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**Political Economy  
and  
Soviet Socialism**

**Alec Nove**



## Political Economy and Soviet Socialism

First published in 1979, *Political Economy and Soviet Socialism* is an integrated selection of papers written between 1967 and 1979, which offers a unique insight into some important and controversial issues. Professor Nove discusses the ideas of some of the leaders of the Russian revolution (Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin), the political economy of socialism and the problems of the contemporary USSR. The author addresses the role of traditional Russian ideas in shaping the Soviet Union's social structure and the conceptual problems involved in defining its ruling stratum - whether or not it is a class. He also considers the criteria by which it is reasonable to judge Soviet reality, the performance and prospects of agriculture in communist-ruled Europe, the ability of the Eastern bloc to tackle problems of inflation and the obstacles to economic reform. Looking at the important and original developments of economic thought in the USSR and Eastern Europe, Professor Nove dissects the ideas of the 'new leftists' concerning the role of market forces under a feasible socialism. These papers offer essential reading for students of politics, economics and comparative social structure.



# Political Economy and Soviet Socialism

Alec Nove



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1979  
by George Allen & Unwin Ltd

This edition first published in 2011 by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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A Library of Congress record exists under ISBN: 0043350372

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-69207-6 (set)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-68242-8 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-203-80279-3 (ebk)

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GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN

Boston

Sydney

First published in 1979

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GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
40 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LU

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Nove, Alec

Political economy and Soviet socialism.

1. Russia - Social conditions - 1917 - Collected works

309.1'47'084      HN523      78-40547

ISBN 0-04-335037-2

Type set in 10 on 11 point Plantin by  
Trade Linotype Limited, Birmingham  
and printed in Great Britain  
by  
Billing & Sons Ltd, Guildford, London and Worcester

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## Glossary

<b>ASSR</b>	Autonomous soviet socialist republic (national subdivision of a union republic)
<i>Baza</i> (pl. <i>bazy</i> )	Supply base, storehouse
<i>Glavk</i> (pl. <i>glavki</i> )	Chief department, e.g. of an economic ministry
<b>Gosplan</b>	State Planning Committee (Commission)
<b>Gossnab</b>	State Committee on Material-Technical Supplies
<i>Khozraschet</i>	'Economic' (or 'business') accounting, profit-and-loss accounting
<i>Kolkhoz</i>	Collective farm (literally 'collective enterprise'). The term also covers some fisheries co-operatives
<b>MTS</b>	Machine Tractor Station
<i>Obkom</i>	Party committee of <i>oblast'</i> (province)
<i>Obyedineniye</i> (plural: <i>Obyedineniya</i> )	(Industrial) association, usually formed by an amalgamation or merger, but sometimes replacing a <i>glavk</i>
<b>RSFSR</b>	Russian republic (Russia proper)
<i>Raykom</i>	Party committee of <i>Rayon</i> (district)
<i>Snabsbyt</i>	Supply and disposal (organs)
<i>Sbyt</i>	Disposals (organs)
<i>Sovkhoz</i>	State farm (literally 'soviet enterprise')
<i>Sovnarkhoz</i>	(Regional) economic council
<i>Tsentrosoyuz</i>	Central union of (retail) co-operative societies
<i>Valuta</i>	(Foreign) currency, usually 'hard' currency
<i>Zayavka</i>	Request (indent), e.g. for supplies

## Notes About Notes

All references to *books* are to author and date of publication of the edition used: e.g. Stalin (1952). Details of title will be found in the list of references at the end of the book.

In the case of *periodical and newspaper articles in Russian*, the reference will be in brackets in the text, usually without the title of the article (for instance: *Pravda*, 21 October 1971). The following abbreviations will be used for periodicals:

<i>EkG</i>	<i>Ekonomicheskaya gazeta</i> (as present weekly)
<i>EKO</i>	<i>Ekonomika i organizatsiya promyshlennogo proizvodstva</i> (usually six copies a year, Novosibirsk)
<i>EkMM</i>	<i>Ekonomika i matematicheskiye metody</i>
<i>Kom</i>	<i>Kommunist</i>
<i>MSn</i>	<i>Material'no-tekhnicheskoye snabzheniye</i>
<i>MEMO</i>	<i>Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya</i>
<i>PEG</i>	<i>Promyshlenno-ekonomicheskaya gazeta</i>
<i>PKh</i>	<i>Planovoye khozyaistvo</i>
<i>VEk</i>	<i>Voprosy ekonomiki</i>

The statistical annual *Narodnoye khozyaistvo SSSR* is abbreviated as *NKh*, followed by the date (e.g. *NKh*, 1973).

## Introduction

The papers printed in the present book have in common the fact that they are about Russia, past and present, and/or about socialist theory and practice. They were written at various dates in the past ten years. To my own surprise, there is very little overlap between them. In preparing them for this collection I made a few amendments here and there, brought some statistics up to date, put in some cross-references and mentioned certain relevant books published since the original was written. But with very few exceptions the papers have been reprinted unaltered. I am most grateful that permission to reprint has been so readily given.

Would the papers have been different had I written them today? Of course some would. Thus the long quotation from Rakovsky which I have included in 'Trotsky and the left opposition' *would* have been included in 'Is there a Ruling Class in the USSR?', had I got around to reading Rakovsky in the original at the time the former paper was being written. The article on 'Planners' Preferences' was written at a time when economic reforms were promulgated, and these have been largely frustrated, and so it should be read in conjunction with 'The Politics of Economic Reform'. The paper on Bukharin was written before the appearance of the excellent political biography by Stephen Cohen, and its text would certainly have reflected my reading of this biography. The discussion on 'Market Socialism' would certainly have drawn on important ideas expressed recently by Włodzimierz Brus and Radoslav Selucky, among others, as well as on subsequent work by Bettelheim himself, but the essentials of the argument would not have been greatly affected.

My 'philosophy' for the study of the Soviet Union and of socialism is set out, by implication at least, in the last article in this collection, on 'Criteria'. It stresses the importance of a realistic approach to the limits of the possible, in the past and in the present. Such limits exist, and to point to them is not to attack either Marxism or any other doctrine. It may be that highly desirable actions, or institutional arrangement, or policy, happen to be impracticable. One is reminded of an old story from the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon ordered that church bells be rung in every town entered by French troops during a campaign in Germany. His troops march into a town and – no bells rang. He called in the Burgomaster. 'Why no bells?' exclaimed the Emperor. 'Well, your imperial majesty,' replied the Burgomaster, 'there are five reasons. The first is that we have no bells.' 'Stop!' shouted the Emperor. We too should remember that it is little use discussing whether something would be (or would have been) advisable if, in cold fact, it could not be done. It is also important to note, as

Kolakowski recently had occasion to point out, that certain objectives could prove to be mutually incompatible, which is one reason why the outcome of human effort is so often at variance with the original objectives of the actors.

The author is well aware of the fact that there are many legitimate and opposed viewpoints on many of the questions discussed here. Debate is highly desirable. Out of argument and contradiction comes a closer proximation to understanding – or so we must hope. But we must all avoid the temptation to substitute eloquence or verbiage for hard-headed analysis. Let us cite three assertions which could be made:

- (1) Most of the working class favoured Trotsky in 1923.
- (2) Most of the working class was opposed to Trotsky in 1923.
- (3) Most of the working class was passive and did not care one way or the other in 1923.

*All* the above statements are ‘disqualified’ as academic discourse, unless, of course, their author(s) give reasons for their answer. And there could, needless to say, be more than one defensible answer, and some of the evidence may be contradictory.

In the days when I was a student, Professor Laski used to warn repeatedly against analyses in which ‘the conclusion is in the premises’. One must not eliminate problems by defining them out of the way. This is not by any means an attack on any one ‘ideology’. Thus, as is made clear in the paper on economic thought, illegitimate abstraction from the relevant aspects of reality is a disease to which mainstream ‘bourgeois’ economics is particularly prone, as are also those Marxist fundamentalists for whom socialism represents (by definition) the elimination of all the perplexing contradictions which beset all existing industrial societies. The planner with perfect foresight and perfectly competitive markets are both impossible, if only because, as Loasby has been pointing out, freedom of choice implies ignorance about what others’ choices will be.

Of course it is easy to criticise others, more difficult to live up to one’s own academic principles. I can only hope that I have done so.

Finally, I would like to thank Elizabeth Hunter for invaluable help in putting these papers into ‘printable’ shape.

Part One

# History of Russia



# I

## History, Hierarchy and Nationalities:

### Some Observations on the Soviet Social Structure

The notes that follow are essentially a series of hypotheses, discussion points, relevant (in my view) to the origins and nature of the Soviet social structure. It is not my intention to assert that any of the points to be made below represent *the* explanation of a complex phenomenon. For example, the historical past of Russia obviously has *some* bearing on the present, both in forming the ideas of the rulers as to the behaviour appropriate to rulers, and in affecting the willingness of the ruled to accept what others, brought up in another environment, might well regard as intolerable. However, I am well aware that historical tradition is a many-sided thing, that it includes both Peter the Great and Tsarevich Alexei, Bakunin and Pobedonostev, Stenka Razin and Nikon, Dostoevsky and Gorky, to name at random a few personalities unquestionably part of Russia's past and unquestionably different in many essential respects. This being so, no argument is made concerning the *inevitability* of Bolshevism or of any part of the social structure of today, even while its specifically Russian background can hardly be discounted.

Let us begin by discussing the relationship between state and rank, between service to the state (*gosudarstvo*, or *gosudar'*) and status. It is, of course, a commonplace of Russian history that Ivan IV largely destroyed the autonomous territorially based power of the old hereditary nobility, that gradually the descendants of the *boyar* families became merged with the serving-men, the *dvoryane*, who held land on condition of, and as a reward for, service, and that two types of landholding became in effect one, linked formally and informally to the duty of service to the state and to the monarch who embodies the state. Peter the Great finally imposed universal service on all the gentry – if 'gentry' is at this period the right word. (Many of the *dvoryane* in the seventeenth century were still common soldiers and

*Reprinted from Soviet Studies, vol. 21, no. 1, July 1969.*

*\*This paper was written for background discussion purposes in connection with work being done at the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, University of Glasgow, in the field of Soviet social structure, on a grant from the Social Science Research Council.*

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petty civil servants.) Peter formalised the gentry's obligations, divided them into fourteen civil and military ranks, with the duty of service for life. The reasons for this stress on universal service, and for the serfdom which was its economic basis, have also been widely discussed by Russian historians: a sparsely populated area, vulnerable to foreign foes and with an open eastern frontier, a weak economy, a low level of culture and of technique, and so the need for great efforts to maintain a viable state. Along with this went a lack of spontaneous social forces: a traditionalist and illiterate merchant class, great shortage of educated officials, virtually no literature. (It is extraordinary how very few works written in Russian in the period up to 1800 can be read with any pleasure or interest at all, save for antiquarian or philological interest, and this in the age of Racine, Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, Milton, Sheridan.)

In no other European country did the state or the monarch so totally dominate the social scene. Of course, the actions of Ivan against the landed nobility did have parallels elsewhere: Louis XI of France acted similarly a century earlier. In France too the nobility was reduced to courtiers, or to the king's senior civil and military servants. But there was much less total dependence on the king, and the hereditary nobility of France had much wider cultural and political horizons than the *dvoryane*. The French autocracy tolerated, indeed was based upon, a far more developed and more autonomous social life in town and country. In Germany multiple centres of power and prestige developed early, with the emergence of a multitude of independent rulers, large, small and tiny, with a wide variety of internal arrangements (some, as in Prussia, also based on state service and on serfdom). In Poland the *szlachta* (gentry) was exceedingly assertive of its independence of the (elective) monarchy, with some very unfortunate consequences for that country.

However, the really significant point for us is, in my view, that the service-to-the-state idea lasted well into the nineteenth century. The gentry were freed from compulsory service by Peter III (1761), but in practice most of them continued to work in the civil and military spheres for the tsar. Those who did not had no role in society, and were the 'superfluous men' who figured prominently in Russian novels of this period. At the time of Pushkin and later it was still the custom to use the word *sluzhit'* (to serve) as a synonym for being in the service of the state. Only much later did work for some private employer 'qualify' for this designation, from which the modern word *sluzhashchii* (office worker) derives. The legal division into ranks or estates (*sosloviya*) survived until 1917.

The powers of the tsar and of his officials over the everyday life of the gentry even in the nineteenth century were remarkably tight by any standards familiar in the West. To take just a small example,

Count Benkendorff, head of Nicholas I's gendarmeries, was responsible for the behaviour of the gentry in St Petersburg, in the same sense in which the provost-marshal is responsible for the behaviour of officers in the British army. Pushkin's letters contain a reference to some *dvoryane* young men arrested and expelled from the capital for making a noise (*shikanie*) in a theatre. (Pushkin, 1887, vol. 7, p. 42.) Imagine such an occurrence in London, Paris or Vienna in 1830! Pushkin even after his political rehabilitation had to apologise profusely to Benkendorff for leaving Moscow for the country without permission, and he was repeatedly denied the right to travel abroad. One of his biographers chose to emphasise the vital role of rank in Russia in the following words, written fifty years after Pushkin's death: 'Our society is so arranged that the greatest artist without rank appears in official society to be below the lowest clerk', and he went on to assert that Pushkin 'was given the rank of Kammeryunker so that his [beautiful] wife could be invited to balls.' (Vol. 1, p. xvi.) It is worth noting the implication that heredity itself did not convey much status.

In an imaginary conversation, a Spaniard questions the author (Pushkin) and puzzles over the meaning of the word 'aristocracy' in the Russian context. 'It seems that your *dvoryane* are socially equal and there is no restriction on entry into this class. Then on what does your so-called aristocracy rest?' The reply asserts that the ancient Russian *dvoryanstvo* fell and became a kind of third estate. Some of those who lay claim to aristocratic status have recently been ennobled, but 'we are proud not of the glory of our forefathers but the rank held by some silly uncle'. (ibid., vol. 4, pp. 359-60.) Elsewhere Pushkin emphasises that entry into the *dvoryanstvo* 'is accessible to all'. Military and state service and university degrees easily promote into it men of other classes. (ibid., vol. 5, p. 99.) It is interesting that Pushkin took the view that this was a good thing.

'The aristocracy after Peter contemplated limiting the antocracy; but luckily the cleverness of the sovereigns triumphed . . . and the form of government remained untouched. This saved us from monstrous feudalism and so the people were not divided by an unclimbable wall from the *dvoryane* . . . Otherwise [the *dvoryane*] would have eliminated the possibility of freeing the serfs, limited the number of *dvoryane* and closed off access to state rank and honour to members of other estates.' (ibid., p. 12.)

It followed from this that Pushkin regarded the freeing of *dvoryane* from compulsory service in 1761 as a 'disgrace'. Yet he also felt that lack of the hereditary principle was a grave source of weakness. In some of his historical works he wrote (in French) that the lack of *de facto* hereditary nobility represents '*moyens d'entourer le despotisme de stipendiaires dévoués et d'étouffer toute opposition et haute indé-*

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*pendance. L'hérédité de la haute noblesse est une garantie de son indépendance. Le contraire est nécessairement moyen de tyrannie ou plutôt d'un despotisme lâche.* (ibid., p. 87.) In some very subtle historical commentary, he traces this to the fact that boyars did not become feudal, that 'they lived at the monarch's court, did not fortify their estates, did not base themselves on the small family, did not fight the monarch, did not sell their services to the towns; they were at once courtiers and comrades, formed factions, counted rank by seniority'. (ibid., pp. 85–6.) The boyars and hereditary seniority (*mestnichestvo*) were liquidated under the pressure of the petty (i.e. non-aristocratic) *dvoryanstvo*, finally by Peter.

So not only was the status of the *dvoryane* originally one of a hereditary service class – though this status could also be acquired by promotion above a certain civil or military rank – but in their social life they were subject to supervision, even tutelage. The emergence of an intelligentsia of non-gentry status must have been a source of annoyance to officialdom, as it did not fit the normal categories. The label attached to them – *raznochintsy* ('other ranks') – expressed this perplexity.

As the nineteenth century wore on, these various class and estate (*soslovie*) distinctions were becoming modified. Thus the close identification between the civil and military service and the *landed* gentry, which was certainly a fact under Catherine, was only very partially the case under, say, Alexander II, when the politically influential *chinovniki* could and did take a view which did not reflect any personal interest in land. Indeed, their *class* nature is something of a puzzle for the analyst. They were not feudal, even more clearly not capitalist. Were they above classes, were they themselves a class?

But it is misleading to look at the gentry and its role *vis-à-vis* the state only from their own point of view or that of the monarch. Equal interest attaches to the folk view of autocracy and gentry. Aware though one is of the danger of generalisation, the following points do seem relevant to our theme and to have some validity.

First, the peasants until the twentieth century recognised the legitimacy and stood in semi-religious awe of the tsar. The many rebellions were directed, supposedly, at the gentlemen-nobles who withheld the truth from the tsar and twisted his will to their own selfish ends. Authority was necessary, otherwise there would be chaos (*chelovek cheloveku volk; homo hominem lupus*) and foreigners would come and seize land and people. In the 1890s, as I recall my father telling me, Russian peasant conscripts sang:

The Turkish sultan wrote to us,  
He wrote to the Russian Tsar,  
I will invade your lands  
And come myself to live in Russia (*sam v Rossiyu zhit' poidu*).

Instinctively, the bulk of the peasants distrusted the gentry's acquisition of rights. Ivan the Terrible became a folk hero even though (or because?) he shortened the nobility by a head. The 'gentry's liberty' from service was felt to be, and was, a licence to ill-treat the serfs to a greater degree. The tsar could rely, whenever he wished, on support from below against the gentry. Only Peter, by challenging too many of the established traditions, including religious ones (*pravoslavnyi tsar*', and all that goes with it), evoked substantial personal hostility among many peasants.

The peasants had a duty to those who had a duty to the tsar and the state. This was, after all, the original rationale of serfdom. The continuance of duty to the lord after the freeing of the gentry from the obligation of service was deeply resented. Yet the feeling of some sort of duty to obey constituted authority ran deep, and found expression in two very similar episodes, one in Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*, the other in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*: rebellious peasants, faced with a determined and bold officer, not only submit but also tie up and hand over their own leaders.

The idea, then, of an autonomous 'gentleman' engaged in his own affairs, and challenging instead of serving constituted authority, ran counter to the folk traditions. A merchant was different. He had the right and duty to buy and sell, and might be regarded as a bold and resolute chap (*molodoi kupets, udaloi molodets* of many folk-songs) in this not very lofty calling. But that educated people should not 'serve' was a new and shocking thought. The unfortunate men of the sixties discovered this, in the course of their heroic and futile 'going to the people'. This attitude may well persist today, since the party conservatives can appeal to the folk against the 'disloyal' literary intelligentsia, and the whole notion of socialist realism can be said to be based less on Marx than on the old idea of universal service to the state, from which writers should be no more exempt than anyone else.

In order to ensure this service, and to fight effectively against subversion from within and from without, the tsar's officials devised controls over expression and movement which, once again, contrasted sharply with what had become normal in Europe in the nineteenth century. I have before me a British passport issued in 1900 (and signed personally, it seems, by Lord Salisbury). Passports were rare in those days, but Russia required one. It bears numerous stamps, showing not only entry and exit (complete with an exit visa) into and out of the empire, but also registration in the appropriate police districts of St Petersburg and Moscow. The parallels between the regulations of the 1840s and those of the 1950s are doubtless familiar to any reader of the reissue of the work of the Marquis de Custine. The system had changed but little by the reign of Nicholas II. The practice of *propiska* (registration, with residence permits) for Russians in Russian cities

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existed then, and it exists today. The practice of requiring a *kolkhoznik* to obtain a species of leave pass before he leaves his village, which so shocks Western observers, has parallels not only with serfdom but also with the situation after 1861, when the peasant society, the *mir*, had the right and duty of regulating the movement of its members.

Of course, it would be wrong to assert that these or any other restrictions on human behaviour today followed inevitably from the practices of tsarist gendarmes; only that the country was to some extent predisposed or conditioned to such arrangements. Similarly, as a Czech communist once sadly remarked, the behaviour of men in authority, whether communist or no, is always in some degree affected by the memories of how men in authority used to behave in the society in question in the past, 'and the further east you go . . .'.

But let us return to the question of social status and its relationship to service to the state, and for present purposes the party machine and the state can be seen as an integral part of the *gosudarstvo* (and the Politburo as the collegiate head of the real state). Under the tsars, almost until the twentieth century, it could be said that the vast social role of the state was in large part a consequence (and in some degree the cause) of the weakness of autonomous social and economic entities. This was being corrected by industrial advance, by the creation of large Russian limited companies and banks, cartels and peasant co-operatives, the growth of professional and *zemstvo* institutions. The revolution, and ultimately the achievement of 'socialism' in the sense of all-round nationalisation and collectivisation, made of almost everyone either a state employee or a collective peasant (*kolkhoznik*). The practice of allowing only one 'official' professional or artistic association, and of nominating its controllers, further reduced spontaneous activity and the number of organisations within which status could be acquired. The Soviet Union is a country in which the civil and military service can be said to dominate the lives of most men, because they, like the *dvoryane* of Peter's time, are usually in full-time state employment.

This state of affairs carries with it not only certain specifically Russian features, but also the general, universal logic of bureaucracy. The word is not used in a pejorative sense. Bureaucracies are necessary and play a major role in all countries. The point is that in the USSR, despite distinctions between party, government, social organisations etc., there is an important sense in which all are part of one great single hierarchy. The common link is the system of *nomenklatura*. This is the great list of appointments of any importance in any sphere of Soviet life and a list of persons fit to hold them, together with the designation of the party committee in whose patronage the given appointment is. The party's personnel departments assign people to jobs in all the sub-hierarchies. It is as if the establishment division of

the British Treasury guided or approved all appointments, from the editorship of a provincial newspaper or a trade union secretaryship in Scotland up to a ministerial appointment and down to a managerial post in the Midlands.

So universal an 'establishment' carries with it certain logical consequences. As in any civil service or army, status becomes very closely linked with rank. Exceptions happen, of course. But rank-consciousness is inevitable, and tends to pervade society to a greater extent if so many are in fact state employees. Inevitably, not only salaries but also material entitlements and 'perks' become attached to rank. A British civil servant who reaches the rank of Assistant Secretary will have his own secretary, a room of defined size, better access to the car pool, a carpet . . . The rules are usually made not only to ensure that promotion receives its due reward, but also so that the reward is not excessive and power is not abused: thus the carpet must not exceed  $x$  square feet, and so on. It is quite logical to expect detailed regulation of this character within any bureaucratic hierarchy. If all the society or group is within one hierarchy, a strong tendency develops to carry rank-consciousness and its advantages into family life outside work. One may study this in the peacetime life of a British military garrison overseas. Colin Cross has written of another hierarchical society, that of British India:

'The Simla government issued an elaborate warrant of precedence with 63 ranks – with the Viceroy at the top and a superintendent of telegraph workshops at the bottom. It included military as well as civil ranks, the Archdeacon of Calcutta ranking immediately below a brigadier and immediately above the Tea Controller for India.' (Cross, 1968.)

Peter the Great would have understood. So it is hardly surprising to find tendencies to carry rank-privilege into everyday life, with some resultant abuses, which those in charge of the system may dislike and seek to remedy. These abuses are facilitated by two features of the Soviet scene. One is the strict state monopoly over distribution, accompanied by frequent shortages of goods in demand, which, to an extent hardly possible under private enterprise conditions, facilitates priority allocation to the men of rank and influence in the region (the head of the retail trade network is one of them, or wishes to ingratiate himself with 'them'). Secondly, for familiar reasons, the single-hierarchy situation, in which the local party and state authorities, newspapers, judiciary and so on are run by the same group of people makes it harder to combat petty abuses.

Mention of the army leads to two other thoughts. One concerns the relationship, conceptually, between the army officers and property and

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so with class in the Marxian sense. In a traditional army in most countries, the officers are drawn in the main from what Marxists would regard not without reason as the ruling class. The army could then be seen as in some degree representative of the class structure of the country, reflecting property relations even while, naturally, the officers did not own the army, and their power over their men had nothing directly to do with property relations. But suppose the whole country were divided into a military and civil service, with ranks and even uniforms. In his later years, Stalin seems to have had such a vision, since he greatly extended the wearing of uniform with rank badges into what is normally civilian life (miners, diplomats etc.). Admittedly this tendency was soon checked and in due course reversed, so it would be quite wrong and misleading to press the military parallel far, even in Stalin's worst years. Yet one could conceive of a 'model' in which everyone did have ranks and owned no means of production at all. Or one could conceive the entire basic capital of the USSR to be in the joint 'ownership' of officialdom, the latter being defined as officials on the establishment list, the *nomenklatura* (*nomenklaturnye rabotniki*), a large hierarchically organised and self-recruiting elite, whose right to suppress any spontaneous social or economic happening outside its own organisation(s) is an essential (*the essential?*) feature of the Soviet system in the Brezhnev as well as the Stalin era. This conception requires us to redefine the word 'ownership' in a way which alters its meaning perhaps too much. Yet somewhere along this line of thought might be found the relationship, if there be any, between property, rank and status in the USSR. (See 'Is there a Ruling Class in the USSR?', p. 195 below, for a further development of these ideas.)

Social mobility and civil and military hierarchy are not, of course, necessarily in contradiction. Peter the Great and even Ivan were quite willing to promote humble men to high office, sometimes to the deep chagrin of the hereditary nobility. (Boris Godunov was described, in a well-known passage, as of slave and Tatar origin, *Vcherashni rab, tatarin*, and his promotion by Ivan led him in due course to the throne.) Much more recently, an examination of the origins of generals and *chinovniki* of Nicholas II suggests that promotion could take men of humble birth well up into the official hierarchy. Officers of the line regiments were more often than not rather simple folk, and were so regarded by the more aristocratic Guards regiments. Well-known World War I generals, such as Ivanov, Denikin and Kornilov, were of very modest origins, and Kornilov was furthermore half a Kalmuk. Research might well show that the Russian imperial service, though based on a hereditary service class, was somewhat more 'democratic' than the British administrative and officer classes of the period. None the less, no one can possibly doubt that the revolution did destroy or

drive out the bulk of the old ruling class, including those of its members who had been promoted from the ranks, and substituted a new ruling group. This at first contained a proportion of the old radical intelligentsia. It is a familiar fact of Soviet history that this type of communist, plus the surviving non-party or ex-Menshevik or neo-populist servants of the regime, perished almost to a man in the Great Purge.

The central committee and government organs, and the army, came to be dominated by persons of unmistakable working-class or sometimes peasant origin. The dominance of men promoted from the lower ranks has coloured some important aspects of Soviet life. Upward social mobility and respect for the dignity and wishes of one's subordinates do not necessarily go together. Once again one is tempted to seek parallels in the army. Sergeants are promoted men of the people. In their capacity as sergeants, they traditionally bully and bawl, and their relationship with the private soldiers is not at all sweetened by the fact that they come from the same social milieu. Indeed the bull-necked table-thumping authoritarian party secretaries and other local bosses seemed and sounded the kind of characters of whom tough sergeants are made. The fact that so many of them rose to high position is indeed a sign that the revolution had as one of its consequences a massive promotion of new men from below. But once established, those new men might well be expected to value their hard-won ranks and privileges, and to seek to defend them against their erstwhile comrades. Solzhenitsyn paints a hostile but convincing picture of such an ex-worker-official in the person of Rusanov in his *Cancer Ward*. In another novel, another author commented that, after being promoted from the workers' to the managerial dining-room, a petty cadres-department official came to regard every suggestion to improve the workers' feeding arrangements as personal insult.

It is by no means suggested that *noblesse* always *oblige*, that the interests and comfort of soldiers, workers or peasants were of great concern to the ruling classes of the past. Russian (and other) history is full of examples of the contrary. Yet the intense feeling of hierarchy, the underlining of the superior-inferior relationship in everyday life, numerous instances of crude use of privileged status, seemed particularly offensive in the Soviet context since they appeared to contradict the revolution and all it stood for. As already suggested, there is no contradiction between these abuses and the colossal extent of upward social mobility which was a consequence of the revolution. Indeed, there is a causal connection. The sergeants, so to speak, became the officers. This led to a marked coarsening of superior-inferior relations, especially at the height of Stalinism. The oppressive severities of the old regime had become markedly softened well before 1917. Referring to the apogee of Stalinism, a Soviet defector of *dvoryanstvo* origin once

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said to me: 'To understand our human relations, especially between officers and men, you must compare us not with Nicholas II but with Nicholas I.' A similar observation must be made in respect of conditions in prison and in camps. The horrors encountered by the Petrashevsky circle in 1849 were inconceivable in 1900. This greater humanity was typical of the early Soviet period too. The treatment meted out to political suspects in, say, 1922 was similar in many respects to the later-tsarist-decadent-liberal period: most suspects were exiled, wives were allowed to visit and sometimes reside with them, there was no mixing with common criminals, and some exiles, including my own father, were even allowed to leave the country quite legally. This contrasts with the vicious conditions so vividly described by Evgeniya Ginzburg and many others, which became the norm in the thirties. The crudities and petty cruelties were the reflection within the prison system of the often harsh boss-subordinate relations of Stalinist life in general, but also of the uneducated sergeant-type's view of the proper treatment of those suspected of disloyalty, dissident intellectuals in particular. It was complicated by such feelings as the ignorant upstart's revenge on those whom he suspected of feeling superior to him. This, under Stalin, was surely part of the process of producing a smoothly working hierarchial society, in which rank, discipline and obedience would be undisturbed by dissident voices or by persons claiming influence other than through the proper hierarchial channels.

Stalinism was, among other things, the organised rule of men of little education promoted from the ranks. Even after the system became organised and organisationally somewhat ossified, promotion to *nomenklatura* jobs was open to all whose origins, attitudes and working methods appealed to the various cadres and personnel departments. The vast expansion of industry, science and the social services led to an immense upsurge in demand for qualified personnel at all levels, and opportunity knocked at many doors. The Great Purge itself was social mobility on a grand scale: within a largely unchanged hierarchial structure, hundreds of thousands had to be promoted to take the place of the vanished ones.

However, with the passing of time an important change was bound to occur. In the twenties, special preference was deliberately given to working-class youth, to some extent also peasant youth, in access to educational opportunities (*rabfaki* etc.) and (especially) party jobs. In the Stalin period generally, promotion went very often to tough men-of-the-people, whose literary prototype was Ovechkin's Borzov. (*Raionnye budni*, of which the first instalment appeared as early as 1952.) At a higher level, Khrushchev was of this species. But in the fifties and sixties advancement even in the party hierarchy became increasingly confined to those with higher education. This is logical.

Able children of workers had excellent opportunities to get onto the educational ladder thirty years ago and are now in the prime of life. (Something of the kind, following the widening of educational opportunities, is happening in the British Labour party, to the irritation of men like Gunter and others of their generation who left school at 14.) Furthermore, fifty years after the revolution, the party itself has come to represent, and to a great extent consist of, the successful. The *class* contrast between party commissar and 'bourgeois specialist', typical of the early years of Soviet power, has long since vanished. So has the *partmaksimum* insisted upon by Lenin, the rule that party members should earn no more than skilled workers.

This state of affairs has important consequences for our understanding of the changing nature of the party, but this is not the theme of the present essay. The point relevant here is that higher education has become *the* way forward for the vast majority of those who wish to become anybody in the USSR, whether in the intellectual, governmental or party spheres. Observant foreigners have noted that the young official recruited by the party (and perhaps also by the KGB) represents a particular type of student, the species that becomes a secretary of the Komsomol at his higher educational institution. None the less, such a person has been exposed to higher education. In these circumstances, any light which can be thrown on the process of student selection, on the social origins of students, tells us much about social mobility.

Such studies as have been published in the USSR show that a high proportion of the children of persons with degrees make their way into higher education. (For example, see the works of Perevedentsev and others at Novosibirsk.) This is hardly surprising, and it would be quite unreasonable for critics of the USSR to use *this* as proof of the ossification of the social system, of privilege and so on. For reasons familiar in all countries, the children of educated parents have advantages in both the way of help from home and greater interest in learning. Education being free in the USSR, the financial bar to progress up the ladder, in towns at least, is now minimal. Consequently, despite some cases of string-pulling (hardly surprising anywhere, since the population does not consist of angels), it could be argued that the high share taken by the children of the educated of places in higher education is the result of fair competition. Those who criticise this state of affairs would presumably also criticise the kind of measures which used to be taken to combat this trend: special educational privileges for children of proletarians, special difficulties in university entry for children of the intelligentsia. Khrushchev's ill-fated education 'reform' of 1958 was an attempt to redress the balance. Under normal non-revolutionary circumstances, it is bound to appear contrary to sound educational practice and to be a social irritant.

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Among the ways up into the technical intelligentsia which ambitious workers do use are evening and correspondence courses, which are highly developed. Many do not make the grade, but there are also plenty of success stories. Concentration in studying in the evenings is doubtless facilitated by the relative absence of distraction, especially in most provincial towns. It is facilitated also by legal provision for time off to take examinations. The USSR publishes many figures of the total number of students divided into day, evening and external (correspondence). It would help our picture of social mobility from the factory floor if there were also figures of actual graduands divided into these three categories.

A much less favourable picture emerges when one examines the situation of the rural population. Of course, in the Soviet Union, as in all other countries, one way of bettering one's lot is to move to town and acquire a trade. The drift of ambitious young men to the bright lights of the city is a universal phenomenon, and it is propaganda and not serious analysis to identify such a trend in the USSR and, without further ado, ascribe it to the collective farm system or to the policies of the government. These have indeed been town oriented in the main, at the least until the most recent years, but before ascribing this to Marxism ideology it is as well to note a very similar trend in most developing countries, even under the authority of rabid anti-Marxists. Nor should it be surprising that the standard of rural schools is below urban levels, or that children of peasants tend to be less academically ambitious than children of many townspeople. I imagine that the educational opportunities in (let us say) Beynac in Dordogne are not equal to those available to the pupils of the great Paris lycées. Egalitarians could argue that, to the credit of the Soviet educational system, it has resisted the temptation to set up anything resembling the great lycées, or to lay any stress on the identity of particular schools, which are usually known only by number and have no distinctive uniforms. Only in the most recent years have we seen a few special schools for high-flying mathematicians and physicists (plus of course musical and ballet schools), which do give their pupils an excellent start in their particular specialisations. But when all is said, the gap between rural and urban schools remains very wide. This was commented upon by the eminent mathematician Kolmogorov recently; he deplored the tiny proportion of villagers who gain entry into universities. The problem is a difficult one. Rural teachers are not well paid, amenities of life are as a rule exceedingly primitive, school rooms are primitive too, being normally built by the village and not by the state. It is hardly surprising that the standard of teaching is comparatively modest, though no doubt there are many thousands of devoted teachers doing their best in often very difficult circumstances.

The gap between the cultural and material level of village and town