hard work and turn to forms of political and cultural deviance. A juvenile gang subculture and models of political and cultural deviance have already been well established. So far Chinese socialism has not found a solution to the overproduction of middle-school graduates.⁷⁵ But they may just possibly be on the way toward a solution. According to Chinese sources in the beginning of 1979, some five to eleven per cent of the non-agricultural labor force were unemployed, figures that are on the high side. Three years later, by the beginning of 1982, the figure was reported to be down to three per cent? On the other hand, it is by no means

⁷⁴ Whyte and Parish, *Urban Life*, p. 103.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63, 272-73.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42; see also pp. 40-41, 55 for some reasons for the drop.

clear that this reduction in urban unemployment will reduce suspicion of work and education. A considerable number of the unemployed seem to have been sopped up by a reduction of the investment in capital-intensive state industry and an increase of funds for collective enterprises with low earnings and few fringe benefits, like bicycle repair shops and other services that are labor-intensive. Now it is reasonably plain that youngsters will not compete in school in order to work in bicycle repair shops, but that they may wish to educate themselves to become plant managers or to get jobs in one of the ministries. Hence we cannot be sure that the policy of encouraging small-scale enterprises will accomplish much toward making an education seem worthwhile.

It is all very well in the West to say that a good education is a value in its own right, as I believe very firmly. On the other hand, without some support in income and status — or the sense that one is doing something worthwhile that enables one to eat regularly — an education can merely turn the world sour and lead to behavior destructive for oneself and others. Only the future will show whether Chinese socialism can cope with this problem. So far the Chinese and the Russian evidence suggests that decay in socialist systems proceeds from the top down as it has done in preceding forms of civilization. A very small amount of force can keep the expression of a large amount of popular discontent within bounds tolerable to the rulers. Disintegration begins when the rulers start to quarrel about the premises of the social order, the bases of their legitimacy and authority.

IV. IMPLICATIONS

In bringing these lectures to a close I want to raise and attempt to answer a quite general question: What may be the implications of the evidence reviewed here for the prospects of a free and rational social order in the foreseeable future? Implicitly or ex-

plicity this question underlies most social science. Although there is plenty of room for debate about the meaning of the terms free and rational, including the possibility of inherent conflicts between freedom and rationality, the constraints of time and space make it necessary to pass these issues by with the debatable assumption that the terms are well enough understood to permit the discussion to proceed.

For the sake of the argument it is also necessary to assume that nuclear destruction will not end life on this planet. This is an assumption about which many of us feel less confident than we did only a few years ago. Nevertheless, without this assumption no effort to create a less miserable social order can make any sense.

As a starting point we may take the prevailing widespread disenchantment with *both* liberal capitalism and socialism as it has worked out in practice. This is a new historical situation. Previously there has been some place in the world to which people who wanted to change the world could point as a desirable model for the future. Now that the big models have been discredited, the result, especially among many young people, has been a turn toward hedonism and a generalized suspicion of all forms of authority. In my judgment such a reaction promises no viable political alternative. Except in very simple and isolated non-literate societies, anarchism is not a viable social arrangement. Some sort of central authority is necessary in more complex societies in order to coordinate human activities, compose quarrels, and see to the defense against enemies. Today most neo-anarchist social criticism, even with the addition of Marxist coloring matter, impresses me as essentially a form of self-indulgence. Such criticism depends parasitically on the tolerance exercised by the objects of its criticism, mainly varieties of liberal capitalism.

Yet the moral and intellectual rejection of both liberal capitalism and socialism runs wider and deeper as an intellectual current than the neo-anarchist critique. This larger current of rejec-

tion, as I perceive it, emphasizes three structural defects in liberal capitalism and a different trio under socialism.

The main charge against capitalism stresses unemployment, the terrible waste and human misery that results from the boom and bust of the business cycle. Inflation has in recent years complicated and even intensified these fears. The second failure of capitalism has been the creation of what morally sensitive observers regard as excessive inequalities of wealth and income. There is also overproduction in some areas along with shortages and starvation in others. The third defect is imperialism, or attempts to control the political structure of weaker states by a variety of means including in some cases military force. For reasons advanced elsewhere in print I do not believe we have any good explanation of imperialism, at least not for the United States, where the standard economic explanations just do not work.¹ But for the issues at hand, the absence of a satisfactory explanation is not all that important. Imperialism exists, which is all we need to know. The revolutionary and nationalist opponents of imperialism are there too. Yet it is an abdication of human reason to assume that they will necessarily be less repressive than the regimes they overthrow.

Presently existing forms of socialism emerged from revolutionary victory in economically backward countries. So far, it has been a socialism of scarcity and oppression rather than of freedom and plenty. Every inhabitant has to live in a bureaucratic strait jacket tailored by planners, propagandists, and the secret police. When, as in China during the Great Leap Forward, political leaders get carried away by their own enthusiastic capacity for self-deception, the result is not greater freedom and plenty. Instead it is exhaustion, chaos, and widespread starvation. The bureaucracy becomes a monster that turns out to be indispensable.

¹ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and Upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 116-32.

Like the corpse in one of Ionesco's plays, long after its proclaimed demise it continues to grow and grow until its feet stick out the door. There is nothing to be done except shrug the shoulders and mutter about an incurable sickness of the dead. So socialists have complained about bureaucratic deformation as the incurable malady of socialism.

Another of the major stigmata of socialism as it actually exists is the absence of intellectual freedom. This would be a bit more bearable were it not for the suffocating presence of prescribed Truth on every conceivable subject of human concern, from relations between the sexes to how to grow rice. It is often said that the absence of intellectual freedom troubles no one except intellectuals, who are only a very small segment of the population anyway. But where there is repression of the intellectuals, the rest of the population is also the victim of arbitrary oppression. No one is immune to the sound of booted police clumping up the stairway in the darkness of the night to take off a loved one to an unknown destination. Nor is it much better to face helplessly the insults and threats of a raging crowd stirred up by one's enemies, official or unofficial. To be sure, this kind of violence has of late sharply diminished in both the Soviet Union and China. But it has declined mainly because high-level officials do not want *to* be victims any more. There is very little in the way of institutional barriers to arbitrary terror and almost no barrier in doctrine or the more general cultural and moral climate.

Finally, the system of inequality under prevailing forms of socialism has turned out to be not very different from that under liberal capitalism. At the apex of the system there is a tiny elite whose official position gives them access to most of the material goods of this life: luxurious housing, fine food, chauffeured automobiles, in some cases an airplane for private use, special access to health care and vacation resorts, etc. All that seems to be missing are fancy yachts. Smaller motor cruisers do ply the Volga. Many belong to successful writers and artists.

Looking now at the bottom of the social pyramid, we find large numbers of people who are forced to make do at the margin of subsistence. In between these two extremes there are numerous gradations from the official able to lead a quite comfortable life down to the peasant who can make ends meet by dint of extra hard work. Thus the range of inequality is essentially the same under socialism and liberal capitalism. The principle or justification —to each according to his work —is the same in both societies, with roughly the same amount of deviation from the principle in the practice of both societies. There is a difference in that judgments about the value of any specific kind of work have a much stronger political component under socialism than under liberal capitalism. It is also likely that there are many more people clinging to the upper rungs of the income ladder in the United States than in the USSR or China. Yet, to repeat, the number of rungs in the ladder and the differences in life styles between high and low rungs are similar in all three of the societies discussed here.

Turning our attention to prospects for the future I will begin by taking a cue from a famous article by Lenin and ask: *What cannot be done?* The most obvious answer suggested by the evidence discussed earlier is that one cannot eliminate bureaucracy. In a socialist society there has to be a bureaucracy to replace the allocation of goods and services through the market. To the extent that a capitalist society wishes to use criteria other than the market —as in the allocation of welfare benefits, or in the obtaining of goods and services, such as military hardware, that do not have a ready market price —a capitalist state also has to resort to bureaucracy. Finally, both socialist and capitalist societies have to make use of hierarchical controls in order to supervise the flow of raw materials and the application of human labor through the process of production. More briefly, a factory too has to have a bureaucracy.

The need for bureaucracy can be enough by itself to undermine and destroy egalitarian hopes, where such hopes exist. (I

know of no evidence to show that they have ever been a mass phenomenon.) Other forces also work against egalitarianism. A fair amount of evidence indicates that for people to work hard there has to be a close connection between putting out the effort and getting the reward. One trouble with Chinese collective agriculture, a difficulty the new regime has tried to remedy, was that egalitarian arrangements broke the link between effort and reward. A peasant who worked hard on the collective farm might raise the total productivity and income of the farm. But since this increment had to be shared with all the others, the individual peasant would get for his pains no more than a tiny, invisible fraction of his contribution to the collective welfare. On his own private plot, on the other hand, the connection between work and results was perfectly plain and quite satisfying. In that situation it made no sense to work too hard on collective property. Most peasants in the area from which this report comes simply soldiered on the job for a few hours each day. The local cadres could do nothing about the situation.²

On these and other grounds it seems plain enough that one cannot eliminate authority and social inequality from modern social arrangements. An influential tradition that goes back to Marx sees scarcity and the compulsion to work as the main source of repressive authority and unjustified inequality. A reduction in scarcity, both the artificial kind of induced scarcity among the rich and the real kind among the poor, might very well reduce the need for authority. Such a reduction in scarcity is in terms of reducing human misery something very well worth having in its own right, although on a worldwide scale the prospects now look very dim. But it is important to recognize that scarcity is not the only source of authority and inequality in human societies, perhaps not even the most important one. There is the need for disci-

² Mosher, *Broken Earth*, pp. 39–43; Anita Chan et al., *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 173–74.

pline and social coordination mentioned from time to time in these lectures. There is the need for more rules and more ways to enforce them that arises from increasing numbers and increasing crowding. Increased crowding is also likely to generate more quarreling and more need for ways to settle and prevent quarrels. Then there is the occupational structure of modern societies that is hardly likely to lead to anything approaching full equality of reward and esteem. Finally, in the absence of world peace there will always be the imperatives of military organization, certainly a decisive source of authority and inequality in contemporary societies.

If authority, especially bureaucratic authority, and inequality are likely to be prominent features of the social landscape for the foreseeable future, that does not mean there is absolutely nothing one can do. It merely means, as already suggested, that the egalitarian thrust is unlikely to accomplish anything. But there remains the huge if perhaps more feasible task of ensuring that social inequalities are rewards for scarce and socially desirable forms of competence. The airplane pilot who can land his plane repeatedly and safely under difficult conditions is a good example. So is the architect who can design a building that is inexpensive to construct and comfortable to work and live in. The obverse of the requirement of competence to justify authority would be a set of social mechanisms to prevent the privileged from appropriating their perquisites for purely personal ends.

To identify the socially necessary forms of special competence, to reward them in ways that elicit the best performance, and at the same time to prevent the misappropriation of scarce resources by an elite, constitutes a set of very difficult tasks. Together they can provide the ingredients for savage disputes. Every privileged class in human history has managed to create a rationale for its privileges in terms of its allegedly indispensable contributions to human welfare. To distinguish justifiable claims from self-serving rationalizations in such claims is no easy task. Yet one need not

exaggerate the difficulties. In modern societies at any rate there is no great difficulty in spotting wealthy social parasites. Such persons do not even pretend to work. Instead they flit from one pleasure dome to another, according to fashion and the seasons.

Although controlling arbitrary authority and unjustified inequality is extremely difficult, under certain conditions it may not be altogether impossible. A parliamentary system with competing parties, based on a well-informed and relatively homogeneous electorate is probably compatible with economic planning. Planning along with measures for welfare does diminish the sufferings of the poor, sufferings hard to justify in a wealthy society. Under such a system the planning apparatus would consist mainly of technicians carrying out policies mandated by a parliamentary majority. To this extent there would be popular controls over the bureaucracy. It would be possible to extend these controls if there were a popular demand for so doing. On this score, however, there are grounds for skepticism. By and large people are reluctant to do anything about the evils of everyday life, not to mention the more remote ones of government. They would rather grumble.

For a relatively free form of socialism or socially controlled capitalism to emerge, in the first place the economy would have to have reached a high level of development. To maintain the system some sectors of the economy have to remain sufficiently profitable to support the social and welfare costs generated elsewhere in the economy. In the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland the export sectors have carried much of this load. Hence the economies of these countries, and others, have remained vulnerable to trends and decisions outside their borders. Every country, large and small, capitalist, socialist, or in between, is to a degree subject to the sanction of international markets. There is probably no way to eliminate this vulnerability.

A socialist or capitalist society with powerful democratic and liberal components could maintain itself, I suspect, only in a relatively safe back-eddy, one sheltered from the main currents and

storms of international politics. Otherwise nearly every domestic issue becomes entwined around the issue of the state's alignment in the international arena. Likewise, too many resources go into expensive military machines to permit extensive social programs. On the other hand, if a state is able to remain aloof from the major international contests of the day, its leaders can from time to time enjoy the luxury of lecturing the Great Powers with moral platitudes that no one takes seriously.

To sum up, the prospects for a free and rational society seem to me very bleak in the world's leading societies. Moderately free and rational societies may sustain themselves in marginal areas of prosperity, now confined to Western Europe. Even there such societies appear to be examples of virtue parasitic on the vices of others, since they are heavily dependent on trade with the Great Powers. On the other hand, if one relaxes the conception of free and rational, other more encouraging trends appear. They deserve at least very brief comment because no observer, so far as I am aware, has called attention to them.

Since the end of the Second World War there has been a resurgence of parliamentary democracy that reversed prior trends of the interwar era. The defeat of the Axis led to the establishment of democracies in Japan, Germany, and Italy. More recently parliamentary systems have been set up in Portugal and Spain. After an interlude of authoritarian government, Greece returned to a parliamentary regime. So did India after a brief period of emergency rule. Argentina has returned to democratic government after a long period of brutal authoritarian rule. None of these regimes is altogether edifying. In some instances parliamentary democracy is still precarious. But from the standpoint of justice and human freedom, all of them are a great deal better than their predecessors. There are then some objective reasons for hope about the future of human institutions.

Over against these trends one must set the proliferation of religious and chauvinist fundamentalisms all over the world. They

are prominent in Iran and Lebanon and by no means invisible in Israel. Although in India the Sikh movement has with good reason captured world attention, the Mutiny of 1857 displayed the same religious fundamentalism, perhaps for the first time in modern history as a serious political force. Northern Ireland presents the spectacle of two fanatical groups locked in what looks like permanent conflict. The United States displays similar trends, although so far without the violence. Reactionary religious fundamentalism is strong enough to be a factor national political leaders must take into account. Among blacks there have been a few episodes of what was presented as black revolutionary violence, though to my recollection nothing has happened recently.

Perhaps more revealing is the widespread search for roots in American society. Adopted children want to know about their biological parents, often to the distress of adoptive parents who have lavished care and affection on their upbringing. Blacks want to know about their African ancestors. Immigrant groups tout the virtues and values of their country of origin. Patrician elites do the same about their forebears, although an occasional iconoclast may express glee at raking up a disreputable ancestor. Like the other movements mentioned here, the American search for roots reflects, I suggest, a current of opposition to a social order that judges people by performance and merit as measured by the market place, and a longing for a familiar world with secure social status and the traditional moral and intellectual certainties still intact.

This form of romantic nostalgia furnished much of the mass appeal of fascism over half a century ago. Fascism even displayed the same glorification of community that one finds in contemporary religious and chauvinist fundamentalism. Although these contemporary movements are not the same as fascism, there are enough similarities to make them ominous. Indeed, most of them are ominous upon inspection without calling attention to their similarity to fascist movements, although the parallels help us to

understand both. Where then do they come from? Discontent with modernization and its results is certainly a fundamental aspect of any explanation. By itself, on the other hand, it is inadequate. Two generations ago, by the time fascism was thoroughly defeated, most of these discontents would have fueled either Marxist movements or militant movements for reform within the liberal capitalist order. Now that both of these have lost much of their luster, religious and chauvinist fundamentalist movements are taking their place by offering an image of the future and a cause to fight for. Fighting can be an excellent antidote for boredom and despair, especially for the young with limited prospects and tenuous social ties. Beirut and Belfast may be the images of the future rather than Orwell's bureaucratic nightmare. I certainly hope not. But I would like to have stronger grounds for hope than any I can presently discern.