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PART I

Party apparatus

I

The apparatchiki and Soviet political development

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This paper explores a particular dimension of the role of the *apparatchiki* in the development of the Soviet system, particularly in relation to *political* development. To some degree, it extends work presented elsewhere,¹ and relates to an important dimension of Soviet (and other) political development: the role of those selected to occupy a “leading and guiding” position in society, and the limitations they impose on the prospects for political development; these stem indirectly from past recruitment and training practices, further influenced by their more recent experience in office. It is argued that the *apparatchiki* chosen to perform certain tasks at a particular stage of socioeconomic development, and trained to use a range of techniques deemed appropriate at the time, became an obstacle to the development of the political system in the direction to which successive leaders have declared their commitment. More specifically, leaders appointed under Stalin to enforce rapid economic growth, at the expense of developing the society’s political dimension, were recruited for their possession of certain skills and attitudes that were reflected in their administrative behavior and that became the norm in Soviet administrative practice. The “consideration” with which the Brezhnev administration treated its cadres further confirmed inappropriate values in the culture of the administrators.

This feature of the role of the *apparatchiki* has been recognized in the Soviet Union, but little of concrete effect has been done to counteract it. Leaders from Khrushchev on have decried such an administrative style, as part of a rhetorical campaign to create a more responsive and responsible cadre of party and state administrators, but to no avail, as the revelations of the Gorbachev period have revealed. Old habits and attitudes of mind have persisted, to the detriment of the system’s further development. Moreover, theories of culture formation and socialization suggest that the problem will be difficult to eradicate over the short term.

THE FORMATION OF THE APPARAT

The significance of the *apparatchiki* in “building a communist society” was recognized from the very beginning of the enterprise, and is implicit in Lenin’s notion of a party of “professional revolutionaries.” The double metaphor, popular in Stalin’s day, of the military machine, in which an officer corps of administrators imbued with *partiinost’* directed the ground troops in industry, using various institutions as “driving belts,” reflects this view of the importance of leaders. Such a view can certainly be rationalized, even justified, given the vastness of the goal the communists set for themselves, and bearing in mind the unpromising point from which they were starting out. The class that led the industrial and political modernization of Western Europe and North America, the merchants and industrial entrepreneurs (the “bourgeoisie”), was exceedingly weak in pre-revolutionary Russia, and in any case the Bolsheviks were ideologically hostile to the small Russian bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. In the early 1920s, obliged to employ the expertise of former Tsarist administrative officials, Lenin expressed his mistrust by complaining that the cadres of the former apparatus “behave wilfully, and in such a way that they very often work against our measures.” He continued:

At the top we have, I don’t know how many, but I think that, at any rate, only a few thousand, or a maximum of several tens of thousands of our own people. But at the bottom, hundreds of thousands of old bureaucrats [*chinovniki*], acquired from the tsar or from bourgeois society, working partly consciously, partly unconsciously, against us.²

When industrial reconstruction was embarked upon, followed by the drive to create a modern industrial economy, the Bolsheviks’ profound suspicion of the “bourgeois specialists” demanded the creation of a reliable group or stratum to direct the whole undertaking: the replacement of one way of life or culture by another, derived from the ideology.³

Moreover, this applied particularly in the non-Russian ethnic areas of the country, where in the early years “the party, taking into account the paucity – and in a number of cases the total absence – of national cadres, widely adopted the practice of sending communists from the centre and other industrial areas of the country into the localities on party, state and economic work.”⁴ And when the party “boldly promoted to responsible party, state and economic posts workers from the assembly-line and peasants from the plough,”⁵ the chances are that these recruits took with them expectations of their new role that were not fully in

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accord with, say, notions of civic responsibility and public service: they were drawn into such positions by the party in order to serve the party's needs. As Moshe Lewin argues, when the party drew into its middle and even upper ranks semi-educated recruits from among industrial workers and junior government employees, "this important new pool of officials could not fail to make an imprint on the outlook of the party and to penetrate the higher echelons."⁶

Since the development of the administrative system in the 1930s, the *apparatchiki* have possessed enormous power, which accrued as part of what Alex Simirenko identified as the "professionalization" of Soviet society.⁷ In that process, those who claimed an ideologically inspired special insight into society's needs placed themselves in an unchallengeable position *vis-à-vis* the masses. Protected by assertions of superior understanding, they have been able to claim that whatever they did was required for "building communism." This was reinforced by expectations of the central power that they would use that authority to force the attainment of goals set by the center. Certain kinds of behavior, certain attitudes and expectations, backed up by specific organizational principles – notably "democratic centralism" and the banning of factions⁸ – permitted the perpetuation of relationships among individuals and institutions that have proved extraordinarily resilient.

One manifestation is the problem of *podmena* (supplanting), whereby party officials interfere in the work of state and other non-party institutions, whose administrative officers shirk their responsibilities for fear of offending the party officials (and thereby risking party disciplinary action), secure in the knowledge that the party will step in and take operative decisions anyway. The secretary of the Kishinev *gorkom* as recently as February 1985 recounted the case of a citizen who, after days of trying to have a burst water pipe repaired by the appropriate state body, wrote in desperation to the party, which swiftly intervened. "Why," asks the secretary, "was such a trivial emergency sorted out only after half a month and only after the intervention of the party *gorkom*?"⁹ The effect of this, as *Pravda* averred in 1981, is that it "leads these [administrative] workers to stop thinking independently, to be afraid of taking decisions, and to transfer their burden to the shoulders of the branch departments of the party *raikom*, *gorkom* or *obkom*."¹⁰ *Podmena* is so well entrenched that the attitudes that support it are effectively part of the Soviet system's political culture.

A UNIFIED APPARAT?

The role of the *apparatchiki* is closely associated with the party's view of its own role in the Soviet system. This self-image, while containing a

constant core expressed as a very general long-term goal (directing the building of communism), has changed in details, related in part to developments in society that have presented somewhat different immediate tasks over time. This affects the way we identify the *apparatchiki*: who is included? Is there one apparatus, or several? Are the *apparatchiki* “specialists” on one apparatus, or “generalists” who turn their hand to administration in whichever apparatus the party places them? This question also has implications for the practical management of Soviet society.

The evidence is somewhat conflicting, and Western scholars argued that a trend towards specialization in one particular apparatus was becoming the norm in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, Michael Gehlen wrote of a tendency that became established in the post-Stalin years “to allow individuals to work their way up within a single hierarchy rather than to transfer them back and forth between various hierarchies”;¹¹ Michael Frolic likewise argued in 1972 that “crossover between party and non-party posts has decreased, and officials are becoming now more committed to long-term careers which require extra specialization and early career orientations.”¹² Moreover, the CPSU itself from at least the early Brezhnev years has identified workers in the party apparatus as a “profession” and their work as “not an auxiliary speciality.”¹³ However, John Armstrong, Roy Laird and the present author, among others, have identified and documented a tendency to shift personnel from one apparatus to another, from party to state to industrial management and back.¹⁴

Within the present leadership, indeed, more than one career pattern is in evidence. Gorbachev, after Komsomol experience, became established early in his career as a party worker, rising to Stavropol *gorkom* first secretary by the age of thirty-five, and *obkom* first secretary less than four years later. He was brought to Moscow in 1978 to a Central Committee secretaryship, leading to Politburo candidate and full membership.¹⁵ Nikolai Ryzhkov, by contrast, appointed prime minister in September 1985, was praised in Gorbachev’s nomination speech for his “wealth of experience in production, economic and party work,” including the general directorship of the enormous “Uralsmash” machine-building works, the posts of first deputy minister of heavy and transport engineering, and later first deputy chairman of *Gosplan*, followed latterly by a Central Committee secretaryship with broad responsibilities for the economy.¹⁶

This contradictory evidence complicates any assessment of the *apparatchiki* as possessing unitary interests, but it also confirms a sense that the *apparatchiki* belong to what T. H. Rigby characterized as a “common leadership pool.”¹⁷ Some Soviet writers likewise have taken

a broad view, and identified as specific groups within the “managerial apparatus” (*apparat upravleniya*) “cadres of the apparat of the organs of party, state and mass public management,” while noting nevertheless that “organization work in a party, trade union and other public organization is not fully identical to the organizational experience of work in the state administrative apparatus.”¹⁸ The same authors present the results of a study of the *Moskovskii raion* in Leningrad in the early 1960s, showing that the state regularly recruits officers from the party apparatus: or, expressing it more accurately, “The party sends into the leading group of the *ispolkom* [Executive Committee of People’s Councils] apparatus its own best cadres, the leading cadres of the party apparatus.”¹⁹

If there exists such a tendency to put “leaders” through a common basic selection and training procedure, followed by a range of experience in different kinds of managerial or administrative post, they are likely to acquire similar outlooks and expectations, regardless of their concrete experience working in a specific apparatus. They will gain, in Robert C. Tucker’s words, “the ingrained habits of mind, ways of defining and responding to situations, styles of action, common memories, mystique, etc., that collectively constitute the culture of a political movement insofar as a given age cohort of its membership (and leadership) is concerned.”²⁰ Gorbachev, in his main report to the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU, explicitly stated that his strictures against party officials who evaded criticism applied equally to officials of the state and other organizations.²¹ Again, without drawing institutional distinctions, some authors use the indirect device of quoting Lenin, who asked rhetorically at the Eleventh Party Congress, wherein lay the Bolsheviks’ strength and what was lacking among them. He answered that it was not political authority or economic power that they lacked: “It is a clear matter what is missing: what is missing is culture on the part of the stratum of Bolsheviks that manages.”²²

Here lies the central issue. The notion of “building communism” (preceded by “building socialism,” and more recently by creating and “further perfecting” the “developed socialist society”) involved not simply economic development. Indeed, the ultimate goal was (and is) to change the *political* relations between members of society, so that “exploitation” will be replaced by “social homogeneity” and harmony. In the Marxist–Leninist approach, economic development was not seen as an end in itself; and if the bourgeoisie and its former employees might be interested in promoting socio-economic development, they could certainly not be relied on to advance the establishment of “communism.”

However, to some extent this argument has proved to be beside the

point. The Bolsheviks took power in a society that was technically “unripe” for embarking on such an ambitious goal – hence the arguments among Lenin’s colleagues, and between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (and others), about the appropriateness of seizing power, and the subsequent promulgation of the concept of the “premature” revolution. The failure of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries to come to the aid of the Bolsheviks, leading to the decision in the mid-1920s to “build socialism in one country,” threw the country back on its own meager resources; these included the inadequate level of skill and experience, not to mention the absence of general appreciation of and support for the goal, among the general public as well as in the ranks of what remained of the bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, “building socialism” was not simply a technical exercise. It was a feat that had never been attempted and for which the writings of the founding fathers of the ideology provided no blueprint. In addition, and crucially, it was thoroughly intertwined with the power struggles among individual leaders and their followers. These took place in an atmosphere promoted among generations of revolutionaries by a political rhetoric in which the military metaphor impelled politicians to “defeat” their “foes” and eliminate them, not only politically but physically. It is no accident that the Seventeenth Party Congress (1934) was called the “Congress of Victors” (although the term supposedly referred to the victors in the “battle” to establish socialism).

THE LEADER AND THE *APPARATCHIKI*

Stalin’s political needs caused him to recruit his own supporters into the apparatus of both party and state, by carefully manipulating election and appointment procedures in the “circular flow of power” identified by Robert V. Daniels.²³ In the atmosphere that developed in the 1930s, sycophantic support for Stalin and his cult was a *sine qua non* of holding any position in the apparatus, establishing a tradition that has endured to our own times: Gorbachev may choose to project a business-like image of modesty and affability, yet his immediate predecessors, at death’s door though they may have been, were showered with gushing adulation. Brezhnev, six days before his death, was hailed as “a great continuer of the cause of Lenin,” and as a man whose activity was characterized by “the Leninist style in his work – a scientific, creative style, combining a high degree of ‘exactingness’ with a respectful attitude and trust towards people.”²⁴ Two days later, Defence Minister Dmitri F. Ustinov declared that Brezhnev had profoundly revealed current problems of war and peace, and had precisely defined the

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decisive links in the activities of the armed forces and the defense sector of industry for furthering the country's defense capacity.²⁵ Brezhnev's array of awards, including the Lenin Prize for literature for his pedestrian memoirs, and his marshal's uniform which he wore for formal portraits, added to the unreal image. Even the ostensible "modesty" of E. A. Shevardnadze's praise at the Twenty-fifth Party Congress in 1976 is an effective form of flattery, no matter how genuine the kernel of truth within it:

One of Leonid Il'ich's best qualities is that he does not cloak himself in the mantle of a superman, that he does not think and work on everyone's behalf, but, bringing his own great personal contribution to the common cause, creates conditions in which all are able to think creatively; that he possesses the greatest art, that of uniting and directing a collective of highly erudite people, made wiser by experience of life.²⁶

Brezhnev's successor, Andropov, although ostensibly urbane and modest, was quickly surrounded with the appropriate "traditional" rhetoric. Early examples were the speeches at the meeting held on 21 December 1982 to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the USSR, and particularly that of the Bulgarian leader, Todor Zhivkov.²⁷ Even Chernenko, one of the least impressive figures ever to attain high party office, was praised as a "talented organizer of the masses, an ardent propagandist of Marxist-Leninist ideas, an indefatigable fighter for implementing our great party's policy," distinguished by his ability "to fire people with his energy and his innovative approach to any matter, and to rally comrades for amicable collective work."²⁸ All of this indicates a particular mind-set on the part of higher-echelon *apparatchiki*, as well as perhaps revealing something of relationships among them. The cult of the individual, accompanied by affirmations of the collective principle, therefore remains a significant element in the system's culture.

Furthermore, it is clearly established that leading figures still recruit persons of their own stamp, with ripples of purges reaching far down the hierarchy of party offices.²⁹ In addition to his many other activities, Gorbachev must have been considerably preoccupied during 1985 with arranging for like-minded individuals with the appropriate talents to be elected to party committees and offices across the country, in the campaign that preceded the Twenty-seventh Congress in February 1986. This was most visible at the level of the central organs, where he moved with astonishing agility to effect swift changes in the composition of the Politburo, the central Secretariat, and the Council of Ministers, bringing in new members, promoting and sacking long-standing colleagues, and re-allocating portfolios among them.³⁰

There is nothing particularly alarming about the *fact* of this manipulation of recruitment processes. It is certainly no recent discovery that *nomenklatura*, or party control over appointments, is applied as a matter of course in elections to party, state and other offices. It is also quite understandable that a political leader should seek to surround himself with individuals with whom he feels in sympathy, and that they in their turn will seek out and arrange for the appointment of loyal subordinates: it may even be functional to the system's effective operation. Cabinet-building in parliamentary systems follows similar principles, and in the political system of the United States much of the state service changes following the election of a new head of state.³¹ The "problem" occurs in the Soviet Union when it is pointed out that this apparently conflicts with the principle of electivity to party office, one of the elements in "democratic centralism."

However, the willingness to support a particular leader is, and was, only one of the qualities required of the *apparatchik*, albeit at times a critical one. The party official's designated role is not confined to voting in support of the leader and his policies on demand. As the operating arm of party authority in the political system – the individuals on whom the party depends in carrying out its self-appointed functions – the *apparatchiki* are involved, often minutely, in supervising the country's day-to-day administration.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE OF THE APPARATCHIKI

The Bolsheviks' task in "building communism" was multi-faceted, embracing economic development, social change, cultural development, and changes in political relations. It is difficult to prescribe an approach that would guarantee advance on all fronts, and the modest results so far may indicate that the chosen strategy has proved not effective in at least the political dimension. The patent contrast between Soviet reality and the supposed ideological aspirations is too obvious to require elaboration, and the difficulty of reconciling these is manifest in the linguistic and conceptual contortions required of those charged with "explaining" the nature of freedom and democracy, Soviet-style. Indeed, one leading Soviet scholar (who also functions as an *apparatchik* in the central party apparatus) directly challenged the "inverted" official view that the restriction of self-expression for "subversives" in Soviet society represents an enhancement in the level of freedom for others, arguing that "the restriction of freedom remains a fact [that] cannot be screened by arguments about the good of society, etc."³²

In the Bolsheviks' approach to building communism, economic

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development was given the highest priority once the regime was firmly entrenched, and the establishment of a *system* of rule from the late 1920s was built on the assumption of primacy for economic advancement. The planning and ministerial empires that ran the economy came to constitute the core of the political structures. The supposed *democratic* institutions – the Soviets of Toilers’ Deputies – played a subordinate, ceremonial role, while also serving to socialize those drawn into their work: as representative bodies, they displayed no significant development during the period of Stalin’s rule.³³ Even the party lost many of its political functions, becoming by the time of the Second World War a means of imposing discipline: on the newly emerged class of managers whose power had somehow to be brought under political control, on the military officers whose loyalty also had to be secured, and on rank-and-file members of the armed forces, for whom party membership became something of a reward for brave conduct.³⁴

Inducing rapid economic growth, winning a war: all else was subordinated to these priority goals. Discipline was imposed with notorious rigor and hardship. The key function of the *apparatchiki*, supported by or in support of the secret police, was to guarantee political peace in the localities, and to ensure that the demands of the plan were implemented. The tempo was such that there was no room for sentimentality or complacency: leaders were selected for their loyalty to Stalin and his system, and for their ability to “produce the goods,” using whatever methods they found effective. The picture of “little Stalins,” ruling their own fiefdom with crude bullying, is a well established image of how the Stalin system of government operated.³⁵ Plans and instructions were handed down for implementation, and reports were sent back to the center, purportedly indicating satisfactory economic performance and political quiet. The quantitative statistic replaced the assessment of quality, in political life as well as in economic production. For example, the soviets and their deputies were judged by sociological criteria of representation, reflecting more on local administrators’ ability to juggle statistics than on the capacity of those honored in this way to perform genuine representative functions.³⁶ The performance of party propagandists was judged less by their success in developing a degree of popular conviction that would enhance the regime’s legitimacy than by the sheer quantity of talks and lectures delivered or articles written. Hence, the effectiveness of local party officials engaged in “guiding” these processes also came to be assessed according to quantitative indicators, rather than by more sensitive measures of their role performance.³⁷

They were given virtually no training to carry out their complex and