Introduction

What comes after socialism?

PETER RUTLAND

The essays in this volume originate from papers presented at a conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in May 2001 to honor the career of Theodore H. Friedgut, a scholar whose research on the Soviet system was characterized by a scrupulous attention to detail and a willingness to treat Soviet citizens as real people with interests and views of their own, still capable of making choices and exerting some human influence within the rigid and oppressive political system that entrapped them. A concern with the human impact of politics and a willingness to look beyond the facade to study the ways in which politics really works are excellent principles with which to investigate the regimes that have sprung up in the wake of the Soviet collapse.

The end of state socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was a defining moment of the twentieth century. The experience was strikingly different in the various component regions of the Soviet bloc, however. In Central and Eastern Europe the experience was, for the most part, one of liberation. People were swept up by a surge of optimism and a sense that the future would be better than the past – and better than the present. In the former Yugoslavia, the situation degenerated into violence and slaughter on a scale that few could have imagined. In the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union, the political breakdown produced a socioeconomic collapse with few parallels in modern history. As Theodore H. Friedgut documents in his contribution to this volume, post-Soviet Russia has seen rising mortality rates, declining birth rates, and an explosion of symptoms of societal breakdown – from a doubling in the murder rate to the return of previously conquered infectious diseases such as syphilis and drug-resistant tuberculosis. Male life expectancy of 58 means that "a 20-year-old in Russia stands only a 50 percent chance of reaching age 60." "The projected loss of population for Russia in a single generation is thus between 10–20 million persons, a demographic shock reminiscent of the catastrophe of

World War II, from which Russia has never fully recovered, even after two generations."

Friedgut notes that the roots of these social strains lie deep in the Soviet era. The crash modernization program saw a surge in urban population from 64 million in 1960 to 110 million in 1991. This headlong growth outpaced the urban infrastructure of housing, communications, and real employment opportunities required to sustain this urban population for the long term (especially in the remote climes in which many of these new cities were located).

Echoing Friedgut, Marshall Goldman's contribution to this volume shows how the implosion of the planned economy produced an economic vacuum that will take a generation or more for market forces to rebuild. With only a dozen years passed since 1991, it is still too early to say how these profound social and economic effects, the "collateral damage" from the "End of History," will work their way into the political regimes, which will eventually stabilize in the countries of the region. But who would dare predict the future when the recent past has been so unpredictable?

The collapse of the Soviet Union came as a great surprise to the majority of social scientists, who had grown accustomed to the existence of the USSR as an integral part of the modern world as they understood it. Political theorists typically focused on the competition between liberalism and Marxism, with Soviet socialism being the dominant example of the latter. Students of international relations had taken the Cold War as a given for 40 years. Courses in comparative politics and comparative economic systems saw the Soviet-style, one-party system as a viable, even successful alternative path to modernity – one that was being taken, it seemed, by an increasing number of countries even as late as the 1970s, with the projection of Soviet influence into Africa under Leonid Brezhnev. Although many scholars had pointed to the inefficiencies of the Soviet system, and some were adamant that it was doomed to collapse, no one predicted the speed or manner of its demise.

It will not be easy to shake off these analytical frameworks and habits and it will probably take a generation or more for a lasting new perspective to emerge from the rubble of the Soviet collapse. The chapters in this book examine the developments since 1991 and represent a preliminary report based on the evidence currently available. The approach is inductive rather than deductive: the authors seek to establish facts, to extricate trends, and to look for patterns among the data that are now being gathered. It is too early to launch grand theories based on deductive categories. The main framework hitherto used for such efforts at generalization is of "transition" – the assumption that the political events of

the past decade are best understood as a movement toward systems of liberal democracy and a market economy. Such a teleological approach is easy to grasp and comforting in its implicit assumption that current troubles are but stumbling blocks on the road to a brighter future. This approach, however, has triggered fierce objections from analysts who denied that events on the ground conformed to such a transition trajectory and who denied that we can know the parameters of the end-state toward which these countries are allegedly headed. Not least of the problems was the fact that half of the countries involved did not seem to be discernably in transition to the anticipated future: they are obstinately mired in an unattractive present, if not regressing toward an even less desirable state of affairs.

What, then, are the lessons of the post-Soviet period? The triumphalist rhetoric with which the collapse of Soviet socialism was greeted in the West has gradually given way to a weary acceptance that these societies are still somehow structurally different. Nevertheless, the developments of the 1990s are probably more positive than negative for most of the countries of the region. The scariest, worst-case scenarios failed to materialize. There was no return to communism in Russia. Irresponsible nationalists did not take power in Moscow, as feared by the "Weimar Russia" school.[1] There was no resurrection of the Soviet empire inside or beyond the boundaries of the former USSR. Few would have predicted, say, in 1989, that places such as Azerbaijan or Kyrgyzstan would emerge as sovereign nations within a few years. But so they did – and they have become, for all intents and purposes, permanent fixtures of the international landscape. Civil wars were confined to the flash points that erupted in 1988–92 and did not spread elsewhere. There was no significant leakage of nuclear weapons from the colossal Soviet stockpile, thanks in large part to the fact that they were removed from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.[2]

This book focuses on developments in Russia, both specifically and in comparative perspective, a choice that reflects Russia's size and importance relative to the other component parts of the Soviet Union. It also reflects a persisting bias in the way academics cover the region. It is easier to collate information from a single location, and the typical starting point for such research is inevitably Moscow. At the same time, a striking and most welcome development of the past decade has been the

[1] Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein, "The Weimar/Russia Comparison," *Post-Soviet Affairs,* no. 13 (1997), pp. 252–83.

[2] This is cited as the major achievement of U.S. foreign policy in the decade by former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002).

emergence of a group of indigenous Russian scholars and observers who have gradually displaced Western commentators as the main source of information and analysis on developments inside Russia. Their grasp of the facts on the ground is matched by their analytical rigor and creativity, and – even more surprisingly – by their objectivity and ability to present their findings for a Western audience. A clutch of such scholars is represented in the pages of this volume.

Regrettably, equivalent teams of researchers have been slower to emerge in the other states of the former Soviet Union. This partly reflects the fact that the Soviet Union concentrated academic talent and resources in Moscow. It also indicates how tough life is for independent scholars in most of the non-Russian republics. Economic opportunities to sustain their work are few, and the political and personal costs of publishing material critical of the status quo can be severe. Scholarship in these countries has become heavily polarized between defenders and opponents of the incumbent regime, with precious few observers able to occupy the middle ground.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The countries of the former Soviet Union have experienced a dramatic and disorienting political transformation over the past decade. Powerful institutions that had ruled people's lives for decades disappeared almost overnight – not only state structures such as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Gosplan, but also institutions that shaped social behavior down to its roots, such as the Young Pioneers or the practice of queuing for goods. Some feisty if unstable new institutions sprang up in their place: an elected parliament and president, a burgeoning capitalist class, markets, a free press, and even (perhaps) a free citizenry.

But not all the old institutions vanished. For all the debate about Russia as a fledgling democracy, it is important to bear in mind that two central pillars of the Soviet regime – the security services and the military – remain virtually unreconstructed as crucial pillars of the new political order.

The secret police (reborn in Russia as the Federal Security Service, or FSB) managed to preserve itself and carve out a niche in the new democratic market economy. Their information-gathering skills were handy in political campaigns and boardroom battles, and their access to legal (and not so legal) means of violence made them powerful competitors for mafia gangs in the burgeoning market for security services.[3]

[3] Federico Varese, *The Russian Mafia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Especially since the accession to the presidency in December 1999 of Vladimir Putin, for 17 years a member of the State Security Committee (KGB), it has been even more obvious that the FSB is one of the main instruments of the new political regime in Russia.

Another Soviet legacy institution, the Russian army, saw its budget slashed and was forced to withdraw its troops from Eastern Europe. But the military slogs on, unreformed, as evidenced by the continuing horror of the two-year draft despite the repeated promises of Presidents Yeltsin and Putin to introduce a professional army. This unreformed military is another of the main pillars of the contemporary political regime. The army put Boris Yeltsin into power by refusing to back the August 1991 coup and kept him in power by agreeing to crush the parliamentary insurrection in October 1993. (Yeltsin "rewarded" the generals for their loyalty by turning a blind eye to their corruption and by allowing them to invade Chechnya in December 1994.) The army was unleashed against Chechnya for a second time in the fall of 1999, and this was the single most important factor ensuring Putin's accession to the presidency.

While political institutions were dying, adapting, or being created anew, a similar radical transformation was under way among the individual persons who made up the political and economic elite. It is difficult to calibrate whether the rate of social transition was faster or slower than the rate of institutional transformation. In Russia itself, the top stratum of the political elite was discredited by its involvement in the August 1991 coup and promptly left the political stage. (Most of them were anyway far past retirement age, given the gerontocratic structure of the Brezhnev era bureaucracies.) According to the careful calculations of David Lane and Cameron Ross, about one-third of the post-1991 Russian elite held some sort of position in pre-1991 elite institutions.[4] Is the glass of elite transformation half empty or half full? Is two-thirds turnover a lot or a little? Surely having two-thirds of elite posts held by newcomers represents a tremendous break from the closed, stagnant elite of Soviet times. On the other hand, it remains true that most of Russia's current leaders were raised, trained, and selected through the ranks of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) or organizations closely monitored by it, such as the Komsomol or the Academy of Sciences. The Soviet elite quickly learned the new rules of the electoral game (and rewrote some of them to their advantage). As Nikolai Petrov notes (this volume), "The results of the first (1989) and second

[4] They examined the biographical data on about 800 officials from the 1991–5 political and economic elite and interviewed 116 of them. David Lane and Cameron Ross, *The Transition from Communism to Capitalism: Ruling Elites from Gorbachev to Yeltsin* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1999).

(1990) elections profoundly affected the Soviet nomenklatura, leading, however, to its modification rather than its demise."

Comparable studies of elite turnover have not yet been done, to my knowledge, in the other ex-Soviet states. Looking at the presidential ranks in Central Asia and the Caucasus, one sees that in nearly all cases the incumbent in 2003 is the last top leader from the Soviet era. Armenia is the only exception in not having a post-independence president with a CPSU background. Azerbaijan and Georgia each had a brief (and disastrous) interregnum under a post-communist nationalist leader. Belarus certainly breaks the pattern, with a former collective farm chairman catapulted to the presidency, in the person of the erratic and dictatorial Alyaksandr Lukashenka. (This should serve to remind us that change is not necessarily a good thing.)

THE PHANTOM OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy has been the central organizing concept for the political evolution of the former socialist regimes – and the world in general – over the past decade. Yet it has proved to be maddeningly elastic and nuanced. As Alexander J. Motyl notes in his chapter "Communist Legacies and Post-Communist Trajectories," applying the Freedom House criteria of civil and political liberties produces three broad groupings of countries: those that are unequivocally democracies, those that are not, and those in the middle. Unfortunately, that middle group includes the largest countries in the region: Russia and Ukraine. These two states are five to ten times larger than their neighbors in the former Soviet Union, so the gravitational pull of their political, economic, and military policies on other countries of the region is considerable.

Is Russia a democracy? There is no simple answer to this question.[5] The consensus view in Washington is to duck the question: no one in U.S. government circles seems prepared to answer with an explicit yes or no. Thus, for example, Michael McFaul suggests that Russia as of 1996 was as democratic as it could reasonably be expected to be.[6] Tom Bjorkman, the former top Russia analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, argues that Russia under Putin is ready for a new wave of democratic reforms

[5] Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[6] Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001).

to engage a population that Bjorkman claims is committed to democratic values.[7]

At one level, Russia has on paper met the formal criteria of democracy. Its president, parliament, and regional leaders are subject to popular elections involving more than one candidate and with results that are not a foregone conclusion. However, when one digs deeper, one realizes that the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000 involved the legitimation of an incumbent and not the freely contested selection of a leader from a range of alternatives. And the parliamentary elections, while regular, lively, and contested, do not really count because the parliament does not form the government and is limited in its capacity to hold the president and government accountable.

This leaves only the regional elections as a forum in which leaders with real power may be removed from office through the ballot box. Nikolai Petrov's exhaustive data on Russian electoral history reveal that, indeed, in the 1995–7 period, fully half of the incumbent governors who ran for reelection were defeated. However, in the 1999–2001 cycle, two-thirds of governors won reelection. Moreover, once in power, these regional bosses faced few constraints on their power from regional legislatures or elected municipal officials.

One important potential source of pluralism in Russia is the federal structure it inherited from the Soviet Union. However, Oksana Oracheva (this volume) shows that federalism has failed to serve as a buttress for nascent democracy in Russia. The reforms that Putin introduced soon after taking office in 2000, ostensibly aimed at creating a more rationally structured federalism, turned out to be more narrowly focused on boosting the power of the center. Putin backed off from challenging authoritarian leaders in the regions, a shift confirmed by the July 2002 Constitutional Court decision allowing regional leaders to run for more than two terms. With such leaders left in place and allowed to flout or undermine federal laws on their own turf, there is no point talking about a law-based division of powers between center and periphery. Equally depressing for democrats has been the ill-defined and constantly shifting structure and role of the Federation Council, the upper chamber of parliament that is supposed to represent the views of Russia's diverse regions. Under both Yeltsin and Putin, building democratic institutions took second place to political maneuverings aimed at consolidating the power of the president.

[7] Tom Bjorkman, *Russia's Road to Deeper Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003).

At the national level, one wonders whether Russia really has competitive elections in any meaningful sense, if one adopts the minimalist, Schumpeterian definition of elections as a chance to change one's rulers. Russia's elections, even though they are formally competitive, serve to disempower and disenchant the electorate. Andrey Ryabov (this volume) goes a step further, provocatively suggesting that a "negative consensus" exists between elite and society around the principle of mutual noninterference. Ordinary citizens accept whatever leader the elite comes up with and agree not to disrupt or attempt to overthrow the political regime; in return, the state does not expect them to obey laws or pay taxes.

The party system – or lack thereof – adds to the confusion in society. Parties form and reform between elections, while individual deputies switch sides in a constant Brownian motion, leaving voters confused as to who stands for what. Russia does not have a party *system* as such despite having regular elections and formal freedoms of speech and association.

Ryabov sees the *potential* for a party system to emerge from the existence of three broad ideological positions among the Russian electorate: the friends of Western-style reform, the opponents of change, and a third bloc of "traditionalists" who reject both the first two alternatives. Putin has skillfully tapped into this third group, transcending the polarity of reformers versus reactionaries, which had been Yeltsin's main political gambit in 1996. The crucial problem, however, is that decisive power rests in the hands of the president, and neither Boris Yeltsin nor his anointed successor Vladimir Putin was willing to connect himself to a specific political party. Rather, they preferred to adopt the stance of a head of state who is "above politics." This was not an irrational whim on their part: both men feared that forming such a party might constrain their power and prevent them from achieving their personal agenda for Russia. For both men this agenda was broadly similar: forcing the country to take the tough steps necessary to remain a competitive state in the new post–Cold War world.

The situation is only slightly better in Ukraine. As Ilya Prizel shows in his essay "Ukraine's Hollow Decade," Ukraine had certain advantages back in 1991: no burden of foreign debt, no cities in the far north to be subsidized, and no violent ethnic conflict such as Chechnya. Yet an entrenched elite determined to cling to power has squandered the opportunity to build a new polity. Ukraine, like Russia, is ruled by a super-president, Leonid Kuchma, who puts himself above party politics, although unlike in Russia there was a competitive turnover of power in 1994. The Ukrainian party system is more robust, with nationalists