

# Russia in transition

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Who would still maintain nowadays that Soviet society has emerged from the Stalin era in a state of petrified immobility, decayed and incapable of inner movement and change? Yet only a short time ago this was the opinion commonly accepted; and a writer who defied it and claimed that, despite all appearances to the contrary, the Soviet universe did move seemed to argue from mere faith or wishfulness. Yes, the Soviet universe does move. At times it even looks as if it were still a nebula unsteadily revolving around a shifting axis—a world in the making, rumbling with the tremor of inner dislocation and searching for balance and shape.

It is the twilight of totalitarianism that the U.S.S.R. is living through. Again, how many times have not "political scientists" told us that a society which has succumbed to totalitarian rule cannot disenchant itself by its own efforts, and that such is "the structure of Soviet totalitarian power" (the like of which, it was said, history has never seen before!) that it can be overthrown only from the outside by mighty blows delivered in war. Yet it is as a result of developments within the Soviet society that Stalinism is breaking down and dissolving; and it is the Stalinists themselves who are the subverters of their own orthodoxy.

It is nearly four years now since the U.S.S.R. has ceased to be ruled by an autocrat. None of Stalin's successors has "stepped into Stalin's shoes". Government by committee has taken the place of government by a single dictator. A French writer, still somewhat incredulous of the change, recalls that in Rome, when a Caesar died or was assassinated, his head was struck off the public monument, but "Caesar's body" was left intact until another head was put on it. Yet, in Moscow not one but many heads have been put on Caesar's body; and perhaps even the "body" is no longer the same. It is pointless to argue that it makes no difference for a nation whether it lives under the tyranny of an auto-

crat or under that of a "collective leadership". The essence of collective leadership is dispersal, diffusion, and therefore limitation of power. When government passes from one hand into many hands it can no longer be exercised in the same ruthless and unscrupulous manner in which it was exercised before. It becomes subject to checks and balances.

It is not only Caesar's head that has vanished. What used to be his strong arm, the power of the political police, is broken. The people are no longer paralysed by fear of it. The stupendous machine of terror which overwhelmed so many people with so many false accusations and extorted so many false confessions of guilt, the machine which looked like an infernal *perpetuum mobile* at last invented by Stalin, has been brought to a standstill. Stalin's successors themselves have stopped it, afraid that even they would be caught by it; and they can hardly bring it back into motion, even if they wished to do so—the rust of moral opprobrium has eaten too deep into its cogs and wheels.

Nearly dissolved is also the Stalinist *univers concentrationnaire*, that grim world of slave labour camps which in the course of several decades sucked in, absorbed, and destroyed Russia's rebellious spirits and minds, leaving the nation intellectually impoverished and morally benumbed. Rehabilitated survivors of the Great Purges of the 1930's have returned from places of exile. There are, unfortunately, few, all too few, of them; and some may be broken and exhausted men. Yet, few as they are and such as they are, they are a leaven in the mind of post-Stalinist society—a reproach and a challenge to its disturbed conscience. Multitudes of other deportees have been allowed to leave concentration camps and to settle as "free workers\*" in the remote provinces of the north and the east. Temporarily or finally, the nightmare of mass deportations has ceased to haunt Russia.

## A fresh gust of wind

The mind of the nation has stirred to new activity. Gone are the days when the whole of the Soviet Union was on its knees before the Leader and had to intone the same magic incantations, to believe in the same bizarre myths, and to keep its thoughts tightly closed to any impulse of doubt and criticism. To be sure, it is only slowly and painfully that people recover in their minds from monolithic uniformity and relearn to think for themselves and express their thoughts. Yet, a diversity of opinion, unknown since decades, has begun to show itself unmistakably and in many fields. A fresh gust of wind is blowing through the lecture halls and seminars of universities. Teachers and students are at last discussing their problems in relative freedom from inquisitorial control and dogmatic inhibition. The Stalinist tutelage over science was so barbarous and wasteful, even from the State's viewpoint, that it could no longer be maintained; and so it is perhaps not surprising that scientists should have regained freedom. What is more startling and politically important is the freedom for people to delve into the Soviet Union's recent history—a freedom still limited yet real. In Stalin's days this was the most closely guarded taboo, because the Stalin legend could only survive as long as the annals of the Revolution and of the Bolshevik Party remained sealed and hidden away, especially from the young, who could find in their own memories no antidote to it.

Even now the annals have not been thrown open indiscriminately. They are being unsealed guardedly, one by one. The historians reveal their contents only gradually and in small doses. (The history of the October Revolution is still told in such a way that the giant figure of Trotsky is kept out of it—only his shadow is allowed to be shown casually, on the fringe of the revolutionary scene. But if Hamlet is still acted without the Prince of Denmark, the text of the play is becoming more and more authentic, while

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in Stalin's day, the whole play, with the Prince cast as the villain, was apocryphal). Every tiny particle of historical truth, wrested from the archives, is political dynamite, destructive not only of the Stalin myth proper, but also of those elements of orthodoxy which Stalin's epigones are anxious to conserve. The old-Bolshevik heresies, of which even the middle-aged Russian of our days has known next to nothing, and the authors of those heresies, the ghostly apostates and traitors\* of the Stalin era, are suddenly revealed in a new light, the heresies can be seen as currents of legitimate Bolshevik thought and as part and parcel of Russia's revolutionary heritage; and the traitors—as great, perhaps tragic, figures of the revolution.

The rehabilitation, even partial, of past heresy militates against the wholesale condemnation of present and future heresy. It corrodes the very core of orthodoxy to such an extent that the ruling group shrinks from the consequences. But the ruling group is no longer in a position to stop the process of Russia's historical education which forms now the quintessence of her political education.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the place to discuss further the intellectual ferment of the post-Stalin era. Suffice it to say, that in its initial phases de-Stalinization has been or was primarily the work of the intelligentsia. Writers, artists, scientists and historians have been its pioneers. Their demands have coincided, at least in part, with the needs and wishes of the managerial groups, and of influential circles in the party leadership. This accounts for the peculiarly limited, administrative-ideological character of the reforms carried out. Yet, as at the turn of the century, the intelligentsia has acted as the *bwevegtinik*, the storm-finch. Its restlessness augurs the approach of an upheaval in which much wider social forces are likely to come into play.

## The new working class

The new working class which has emerged from the melting-pot of forced industrialization is potentially

a political power of a magnitude hitherto unknown in Russian history. There are now in the U.S.S.R. four to five times as many industrial workers as there were before the revolution and even in the late 1920's. Large scale industry employed then not much more than three million wage labourers. It now employs at least fifteen million (not counting transport workers, state farm labourers, the medium and higher technical personnel, etc.). The working class has not only grown in size; its structure and outlook, too, have changed. These are not the old Russian workers who combined exceptional political *elan* with technological backwardness and semi-illiteracy. This in its main sections is a highly advanced working class which avidly assimilates skills and absorbs general knowledge. Among the young who now enter industry many have gone through secondary education. The change may be illustrated by the following comparison: about a quarter of a century ago as many as 75 per cent of the workers employed in engineering were classed as unskilled and only 25 as skilled. In 1955 the proportion was exactly reversed: 75 per cent were skilled men and only 25 remained unskilled. The relation is certainly not the same in other industries: engineering represents the most progressive sector of the economy. But the situation in this sector is highly significant, if only because engineering employs about one-third of the industrial manpower and accounts for about one half of the total gross industrial output of the U.S.S.R.

The power of the Soviet bureaucracy was originally rooted in the weakness of the working class. The Russian proletariat was strong enough to carry out a social revolution in 1917, to overthrow the bourgeois regime, to lift the Bolsheviks to power, and to fight the civil wars to a victorious conclusion. But it was not strong enough to exercise the actual proletarian dictatorship, to control those whom it had lifted to power, and to defend its own freedom against them. Here is indeed the key to the subsequent evolution or "degeneration" of the Soviet regime. By 1920-1921 the

small working class which had made the revolution had shrunk to nearly half its size. (Not more than 1,500,000—2,000,000 men remained then in industrial employment). Of the rest many had perished in the civil wars; others had become Commissars or Civil Servants; and still others had been driven by famine from town to country and never returned. Most factories were idle. Their workers, unable to earn a living by productive work, traded in black markets, stole goods from the factories, and became *declasses*. As the old landlord class and the bourgeoisie had been crushed, as the peasantry was inherently incapable of assuming national leadership, and as the industrial working class was half dispersed and half demoralised, a social vacuum arose in which the new bureaucracy was the only active, organized and organizing element. It filled the political vacuum and established its own preponderance.

## A Leviathan State

Then, in the course of the 1920's, the working class was re-assembled and reconstituted; and in the 1930's» the years of forced industrialization, its numbers grew rapidly. By now, however, the workers were powerless against the new Leviathan state. The bureaucracy was firmly entrenched in its positions. It accumulated power and privileges and held the nation by the throat. The working class could not at first derive strength from its own growth in numbers. That growth became, on the contrary, a new source of weakness. Most of the new workers were peasants, forcibly uprooted from the country, bewildered, lacking habits of industrial life, capacity for organization, political tradition, and self-confidence. In the turmoil of the second world war and of its aftermath, society was once again thrown out of balance. It is only in this decade, in the 1950's, that the vastly expanded working class has been taking shape and consolidating as a modern social force, acquiring an urban industrial tradition, becoming aware of itself, and gaining confidence.

<sup>1</sup>It is difficult to find an analogy in any nation at any other time for so close an interdependence of history and politics as that which exists in the USSR at the present. The controversies of Soviet historians which preceded the XX Congress foreshadowed Krushchev's and Mikoyan's revelations at the Congress; and it was no matter of chance that even before Krushchev, at the Congress itself, Professor Pankratova, an historian, made one of the most startling pronouncements. Since then the historians' disputes have gone on uninterruptedly.

## Workers and Bureaucracy

This new working class has so far lagged behind the intelligentsia in the political drive against Stalinism, although it has certainly had every sympathy with the intelligentsia's demand for freedom. However, the workers cannot possibly remain content with the administrative-ideological limitations of the post-Stalin reform. They are certain to go eventually beyond the intelligentsia's demands and to give a distinctive proletarian meaning and content to the current ideas and slogans of democratization. Their thoughts and political passions are concentrating increasingly on the contradiction between their nominal and their actual position in society. Nominally, the workers are the ruling power in the nation. In the course of forty years this idea has been ceaselessly and persistently instilled into their minds. They could not help feeling edified, elevated, and even flattered by it. They cannot help feeling that they should, that they ought, and that they must be the ruling power. Yet, every day experience tells them that the ruling power is the bureaucracy, not they. The bureaucracy's strong arm has imposed on them the Stalinist labour discipline. The bureaucracy alone has determined the trend of economic policy, the targets for the Five Year Plans, the balance between producer and consumer goods, and the distribution of the national income. The bureaucracy alone has fixed the differential wage scales and wage rates creating a gulf between the upper and the lower strata. The bureaucracy has pulled the wires behind the Stakhanovite campaigns and, under the pretext of socialist emulation, set worker against worker and destroyed their solidarity. And, under Stalin's orders, it was the bureaucracy, aided by the labour aristocracy, that conducted a frenzied and relentless crusade against the instinctive egalitarianism of the masses.

Until recently the bureaucracy itself was subject to Stalin's whimsical terror and suffered from it even more than the working class did. This veiled, up to a point, the contrast between the theoretical notion of the proletarian dictatorship and the practice of bureaucratic rule. In their prostration before the Leader, worker and bureaucrat seemed to be equals. All the stronger did the beginning of de-Stalinization

expose the contrast in their real positions. De-Stalinization was, at first, an act of the bureaucracy's self-determination. The civil servant and the manager were its first beneficiaries: freed from the Leader's despotic tutelage they began to breathe freely. This made the workers acutely conscious of their own inferiority. However, the bureaucracy could not for any length of time reserve the benefits of de-Stalinization exclusively for itself. Having emancipated itself from the old terror, it willy-nilly relieved of it society as a whole. The workers too ceased to be haunted by the fear of the slave labour camp. Since that fear had been an essential ingredient of the Stalinist labour discipline, its disappearance entailed the end of that discipline. Malenkov's government proclaimed the obsolescence of the Stalinist labour code. That draconic code had played its part in breaking the masses of the proletarianized peasantry to regular habits of industrial work; and only to those masses, bewildered and helpless, could it be applied. *Vis-a-vis* the new working class it was becoming increasingly useless and ineffective. A freer climate at the factory bench had indeed become the prerequisite for a steady rise in labour productivity and higher industrial efficiency.

Nor could the worker remain content merely with the relaxation of factory discipline. He began to use his freshly-won freedom to protest against the pre-eminence of the managerial groups and of the bureaucracy. By far the most important phenomenon of the post-Stalin era is the evident revival of the long suppressed egalitarian aspirations of the working class.

From this point the workers' approach to de-Stalinization begins to diverge from that of the intelligentsia. The men of the intelligentsia have been intensely interested in the political "liberalisation", but socially they are conservative. It is they who have benefited from the inequalities of the Stalin era. Apart from individuals and small groups, who may rise intellectually above their own privileged position and sectional viewpoint, they can hardly wish to put an end to those inequalities and to upset the existing relationship between various groups and classes of Soviet society. They are inclined to preserve the social *status quo*. For the mass of the workers, on the other hand, the break with Stalinism

implies in the first instance a break with the inequalities fostered by Stalinism.

## Renascent egalitarianism

It should not be imagined that the renascent egalitarianism of the masses is politically articulate. It has not yet found any clear and definite expression on the national scale. We know of no resolutions adopted by trade unions or by workers' meetings protesting against privilege and calling for equality. The workers have not yet been free enough to voice such demands or to make their voices heard. They may not even have been capable of formulating them as people accustomed to autonomous trade union and political activity would do.\* It is more than thirty years since they had ceased to form and formulate opinions, to put them forward at meetings, to stand up for them, to oppose the views of others, to vote, to carry the day, or to find themselves outvoted. It is more than thirty years since as a class they ceased to have any real political life of their own. They could hardly recreate it overnight, even if those in power had put no obstacles in their way. Consequently, the new egalitarianism expresses itself only locally, fitfully, and incoherently. It is only semi-articulate. It works through exercising pressure at the factory level. Its manifestations are fragmentary and scattered. Yet it makes itself felt as the social undertone to de-Stalinisation, an undertone growing in volume and power.

Many recent acts of official policy have clearly reflected the egalitarian pressure from below. For the first time since 1931 the government has tackled a basic reform of wages, and although the reform has not yet taken final shape, the reversal of the anti-egalitarian trend is already clearly discernible. Hitherto the piece rate has formed the basis of the whole wages system: at least 75 per cent of all industrial wages were until quite recently made up of piece rates, because these lend themselves much more easily than time rates to extreme differentiation. Within this system the so-called progressive piece rate was favoured most of all, a method of payment under which the Stakhanovite producing 20, 30 and 40 per cent above the norm of

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output earned not just 20, 30 and 40 per cent more than the basic pay, but 30, 50, 80 per cent or even more. This method of payment, glorified in Stalin's days, as the supreme achievement of socialism, has now been declared as harmful to the interests of industry and workers alike. The grossly over-advertised Stakhanovite "movement" has been given a quiet burial. The time wage has again become the basic form of payment. It would be preposterous to see in this the triumph of socialism. Both the piece wage and the time wage—but the former much more than the latter—are essentially capitalist forms of payment; and it is only a measure of the retrograde character of some aspects of Stalin's labour policy that the return to the time wage should be regarded as progress. Yet progress it marks. It shows that workers no longer respond to the crude Stalinist appeal to their individual acquisitiveness which disrupted their class solidarity and that the government has been obliged to take note of this.

The year 1956 brought two further significant acts of labour policy: a rise by about one third in the lower categories of salaries and wages; and a new pension scheme with rates of pensions drastically revised in favour of workers and employees with low earnings. While in the Stalin era the purpose of almost every government decree in this field was to increase and widen the discrepancies between lower and higher earnings, the purpose of the recent decrees has been to reduce such discrepancies.

The re-awakening egalitarianism has likewise affected the government's educational policy. Beginning with the school year 1956-1957, all tuition fees have been abolished. It should be recalled that these had first been abolished early in the revolution, when Lenin's government pledged itself to secure free education for all. Poverty, cultural backwardness, and extreme scarcity of educational facilities made universal free education unattainable. The pledge remained nevertheless an important declaration of purpose. Stalin then re-introduced fees for secondary and academic education. Only the bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy could afford paying; and so education was almost defiantly reserved as a privilege for the children of the privileged. The tuition

fee extended to the ranks of the young generation the social differences which Stalin's labour policy fostered among their parents. It tended to perpetuate and deepen the new stratification of society. On this ground Stalin's communist critics, especially Trotsky, charged him with paving the way for a new bourgeoisie. All the more significant is the present abolition of all fees. This renewed pledge of universal free education, given by Stalin's successors, is of far greater practical value than was Lenin's pledge, because it is backed up by a tremendously expanded and still expanding school system. Even so, Soviet society has still a long way to go before it achieves genuine equality in education. Only in the towns are there enough secondary schools to take in all children—in the country there will not be enough of them before 1960 at the earliest. Universal academic education is *Zukunftsmusik*. All the same, the abolition of school fees is the rulers' tribute to the new egalitarianism.

### A significant episode

Odd episodes from every-day life and street scenes described in the Soviet press allow sometimes even the outsider to watch this new mood as it surges in unexpected ways to the surface.

Recently, for instance, *Trud* related an incident which occurred at the Red Square in Moscow. A worker accosted a member of the Supreme Soviet and rudely chided him for "wearing such fine clothes" as no worker could afford. "I can see at once", the worker said, "that never in your life have you done a day's work at the factory bench". *Trud*, indignant at this example of "hooliganism", tells its readers that the member of the Supreme Soviet had in fact been a factory worker most of his life; and that the man who accosted him behaved cowardly for he withdrew and disappeared in the crowd before his identity could be established.

There is hardly a detail in this seemingly irrelevant episode which does not have almost symbolic eloquence. It was unthinkable in Stalin's days that a worker should dare accost a member of the Supreme Soviet; and that he should do so at the Red Square of all places,

just outside the Kremlin wall. This used to be the most heavily guarded spot in the whole of the Soviet Union—it swarmed with police agents and was usually shunned by the ordinary citizen who had no business to be there. But the worker's new daring still has its well-defined limits. Having chided the dignitary, he prefers to keep his anonymity, to withdraw, and to plunge into the crowd. Times have changed, but not enough for a worker to believe that he may vent with impunity his feelings at "their" fine clothes and "their" privileges. That many of "them" had risen from the working class is true, of course; but this does not make the underdog feel less of an underdog. The peculiar form of protest he chose may have flavoured of "hooliganism". But, as a rule, men express their feelings in this way when they cannot easily express them in more legitimate forms. Yet, how much resentment at inequality must have been pent up in the man, and how bitter must it have been, to explode in this way!

Among his workmates the protester certainly feels on much safer ground than at the Red Square; and there, at the factory bench or at the canteen, the privileges of the bureaucracy and of the labour aristocracy have become the recurrent theme of daily conversation. It is the oldest of themes; yet how novel it is after the long and sullen silence of the Stalin era. There, among themselves, the workers are pondering anew their position forty years after the revolution and groping for new collective action. The day may not be far off when the anonymous man returns to the Red Square, but not to accost a bigwig and vent resentment furtively. He will come back, head uplifted, and surrounded by multitudes, to utter anew the old and great cry for equality.

### The scapegoat

Of Stalin it has been said that like Peter the Great he used barbarous means to drive barbarism out of Russia. Of Stalin's successors it may be said that they drive Stalinism out of Russia by Stalinist methods.

The procedures of de-Stalinization are characterised by ambiguity, tortuousness and prevarication. At first it was allegedly only a matter of

doing away with the "cult of the individual", the grotesque adulation of the Leader. When the issue was first posed, in the spring of 1953, even the name of the "individual" who had been the object of the cult was not mentioned; and up to the XX Congress, up to February 1956, the Press still extolled the great apostolic succession of "Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin". The cult was abandoned, yet it was kept up. But having made this first step, Stalin's successors could not help making the next one as well. They had to denounce the Leader's "abuses of power". They denounced them piecemeal and shrunk from saying frankly that these were Stalin's abuses. They found a scapegoat for him. As Beria had for fourteen years been Stalin's police chief, the responsibility for many of Stalin's misdeeds could conveniently be placed on him.

For a time this particular scapegoat was constantly held before the eyes of Russia and the world—until it refused to do service. For one thing, Stalin could not be dissociated from the man who had for so long been his police chief. For another, many of the worst "abuses" to mention only the Great Purges of 1936-1938, had occurred before Beria took office in Moscow. The denunciation of Beria implied the denunciation of Stalin himself; and it led directly to it. It was as if the scapegoat had returned from the wilderness to drag the real and the chief sinner down the steep slope. It threatened to drag others as well. Malenkov, Khrushchev, Kaganovich, Molotov, Voroshilov, had all been Beria's close colleagues and associates. The more they revealed of the horror of the past, the stronger grew their urge to exonerate themselves and find a new scapegoat—this time for themselves. That new scapegoat was none other than Stalin. "It was all his fault, not ours" was the *leit-motif* of Khrushchev's secret speech at the XX Congress. "It was all his fault", *Pravda* then repeated a hundred times, "but nothing has ever been wrong with our leading cadres and with the working of our political institutions".

It was a most hazardous venture for Stalin's associates to try and acquit themselves at his expense. This scapegoat too—and what a giant of a scapegoat it is!—is returning from the wilderness to drag them down. And so they are driven to try to re-exonerate Stalin,

at least in part, in order to exonerate themselves.

### "Honest thieves"

Such attempts at "tricking history" and playing blind man's buff with it are all in good Stalinist style. In effect, Stalin's successors avoid telling the truth even when, on the face of it, truth should reflect credit on them. Their first move on their assumption of power was to repudiate the "doctors' plot". Yet to this day they have not told the real story of that last great scandal of the Stalin era. What was hidden behind it? Who, apart from Stalin, staged it? And for what purpose? Khrushchev's "secret" speech has not yet been published in the Soviet Union, a year after it was made; and this despite of the fact that its contents had in the meantime been shouted from the housetops outside the Soviet Union. Special commissions have been at work to review the many purges and trials and to rehabilitate and set free innocent victims. But their work has remained a secret. Not even a summary account of it has been published to explain officially the background, the motives, the dimensions, and the consequences of the purges. Masses of slave labourers have been released from concentration camps; and many prisoners have regained freedom under a series of amnesties. Yet, not a single announcement has been made to say how many convicts have benefited from the amnesties and how many have left the concentration camps. The present rulers are so afraid of revealing the real magnitude of the wrongs of the Stalin era, that they dare not even claim credit for righting the wrongs. They must behave like that "honest thief" who cannot return stolen goods to their owner otherwise than stealthily and under the cover of night.

How many of the "stolen goods" have in fact been returned?

The break with Stalinism was initiated under the slogan of a return to "Leninist norms of inner party democracy". The XX Congress was supposed to have brought about the practical restitution of those norms. Yet to anyone familiar with Bolshevik history it is obvious that this was far from being true. The Congress adopted all its resolutions by unanimous vote, in accordance with the

best Stalinist custom. No *open* controversy or *direct* clash of opinion disturbed the smooth flow of its monolithic "debates". Not one in a hundred or so speakers dared to criticize Khrushchev or any other leader on any single point. Not a single major issue of national or international policy was in fact placed under discussion.

The change in the inner party regime has so far consisted in this; major decisions of policy are taken not by Khrushchev alone and not even by the eleven members of the Praesidium but by the Central Committee which consists of 125 members (or 225 if alternate members are included). Inside that body free debate has apparently been restored; and differences of opinion have been resolved by majority vote. Only to this extent have "Leninist norms" been re-established. But under Lenin the differences in the Central Committee were, as a rule, not kept secret from the party or even from the nation at large; and the rank and file freely expressed their own views on them. The post-Stalinist Central Committee has never yet aired its differences in the hearing of the whole party. Thus only the upper hierarchy appears to be managed more or less in the Leninist way. The lower ranks are still ruled in the Stalinist manner, although far less harshly. In the long run the party cannot remain half free and half slave. Eventually the higher ranks either will share their newly-won freedom with the lower ranks, or else they themselves must lose it.

### Reform from above

Within the Soviet Union de-Stalinization has so far been carried out as a reform *from above*, a limited change initiated and controlled at every stage by those in power. This state of affairs has not been accidental. It has reflected the condition of Soviet society both *above* and *below*, in the first years after Stalin.

*Above*—powerful interests have obstructed reform, striving to {restrict it to the narrowest possible limits, and insisting that the ruling group should in all circumstances hold the initiative firmly and not allow its hands to be forced by popular pressure. The attitude of the bureaucracy is by its very nature contradictory. The need to rationalize the

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working of the state machine and to free relations from anachronistic encumbrances have induced the bureaucracy to favour reform. Yet, at the same time the bureaucracy has been increasingly afraid that that may imperil its social and political preponderance. The labour aristocracy has been troubled by a similar dilemma: has it been not less than the rest of the workers interested in doing away with the old terroristic labour discipline; but it cannot help viewing with apprehension the growing force of the egalitarian mood, and it resents the changes in labour policy which benefit the lower paid workers without bringing compensatory advantages to the higher paid. The various managerial groups and the military officers' corps are guided by analogous considerations; and they are, above all, anxious to maintain their authority. The attitude of all these groups may be summed up thus: Reform from above? Yes, by all means. A revival of spontaneous movement from below? No, a thousand times no!

### Pressure from below

*Below*—everything has so far also favoured reform from above. Towards the end of the Stalin era the mass of the people craved for a change but could do nothing to achieve it. They were not merely paralysed by terror. Their political energy was hamstrung. No nationwide, spontaneous yet articulate movements rose from below to confront the rulers with demands, to wrest concessions, to throw up new programmes and new leaders, and to alter the balance of political forces. In 1953-1955 political prisoners and deportees struck in the remoteness of sub-Polar concentration camps, and these strikes led to the eventual dissolution of the camps. This was a struggle on the

submerged fringe of the national life; but whoever has any sense of Russian history must have felt that when political prisoners were in a position to resume, after so long an interval, the struggle for their rights, Russia was on the move. Then the year 1956 brought much agitation to the universities of Leningrad, Moscow and other cities. However, these and similar stirrings, symptomatic though they were, did not as yet add up to any real revival of the political energies in the depth of society.

It is not only that the working class had lost the habits of independent organization and spontaneous action. Stalinism had left a gap in the nation's political consciousness. It takes time to fill such a gap. It should be added that the gap is only relative. It is not by any means a vacuum. By spreading education, by arousing the people's intellectual curiosity, and by keeping alive the socialist tradition of the revolution, be it in a distorted and ecclesiastically dogmatic version, Stalinism has in fact accumulated many of the elements that should eventually go into the making of an extraordinarily high political consciousness. But Stalinism also forcibly prevented those elements from coalescing and cohering into an active social awareness and positive political thought. It increases enormously the potential capacities of the people and systematically prevented the potential from becoming actual. Stalinist orthodoxy surrounded the nation's enriched and invigorated mind with the barbed wire of its canons. It inhibited people from observing realities, comparing them, and drawing conclusions. It intercepted inside their brains, as it were, every reflex of critical thought. It made impossible the communication of ideas and genuine political intercourse between individuals and groups. De-Stalinization has given scope to these constrained and

arrested reflexes and has opened for them some channels of communication. This does not alter the fact that the people entered the new era in a state of political disability, confusion and inaction; and that any immediate change in the regime, or even in the political climate, could only come through reform from above.

Reform from above could be the work of Stalinists only. Had any of the old-Bolshevik oppositions—Trotskyist, Zinovievist and Bukharinist—survived till this day, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Voroshilov & Co. would surely have long since been removed from power and influence; and anti-Stalinists would have carried out de-Stalinization wholeheartedly and consistently. But the old oppositions had been exterminated; and new ones could not form themselves and grow under Stalinist rule. Yet the break with Stalinism had become a social and political necessity for the Soviet Union; and necessity works through such human material it finds available. Thus the job which it should have been the historic right and privilege of authentic anti-Stalinists to tackle has fallen to the Stalinists themselves, who cannot tackle it otherwise than half-heartedly and hypocritically. They have to undo much of their life's work in such a way as not to bring about their own undoing. Paradoxically, circumstances forced Malenkov and Khrushchev to act, *up to a point*, as the executors of Trotsky's political testament. Their de-Stalinization is like the "dog's walking on his hinder legs". It is not done well: but the wonder is that it is done at all!<sup>2</sup>

Leon Trotsky once made the prediction that Stalinism *in extremis* would place Russia before the danger of a "Thermidorian counter-revolution". It will be remembered that in France the *coup d'etat* of 9 Thermidor (27th July, 1794) brought about the downfall of Robespierre,

<sup>2</sup>History knows quite a few instances in which necessity worked through the most unsuitable human material when none other was available. Of course, whenever conservative rulers had to carry out progressive reforms, their work was self-contradictory and patchy; and it accumulated difficulties of the future. In my *Russia: What Next?* (1953), analysing the social circumstances which would drive Stalin's successors to break with Stalinism, I compared their position with that of Tsar Alexander II, the First Landlord of All The Russians, who, in conflict with the feudal landlord class and with himself, emancipated Russia's peasants from serfdom. One might go much further back into the past and compare de-Stalinization to the early sixteenth century reforms in the Church of Rome. The Church had been left by the Borgia Popes in a state of utter corruption and discredit; and it was by Cardinals who had themselves been the Borgia's servants that it was reformed and raised up. The reformer first of all restricted the "cult of the individual" in the Vatican and limited the Pope's powers. When they revealed to the faithful the crimes the Borgias had committed, some Prelates objected to the 'de-Borgiazation', fearing that discredit thrown on the memory of the deceased Pontiff would rebound upon the Church and sap its authority. Cardinal Contarini met their objections with this argument: "How? Shall we trouble ourselves so much about the reputation of two or three Popes and not rather try to restore what has been defaced, and to secure a good name for ourselves?"

the collapse of the Jacobin Party, the transfer of government from the Convention to the Directory, and the final ascendancy of the wealthy bourgeoisie over the revolutionary plebs. Although the *coup* looked at first like an episode in the internal struggles of the Jacobin party, it did not, as its imitators had hoped, replace in government one set of Jacobins by another; it entailed a fundamental change in the balance of social forces and spelt the doom of Jacobinism. Trotsky was convinced that Stalinism would lead towards a similar crisis in consequence of which a struggle beginning inside the Bolshevik Party might transcend its initial limits, and, after the bourgeoisie and the *kulaks* had intervened in it, end in the restoration of the bourgeois order.

The notion of the "Soviet Thermidor" was not one of Trotsky's most lucid ideas—he himself was aware of this and repeatedly revised and modified it. However, in the 1920's, when he first expounded the idea, the N.E.P. bourgeoisie and the *kulaks* still existed in Russia; and they had to be reckoned with as inherently counter-revolutionary forces capable of arousing the mass of the small-holding peasantry against Bolshevism and the weak "socialist sector" of the economy. Thirty years later, the possibility of a Soviet Thermidor, as Trotsky first visualised it, appears to be very remote or altogether unreal. The N.E.P. bourgeoisie has disappeared; and it is difficult to see how the collectivised peasantry can ever gain ascendancy over the urban proletariat and restore the bourgeois order. Not only have the old possessing classes vanished. The political parties of the old Russia are also dead and beyond resurrection. It is nearly forty years—and what years!—since they had been driven from the political stage. They have since been uprooted from the nation's memory. What is even more important, their programmes and ideas have lost all the relevance to the new structure and problems of Soviet society. The few emigre Mohicans—Monarchists, Cadets, Social Revolutionaries, and Mensheviks—if they returned to Russia, would appear incomparably more archaic to the present generation than the returning Bourbons appeared to the French or the restored Stuarts to the English; they

would seem as ancient as the phantoms of the Wars of the Roses were to the England of the machine age. Any new political movements which may spring into being can hardly be of a "Thermidorian" character. They are sure to seek to achieve their aims within the framework of the institutions created by the October Revolution and falsified by Stalinism.

### Eastern Europe

However, if the Soviet Union need no longer be afraid of the spectre which once haunted Trotsky, in Eastern Europe the chances of a "Thermidorian counter-revolution" are very real indeed. The communist regime there is not even ten years old. Its foundations are not even consolidated. The *kulaks* and even the urban bourgeoisie are still there. The peasantry as a whole has preserved private property and clings to it tooth and nail. The traditions of the old anti-communist parties are still alive and potent. Some of the old cadres of those parties are still there and have not by any means lost contact with the masses. The masses have not lost their capacity for spontaneous political action. Moreover, in most of these countries communist rule has been associated with Russian conquest and domination; and outraged national dignity and the longing for independence turn automatically against communism as well as Russia.

Consequently, the break with Stalinism has had a very different impact on Eastern Europe than on the Soviet Union. A momentous conflict has, in fact arisen between the logic of de-Stalinization in the U.S.S.R. and its logic in Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany. In the latter countries de-Stalinization is no longer the carefully calculated reform from above controlled at every stage by those in power. There, on the contrary, the explosive anti-Stalinism of the masses has tended to control those in power. Reform from above has led to the revival of movements from below. No sooner had Moscow begun to move away from the Stalin cult, in the spring of 1953, than Berlin rose in revolt. After the XX Congress, Poznan and Warsaw rose, and Budapest took to arms. All over Eastern Europe the Communist Parties have been torn between

Stalinists and anti-Stalinists; and everywhere social and political forces have been present, ready to intervene in the internecine communist struggle and turn it into a Thermidor, a Thermidor which in appearance is also, or even primarily, a war of national liberation.

In the aftermath of the second world war Stalin exported revolution to Eastern Europe on the point of bayonets. He then used the hidden but all-pervading police terror to keep that revolution in being. Now when his police terror has gone or ceased to terrorise, the great question has arisen whether a revolution begotten by foreign conquest can ever acquire an independent existence of its own and redeem itself? Can it ever be accepted by the people on the spot and gain their wholehearted support and devotion? Or must such a revolution collapse the moment the conquerer has withdrawn his bayonets?

### Poland and Hungary

There is perhaps no single answer to these questions. At any rate, the October upheavals in Poland and Hungary gave two different answers, perhaps none of them final. Poland rebelled against Russia but remained communist. She retained the revolution and rejected the bayonets. Moreover, something like a proletarian revolution from below developed there, which adopted the communist regime in order to free it from the Stalinist stigma, to transform it, and to shape it in its own political image. It was this proletarian movement from below which kept the Polish Thermidorian forces at bay in October. In Hungary the position was different. There too the insurrection was at first communist inspired in its anti-Stalinism and sought to regenerate the revolution, not to overthrow it. Then Hungarian Stalinist provocation and Soviet armed intervention infuriated the insurgents, drove them to despair, and enabled anti-communist forces to gain the initiative. Thus a Thermidorian situation arose: what had begun as an internecine communist conflict and looked at first only like a shift from one communist faction to another, from Gero to Nagy, developed into a fully fledged struggle between communism and anti-communism.<sup>3</sup> Hungary in effect rejected Russian bayonets together with the revolution which was origin-

## Russia in transition

ally brought to that country on those bayonets. This was not a counter-revolution carried out by a hated and isolated possessing class defending its dominant position against the masses. It was, on the contrary, the ardent work of a whole insurgent people. It may be said that in October-November, the people of Hungary in a heroic frenzy tried unwittingly to put the clock back, while Moscow sought once again to wind up with the bayonet, or rather with the tank, the broken clock of the Hungarian communist revolution. It is difficult to say who acted the more tragic, and the more futile or hopeless role.

It may not be out of place to recall here that thirty-five years before these events Trotsky warned the Russian Communist Party against the monstrosity of a communist role imposed upon a foreign people by force of arms. "He who wants to carry a revolution abroad on the pint of bayonets", Trotsky then said, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea". Stalin did not heed the warning, and he bequeathed the millstone to his successors. Ever since his death, the millstone has been "hanging about their necks".

### Die-hards and reformers

De-Stalinization in Russia had provided the decisive impulse for the upheavals, in Poland and Hungary, and now these upheavals inevitably sent their tremors into Russia. At once all the dilemmas inherent in de-Stalinization were aggravated to the utmost. The threat to Russia's strategic interests and her international position were obvious. The die-hards of Stalinism could not but blame the reformers for provoking it by the encouragement they had given to "titoism" and every variety of anti-Stalinism. The reformers replied that it was precisely the sluggish tempo of de-Stalinization that had driven Poland and Hungary to revolt. However, the first reaction of the Soviet ruling group in face of the peril was to close its ranks and to call a halt to de-Stalinization. Yet they could not make any serious attempt to resurrect the old orthodoxy. Twice such attempts had been made, first after the Berlin rising in June, 1953,

at the time of Beria's fall; and then at the beginning of 1955 when Malenkov was dismissed from the post of Prime Minister. Both attempts failed and only served to stimulate the reformist trend. A new attempt could have no other result—it could only intensify the disintegration of Stalinism. The desecration of the old orthodoxy had made too deep an impression on the mind of the people to be effaced. It was too late to put the broken idols together again.

More important than the effect of the crisis on the ruling group was its impact on the Soviet masses. The predicament in which Soviet policy found itself could not be concealed from them. The voice of communist critics abroad could not be silenced. The Soviet press had to reproduce wholly or in parts the arguments of Tito, Kardelji, Togliatti, Gomulka and others. The Polish Press, which was now in the vanguard of anti-Stalinism, was avidly read in Russia; and it played its part in stimulating "ideological" revision. The ferment reached a new pitch of intensity; and this time it spread from the intelligensia to the working class. The rulers unwittingly helped to spread it. Khrushchev publicly threatened to expel from Universities the most vocal of the "heretical" students and to send them, as a punishment, to work at the factory bench. The expelled students could only carry the germs of the heresies to the factories and infect the workers. (It is strange that this should not have occurred to Khrushchev: the Tsars used similarly to punish rebellious students: they drafted them into the army as privates, with the result that the regiments where the students served became the centres of revolt).

### A new phase

The Polish-Hungarian drama has thus opened a new phase in the internal development of the U.S.S.R. If until now the pressure which the workers exercised, on the factory level, against the bureaucracy was "economist" in character, and if they were not animated by any clear political idea, the development now reached a point at which the intelligensia, or rather its ideologues and theorists, began to politicise the consciousness of the working class

and to inject into it their own ideas—just as sixty years earlier Social Democratic intellectuals had carried the notions of political socialism "from the outside" into the spontaneous movements of the workers. At any rate the first stirrings made themselves felt of a movement from below; and this may bring to a close that chapter of history in which de-Stalinization was exclusively of reform from above.

At present, at the beginning of the year 1957, two distinct yet interconnected processes seem to be developing; the formation of a new political consciousness; and the inception or regeneration of a spontaneous mass movement. It is a question fateful for Russia's and the world's future at what pace these two processes will evolve and how they will react upon one another. It is possible for a spontaneous mass movement to acquire suddenly a very stormy momentum and to outstrip the growth of political consciousness. Such a movement may well upset the nation's political balance before it has itself acquired a clear awareness of aims, a positive political programme, and a firm and confident leadership. Such a movement may be guided only by its own impetus and express only the pent-up resentments of the workers (and/or the peasants). It may, in particular, raise the cry for equality in an extreme, uncompromising and Utopian manner while the nation's economic resources are insufficient for the extreme egalitarian demands to be met even half-way, especially after a long period during which consumer industries are underdeveloped. Should such a disproportion arise between consciousness and spontaneity, and should it become very acute, then the revived mass movement may well suffer shipwreck. Instead of achieving genuine and lasting democratization it may become a factor of social disruption and chaos. The present rulers would probably try to deal with the situation by means of a combination of concessions and repression. But they would hardly go far enough in meeting popular demands. Nor would they be in a position to use the Stalinist organs of suppression against the bursting energy of the masses. They could hardly bring back to the scene the political police in the full panoply

<sup>3</sup>Nagy and his faction played the role which Trotsky at one time assumed Bukharin and Rykov would play in Russia.

of Stalinist "efficiency". Their last resort would be to appeal for help to the army, as they did in Berlin in June, 1953 and in Budapest in October-November, 1956.

### Despair and hope

The assumption by the Soviet Marshals and generals of the role of the guardians of order not only in satellite countries but within the Soviet Union itself would create a new situation. It should be remarked that Stalin never had the need to use his Marshals and generals in this way—he never sent his armoured divisions to crush popular uprisings—because he could rely on his infallible, invisible, and all-pervading police terror. This enabled him to keep the army leaders in a politically subordinate position. But should the latter, under Stalin's successors, come to act regularly as the guardians of order, an important shift of power would necessarily follow. Sooner or later, the army leaders would say to themselves that instead of guarding order on account and for the benefit of the party leaders, they could as well do it on their own account and for their own benefit. In other words, the strains and stresses caused by a stormy revival of mass movements lacking leadership and clear political purpose, may lead to the establishment of a military dictatorship of the Bonapartist type. All the more so as the military could hardly view with indifference a situation in which they must see a threat to Russia's positions of power and to all the strategic gains she won in the last world war.

What Karl Marx wrote *The 18th Brumaire* about how the various factions of the French bourgeoisie by calling repeatedly on the army to "save society" set the stage for military dictatorship is well worth quoting here, for despite all the differences of time and place (and despite Marx's somewhat old-fashioned imagery), his words still apply:

When barrack and bivouac were periodically thrown upon the head of French society to oppress its brain and keep it quiescent; when sword and musket periodically functioned as judge, administrator, guardian and censor, gendarme and nightwatchman; when military moustache and tunic were periodically acclaimed as the tute-

lary deities of society—was it not inevitable that it should eventually occur to barrack and bivouac, sword and musket, moustache and tunic, to save society once for all on their own initiative, by declaring their own rule supreme and by saving . . . society the trouble of self-government?... Barrack and bivouac, sword and musket, moustache and tunic would be only more apt to hit upon this idea, seeing that they might then expect higher pay for more exalted service".

Fortunately, "military moustache and tunic" have not yet been periodically acclaimed as the tutelary deities of the Soviet Union—although they may still gain that acclaim. Nor is it inevitable or even probable that the formation of a new political consciousness should lag so dangerously behind the revival of mass movements. The gap in consciousness created by Stalinism, it should be repeated, is relative only. Most of the elements needed to fill it are there. Under the shocks of the XX Congress and of the events in Poland and Hungary, and amidst an intense moral-political ferment, it may be filled much more rapidly than it would be otherwise. The great heartsearching and transposition of values, of which the Soviet press offers only minute and purely negative reflections, is going on. The Soviet peoples take the measure of their problems, view critically themselves and the world around them, and are getting ready for another world-shaking historic experience.

A society which has gone through as much as Soviet society has gone through, which has achieved so much and suffered so much, which has seen, within the lifetime of one generation, its whole existence repeatedly shattered, remade and transformed to its very foundations, and which has again and again ascended the highest peaks of hope and heroism and descended to the lowest depths of misery and despair—such a society cannot fail drawing from its rich and uniquely great experience equally great generalising ideas and practical conclusions and embodying these in a programme of action worthy of itself. Nor can it fail to produce sooner or later the men and women strong enough in mind and character—a new "phalanx of heroes reared on the

milk of the wild beast"—to transform ideas into deeds.

No-one, however, can foresee the actual rhythm of historic developments. In moments of great crises spontaneous mass movements do run ahead of political groups, even the most radical ones, and of their programmes and methods of action. So it was in Russia in February, 1917. The workers then found in the Soviets, the Councils of *their* deputies, the institutions within which they learned to harmonize impulse and thought, to test conflicting programmes, and to choose leaders. Of those institutions Stalinist Russia preserved no more than the name and the dead shells. Yet in the memory of the working class the Soviets have survived as *the* instruments of socialist government and self-government, *the* organs of a "workers' state". Even in Hungary, amid all the confusion of revolution and counter-revolution, the insurgent workers hastily formed their Councils. Any political revival in the working class of the U.S.S.R. is almost certain to lead to a revival of the Soviets which will once again become the testing ground of political programmes, groups, and leaders, and the meeting place of spontaneous movements and political consciousnesses.

Whatever the future holds in store, a whole epoch is coming to a close—the epoch in the course of which the stupendous industrial and educational advance of the U.S.S.R. was accompanied by deep political lethargy and torpor in the masses. Stalinism did not and could not create that state of torpor, it spawned on it and sought to perpetuate it, but was essentially its product. Basically, the apathy of the masses resulted from the extraordinary expenditure of all their energies in the great battles of the revolution. The aftermath of the French revolution was likewise one of a deadening lassitude in which the people "unlearned freedom", as Babeuf, who was so close to the masses, put it. Christian Rakovsky, recalling in his exile at Astrakhan in 1928, Babeuf's remark, added that it took the French forty years to relearn freedom. It has taken the Soviet people not less time—but there is no doubt that they are at last relearning freedom.

London, 1st January, 1957.

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