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UTOPIA AND EXPERIMENT IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION:

SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

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The purpose of a Wilson Center colloquium, I am told, is to share some thoughts, show some current research, and test some ideas. This is precisely the spirit in which I present this paper. It is a brief summary of a section of my book. The final book will be a collection of essays on the central theme--utopian dreams and behavior in time of revolution; the portion of the books here presented does not necessarily fit neatly into a unifying subtheme. The first part of the paper is a discussion of pre-revolutionary and Soviet utopian thinking. The second talks about varieties of egalitarianism in the Russian Revolution. At the end I shall try to relate these things to larger questions of Revolutionary impulse and the throttling of that impulse after the advent of Stalin to power.

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The utopian tradition in Russia was made up of three major currents: religious-popular, administrative, and socialist--resembling Jean-Paul Koch's threefold division of "collective experience" as religious, national or military, and social.¹ Of these, the religious mode of utopian thinking was the most ancient.

It was present in Orthodox Russian, Schismatic and Sectarian Christianity with their lush traditions of millenarianism, mysticism, and perfectionism. Russian religious social utopias flourished from the 17th century onward, reaching a curious final explosion in the late 1920s under Soviet power. It took the form of writings and documents, dreams set down on paper, mystical visions and religious legends, popular movements, and social experiments in which sectarian groups cut themselves off from corrupt society, created communities close to God, and displayed many of the behavior patterns and sensibilities that emerged at large during the Russian Revolution: communes, rules for complete equality, abolition of private property, the state, and the family, dismantlement of priestly authority, free sexual relations, iconoclasm, withdrawal from "civilization", loathing of the city, collective work, and "new" moral codes. The Old Believers became the "largest social group in Russia with an articulated anti-state ideology" and the peasant rebel Pugachev promised that after his 18th century social rebellion, "each can enjoy tranquility and a peaceful life which will continue evermore."² Peasant collectivist communities embodying the "smaller world" concept of isolated "brotherhoods" alien to the civilized world sprang up in the 18th and 19th centuries. Their utopias often clothed a flight from despotism and serfdom with religious statements and deeds. They were archaic, nostalgic, and essentially passive, believing that perfection lay in revealing the Godly residue left after stripping away the ungodly accretions of tsar, official, landowner, parasite.³

Administrative utopianism in Russia--largely the business of Emperors, generals, and bureaucrats--made a cult of parade-ground symmetries, geometric barracks life, and the "well-ordered police state". Administrative utopia can be found in the aspirations of antique Babylonians and Egyptians, but it took on a quasi-scientific gloss in the Deistic and mechanistic atmosphere of the 18th century enlightenment. The Russian version had its own antecedents in the rigid attitude to social order expressed in tiaglo and collective responsibility, in the practice of minutely detailed government regulations, and indeed in the whole state tradition. The "Gatchina school" of Russian Emperors --Paul, Nicholas I, Alexander I--made a fetish of ceremonial parades characterized by meticulous order and machine-like precision. Alexander I was vastly impressed by the orderliness, neatness, elegance, and symmetry of his friend Arakcheev's estate and wished to remodel Russia on it. He expressed a reforming zeal as well as a compulsion to regimentation when he founded the notorious military colonies in 1810, with their economic levelling, barrack-like rows of houses, iron rules of order, radical reforms, and their stony "dictator," General Arakcheev. A hundred years after these colonies, Menshevik and trade union leaders, when seeking to insult Trotsky's administrative utopia, "the militarization of labor," called it an arakcheevshchina. Nicholas I abandoned the colonies, but not its underlying "dream of a beautiful autocracy," a dream of stasis, devotion, service, honor,

"silence", duty, obedience, hierarchy, and symmetry--a dream that he saw fulfilled both in the Prussian military state of his day and in the Owenite utopian socialist community of New Lanark, which he visited. The dream of administrative utopia and the pattern of thinking associated with it is not only an outline of Russia's political future as a totalitarian state but also of the angular images and desperate reverence for routinized motions of the time-ists and mechanists of the 1920s who wished to refashion man in the image of the machine.⁴

Socialist utopias of the 19th century often combined elements of the popular-religious and the administrative. They joined Russian themes from popular utopia with imported ideas from the West of order and progress. The Decembrist Utopia, "The Dream" (1819), for example, replaced the barracks of the future capital with academies, libraries, and schools, while the Fourierist schemes of the Petrashevtsy retained Fourier's notions of order and symmetry. The most influential of all socialist utopias of the 19th century was Chernyshevsky's novel What is To Be Done? (1863). Though it sang the virtues of physical field labor, equality, and justice, its motifs of glass and steel communes, routine progression of work, rest, and pleasure in a perfect environment of cleanliness, security, and comfort envisioned a life devoid of waste and disease and mess. Its rationalism, materialism, and hints of conformity and uniformity evoked the bitter irony of Dostoevsky in Notes from Underground (1864) and

much later Zamyatin's antiutopia, We (1920). In the 1860s, young people sat down with copies of the novel and constructed communal experiments from its pages; years later, Bundists arrive in Palestine with copies of the book in their ragged bundles and proceeded to build kibbutzim. When active populists of the 1870s had time to describe the future society, they did so in utopian terms with cooperation and communal life as central elements. The most elaborate socialist utopia in this tradition was V.I. Taneev's Communist State of the Future (1879) which envisioned communal housing and dining, a federation of communes, complete equality of work, the rotation of work, and deurbanization. The only major shift in this tradition came at the turn of the century with the translation and discussion of a half dozen German works dealing with urban socialist utopias, with stress on communal apartment houses and the socialist exploration of electric and gas for domestic services.⁵

Novelists also looked into the future during the nineteenth century and produced both science fantasy and utopias. The first --resembling those of Verne and Wells--were technological speculation about the Promethean dynamism of modern man, such as Chikolev's Electric Tale (1895); Rodnykh's The Self-Propelled Railway Between Petersburg and Moscow (1902); and Bakhmetov's The Billionaire's Legacy (1904). The utopias, often possessing technical science fiction elements too, projected wished-for

social customs and systems, whether nostalgic (Shcherbatov's Journey, 1783), reformist (portions of Radishchev's Journey, 1790) or self-satisfied (Odoevsky's The Year 4338, written in 1840). The last, never published in the author's lifetime, was a conservative, Slavophiloid, Sinophobe fantasy of Russia in the 41st century--a socially static but scientifically progressive empire, bristling with technology, and ruled by technocrats and aristocrats. Among its wonders were a solid megalopolis linking the two capitals, aerostatic communication, space exploration, machine-authored novels (borrowed perhaps from Bulgarin's versemaking machine of 1825 and used again as Zamyatin's "sonata machine" in We), electronic lecturing, perfumed air, piped-in music, truth baths for suspected liars, and stretchable glassine wearing apparel. The first socialist science-fiction utopian novel, Red Star (1908) was written by the major dreamer of the Bolshevik movement before 1917, Alexander Bogdanov. Illustrating the rich possibilities of the genre, the adventure of Bogdanov's hero on Mars also embodied his technological projections of "systems thinking," "data retrieval," and computer-like planning as well as his underlying socialist vision. The novel is a startling example of the marriage of the two great revolutionary aspirations of 19th century Russia--and of other societies since--technical wizardry and social justice.⁶

What is the relevance of all this to the Russian Revolution? How did revolutionary science fiction and utopianism reflect the

revolution itself and how did it differ from traditional genres? How was the euphoric mood of experiment, engendered by the Revolution, related to utopia-building--both in the air and on the ground. As to the mood, poets and political leaders greeted the Russian Revolution of 1917 with a burst of euphoria the likes of which had not been seen in Europe since 1789 and the great nationalist storms of 1848. "Europe and the entire world will be refashioned on new principles by revolution," proclaimed a group of Moscow Social Democrats in April 1917. Mayakovsky added that life, "right down to the last button on your suit," would be reordered. Crowds smiled in public--not a Russian custom--and citizens kissed one another at festivals. Even in the deadening winter of pain and uncertainty after the October coup, revolutionists felt the tingle of expectation--and not only Bolsheviks. "All aspects of existence--social, economic, political, spiritual, moral, familial--were opened to purposeful fashioning by human hands," wrote the Socialist Revolutionary Commissar of Justice, Isaac Steinberg. Gastev, a Bolshevik prophet of the machine, spoke about "cascades of novel ideas gushing forth amid the storms of war and revolution." The writer Panferov thought that "if not today then in the very near future we will live in a communist society." During the Civil War and well into the 1920s, words careened in the air, golden dreams lighted the way along the dark landscape of a ruined land, and the towering optimism of the 19th century intelligentsia, now apparently vindicated by the dawn of

socialism, invested the hearts of would-be redeemers. "It was a great time for projects," recalls Ehrenburg, with his usual irony. "In every institution in Kiev, it seemed, grey-haired eccentrics and young enthusiasts were drafting projects for a heavenly life on earth." The euphoria, poignant and pathetic though it sometimes appeared, was no less potent in its driving power for the fact that the utopian dreamers were as so many scattered and isolated lighthouses in a dark ocean of poverty, backwardness, and famine.⁷

Was there a "dreamer in the Kremlin" as well? Was H. G. Wells right in so characterizing Lenin after a brief interview in 1920? Soviet historians have cited ad nauseam Lenin's little discussion on "the need to dream." Some of his foes have called Lenin a hopeless utopian, while others have stressed his realism, if not brutal cynicism as ruler of Revolutionary Russia. In spite of uncharacteristic lapses, such as State and Revolution, Lenin was not a "utopian" but he was an experimenter. "Those who are engaged in the formidable task of overcoming capitalism," he wrote just before the interview with Wells, "must be prepared to try method after method until they find the one which answers their purpose best." Wells found Lenin prepared for unlimited trial-and-error until the right solution was found, thus displaying flexibility and empiricism rather than the rigidity associated with detailed blueprints for the future. Lenin, Bukharin, Preobrazhensky, and others who projected visions of the future--

near or distant--did so to point the way to a concrete goal and purpose--but in the meantime labored with the practical details of everyday revolutionary life. One might say that Bolshevik leaders were something between the "thinking" utopians and the "acting" utopians in Sorel's acid contrast of Kautsky's visionary books and workers out on general strike. In another sense they were both--acting out certain missions by day and writing about them by night. When lavish dreams did possess leaders, they resembled more the ranting of a mystical chiliastic cult than classical utopianism. A case in point was the belief in "permanent revolution", which proclaimed that very soon a proletarian army of liberation would arrive, laden down with goods, equipment, and specialists to aid the Russian people. The European proletariat would help them defeat the White Army. Their Brothers would make them strong and everyone would be equal. The remnants of the old order would be destroyed to make way for socialism. One may instructively compare this with the following summary of the Vailala Madness, a Melanesian cargo cult of the 1920s.

Some day, very soon, a large ship filled with cargo will arrive. This cargo will be distributed among us by the spirits of our ancestors. The spirits will help us defeat and kill the Europeans. They will then turn our own skins white, and no one will have inferior black skin. Our 'old things' like huts and tools (which cannot compare with the cargo we shall receive) can of course be destroyed.⁸

How did science fiction and utopia work itself out in the early years of the Russian Revolution?⁷ More than 200 works in this

genre (called "science fantasy" or nauchno-fantastika in Russian) appeared in the 1920s in novel, play, story, and film, displaying every major theme, including futurology, space travel, adventure, utopianism, dystopianism, technological projection, automation and so on. In the words of a noted Soviet SF critic, they constituted a "revolutionary critique of the old world and represented the pathos of the revolutionary reordering of life." One of the main categories of the novel viewed the future of science and technology through a socialist prism. Okunevs' The Coming World (1923) portrayed a communist world-city in the year 2123 managed by a statistical bureau, with computer-like machines for gathering and processing data. Nikolsky's In a Thousand Years (1925) allowed for synthetic food, restoration of human organs, and prolonged life. Zhukov's Voyage of the 'Red Star' Detachment to Wonderland (1924) was one of the most concretely elaborate. Among its many delights in the year 1957 were: a worldwide commune of peace after a vicious revolutionary war; brotherhood, happiness, internationalism; the use of a single language--Esperanto, and of a single form of address--Comrade; garden towns with moving steel sidewalks, portable homes, liberated women working in the highest positions, and aeroball--a croquet game played in the sky between aircraft. Some sour notes appeared as well, Aleksei Tolstoy's popular Aelita (1923) warned of the dangers of excessive reliance on technology and of the perils of technocrats--who fashion in his story a brutal despotism on the planet Mars. And A. Belyaev's

Struggle in the Atmosphere (1928) depicts the one-sided intellectual growth of humans in the future which atrophies their bodies at the expense of their skulls.⁹

Another major category of soviet science fiction utopia were novels of the anti-capitalist persuasion, predicting disaster for the bourgeois world. The progenitor of these was Jack London's Iron Heel (1908) which had enjoyed (and still does) astonishing success in Russia before the Revolution. The American writer's crude depiction of the savage repression of the Chicago Commune of 1938 by the industrial barons and the subsequent establishment by 1984 of a proto-fascist "iron heel" was emulated in the Russian books of the 1930s but with a vindictive anticapitalist denouement followed by the dawn of communism. Dozens of titles appeared, most of them melodramatic hash, bearing such titles as Death Ray, Professor Dowell's Head, Dictator, Horror Machine, and contrasting the peaceful life in communist society with the terrors of slave labor, fascist dictatorship, massacre of workers, doomsday weapons, merchants of death, and all the rest. Among the most interesting were Grigorev's The Downfall of Britain (1925) and Abram Palei's Gulfstream (1927 which contrasted the American world of industrial slavery and mindless Taylorism in the same way that Zamyatin did for communist Taylorism in We.¹⁰

Vibrant hope--only rarely dimmed by skepticism--and a bright picture of "the coming world" are the cardinal features of the utopian science fiction of the 1920s and of other, more direct,

utopian visions and plans for a future society. The novelist Gladkov, in Cement (1925), called his idealist workers "dreamers possessed with a vision of the future as a glittering romance which for them extinguishes the ruined present."¹¹ It was precisely the poverty, the inefficiency, the "primitiveness" of work habits, the economic weakness, the thinness of the infrastructure, the abysmally low cultural level of the masses--all these things that generated the dream of leaping into resplendent efficiency, decency, and perfect social justice. This familiar mechanism--compensation for weakness--had been the initial impulse of the social daydreaming of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia and it now accounted for both the utopian pictures and for the optimistic belief in equality that we shall look at presently.

A prominent motif of compensation in utopian literature and rhetoric was the exaltation of an urban order over the rural, the machine over nature. A central vision of science fiction in the 1920s was a world-city and the world-as-city with urban minds beaming out reason and wisdom into the primeval darkness and city-built machines shaping the tangle of nature into symmetrical forms. "After electricity," Mayakovsky once said, "I lost interest in nature. Too backward." He longed for great cities, proudly soaring skyscrapers, forests of chimneys and highways covering all the earth. Not only Bolsheviks, but some Anarchists as well had this vision. A. Grachev wrote in 1917 of "unheard of

giants made of concrete, glass and steel" and of cities swollen into habitats for millions. The architect Lavinsky sketched cities suspended above the earth on springs and made of glass and asphalt, a "romance of the commune--and not the idyll of the cottage." The Bolshevik economist Kruglikov criticized the Neo-Populists of the late 1920s for failing to comprehend "the leading role of the city in modern history." These were all echoes of a long-standing war of words between Slavophiles and Westernizers, populists, nihilists, and conservatives of the 1860s and 1870s, philosophies spun around the lives of uprooted peasant proletarians by legal Marxists and legal populists, in the 1890s. It is perhaps no surprise that the objects of two major cults of the 1920s among intellectuals were Frederick Taylor, prophet of the machine and of the Americanization of society; and Emelyan Pugachev, primitive rebel and apocalyptic utopian of a rural paradise--respectively representing what Verret calls "l'utopie scientiste" and "l'utopie edenique." In poetry this was represented by the opposing images of the city poet Mayakovsky and the village poet Esenin. Even within individual writers there often raged a struggle of images of the future--the most noted case being Pilnyak who was torn between "winding cart tracks and ruler straight road."¹² City and country; consciousness and spontaneity; State and People; leviathan and anarchy; "machines and wolves"--all these dichotomies of Russian social thought were now brought into focus by the urban orientation of the Russian Revolutionaries in power.

Most of the utopian visions were ethereal and rhetorical. When men and women sought to fashion utopia on the ground--they often found more hospitable the countryside or obscure regions far removed from the central Behemoth. During the Revolutions and the Civil War, communities cut themselves loose from the capitals to form dozens of republics, communes, and independent enclaves--ranging from the vast Ukraine and the Far Eastern Republic to the Don and similar local "republics" down to the tiny "Tsardom or Ur" near Kazan which elected its own Tsar and withdrew from Soviet Russia. Towns and districts spontaneously designated themselves republics or communes in celebration of a new order of local power. Sectarians, veterans, orphans, single women, peasants, and workers formed communes on the land and shared labor and lives. Whole regions passed through months at a time without government, administration, or schools--with peasants working the fields with rifle in hand. The most spectacular and volatile of these communities was Nestor Makhno's anarchist "republic on wheels" an insurgent army which roved the land between Ekaterinoslav and Gulyai Pole, abolishing money, prisons, and governments and led by a peasant chieftain who alternated his military service with fieldwork in a commune.¹³

These phenomena were often shaped by purely political considerations--but they also embodied that potent anti-city mentality that had gripped peasants and intellectuals again and again in Russian history. When Makhno spoke of "the political poison

of the cities with their atmosphere of deception and betrayal" and Esenin called it "a labyrinth where men lose their souls", they were echoing Populists' fear and hatred of the city, "the incarnation of sinister forces" in the words of the Populist writer Zlatovratsky. The theme of city-hate appears all through early Soviet novels from Pilnyak to Platonov's Chevengur. But it was more than a fictive device. To a peasant, according to Gorky, "the city is a complex organization of cunning people who live off the bread and toil of the countryside, make useless things for the peasants, and who in all ways adroitly try to cheat and deceive them." Science fiction utopians and visions of world cities and gigantic machine civilization evoked no echo in the backwoods of Russia. "We don't need great factories, my friend," said another peasant to Gorky. "From them you get only troubles and vice." This mood was prevalent all over Eastern Europe in these years and helped to feed nationalist, ruralist, and popular fascist movements between the wars from Poland to the Balkans. In the 1930s Zoltan Boszormeny and the "Scythe Cross" hope to burn Budapest, "sin city", to the ground. There were rumors of plans to burn cities also in the Russian civil war, and an emigre religious utopia, What Will Become of Russia? (1922) predicted in its revelations the collapse of Bolshevik power accompanied by great conflagrations in the cities.¹⁴ It hardly needs to be said that beneath the antiurban fury of the period was an immense demographic egress from the towns of people in search of security and in flight from hunger.

The antiurbanism of the Civil War period found expression in two curious novels that appeared in 1920: Eugene Zamyatin's We, a dystopian projection of communism and the city; and Alexander Chayanov's Journey of my Brother Alexei to the Peasant Utopia, a neopopulist solution to the threat of an urbanized civilization. We was a critique of totalitarianism avant le mot and the inspiration of Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and Orwell's 1984 (1949). Zamyatin drew a picture of a United State in the year 2920 peopled by citizens with numerals instead of names who lived in glass and steel buildings, and who worked, marched, played, chewed their food, and copulated according to rigidly mathematical formulae and whose failure to think properly brought instant public execution at the hands of the benevolent Well-Doer and his Guardians. Chayanov, an economist of SR persuasion, offered the rural alternative to the dominant communist dream of a world city. The hero, propelled into the year 1984, discovers how the Bolsheviks had been unseated by a peasant uprising in the 1930s and how Moscow and other cities had been reduced drastically in size by means of dynamite and how the peasant state had become a ruralized and decentralized society of rustic toilers living in semiautonomous communities and dealing with each other through cooperatives. As a piquant emblem of class peace, Chayanov provides a monument composed of the statues of Lenin, Milyukov, and Kerensky for the adornment of the capital.¹⁵

The Revolution of 1917 and its turbulent aftermath brought together the strands of the older traditions of social dreaming and utopia building. The latter-day disciples of primitive and popular utopia, whether driven by conventional religion or by a secularized anarchistic vision, saw in the upheaval the death of the old state and the daybreak of a new anti-civilization of self-determination, withdrawal, and "calm felicity; and they were weakly echoed in literature by "rye poets" and by the novels of Chayanov and a few others. The urbanist utopians and SF writers were really the psychological descendants of the socialist utopia builders of the Russia's past whose hopes for a just order and technological modernism were outstripped by desperate reveries of construction, tempo, and a machine-like perfection, expressed not only in the SF works of the twenties, but in artistic theories of constructivism, and the spectacularly grandiose schemes of the city planners and architects of the late 1920s and early 1930s who believed that they could change the shape of the Russian worker and peasant by changing the form of his environment. During the 1920s, the rulers possessed no agreed-upon unifying utopian vision only the distant dream of a communist society--a long way off, according to Lenin. Dark reality mocked their dreams--and they labored in ambivalence through the NEP, the moral alliance of peasant and worker, the sexual revolutions, the esthetic experimentation, the roaring energies of social mobilization and rock-like inertia of the masses. Mayakovsky pointed the way

forward; Makhno pointed the way back. But the Bolsheviks, caught in the toils of Russian history, did not go either way. Stalin's solution to this intellectual impasse was the repudiation of both popular utopia and the moral essence of the socialist utopia in favor of a nightmarish administrative utopia.

It would be a distortion to say that the Russian Revolution followed in a historically symmetrical way the three traditions of Russian utopianism: of the people, of the state, and of the intelligentsia. Yet there is a sense in which this is true. Utopian science fiction in Soviet Russia almost disappeared in the Stalinist period, from 1931, the date of the last true SF novel, to the late fifties with the revival of the genre. Fantasy in the thirties tended to be technological, short-range projection with heavy and concrete political overtones of nationalism and counterespionage. It was another example of the chaining down of the soaring Russian revolutionary imagination--but also a repudiation of fantastic dreams, paralleled on other fronts of the cultural revolution and the cultural war of those years. At the same time, the last corners of popular religious utopianism, the communes, were liquidated; and the ancient hope of free communal work and life, unhampered by the tentacles of the Great State, dissolved. Utopianism itself was far from dead. It blossomed forth in frenetic form during the first of the massive five-year plans; but it was Administrative utopia--with heavy emphasis on change from above, order, hierarchy, minute planning

and regulation, control of lives, and movement of people. As in the Military Colonies of the 1820s, its reforms and ameliorations were heavily outweighed by the onerous burden which the Russian people had to bear for the next two decades and more. This was not simply a case of the State defeating both the People and the Intelligentsia--for the new Stalinist Leviathan inherited much from the mentalities of the peasants and lower classes in general and from the radical traditions. Indeed, it was--among other things--a synthesis of the negative aspects of these three world outlooks--gosurdarstvennost, doctrinal radicalism, and what Tolstoy called "the power of darkness."

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Another way to examine the Russian Revolution in the context of 19th century traditions is to look at the experimental impulses derived from the past, and put into practice in the early years when such impulses were allowed to flourish. Among them were iconoclasm, militant atheism, ethical innovation, popular communication, artistic experiment, machinism, and communalism. I have chosen egalitarianism for my focus in this section because in many ways it cut through all the spontaneous revolutionary urges of those years. Traditional notions of equality (ravenstvo) were exceedingly vague and subject to varying interpretation. Such things bother historians sometimes because they often tend to think like philologists and not like social psychologists. The fact is that "equality" and its derivatives had a cluster of meanings originating from different kinds of mentalities. Among

the intelligentsia, the notion of equality was embraced partly as an emphatic dialectical negation of the highly stratified and hierarchical nature of Russian society, and partly as a borrowing from the democratic and socialist enlighteners of Western Europe. Though rarely defined in a precise way, it meant to most Russian radicals political, juridical, social, sexual, ethnic equality --and the absence of notable differences in wealth. Some of the more authoritarian radicals, like Babeuf before them, believed in a symmetrical equality that would run right down to outward appearance and dwellings.

For peasants (including migrant workers and village conscripts) the idea had a far less cerebral and symmetrical meaning. Among cultivators, the most important egalitarian tradition--by no means universal--was periodic repartition of land in order to maintain balance between land use and family size. Strips were allocated in order to distribute the better land evenhandedly. Rural workers and artisans often worked in an artel (small scale, transitory producers' cooperative team), formed for specific jobs. Income was divided equally among its members--but shirkers were fined and organizers were given a bonus. Though differing in images and modes of expression, the radical intellectuals and the "people" generally concurred that no one should get more--or much more--than anyone else. Karakozov, the radical assassin of the 1860s, envisioned a society based upon popular artels with income divided equally among all workers. Trotsky's worker friend,

Mukhin, illustrated his rough and ready belief in equality by scrambling some navy beans on a table and inviting Trotsky to perceive the essential sameness of all beans and all people.¹⁶

"Revolutionary Equality" was translated into everyday activity in the realms of levelling, housing, personal relations, appearance, and work. The intelligentsia had sometimes been accused (by the Vekhi group for instance) of wanting to reduce all to the level of the lowest masses. Though there was much iconoclasm, hatred of culture, and anti-intellectualism in the revolutionary movement, most radicals--and all Marxists--looked to the general upgrading of all, but on the basis of some sort of equality. A prophet of Bolshevik proletarian culture, Kerzhentsev, admired the Levellers of the English Revolution and the Marats of 1789. The Revolution contained many examples of collective responsibility and forced conformity: worker journalists hated it when one of their number seemed to become intellectually estranged from them; stevedores during the famine of 1921 stuffed food into their garments and when one was caught out shouted "Why arrest him? We are all equally guilty." Peasants sometimes dragged by force their fellow villagers to share equally in their division of pillaged land. Workers rode employers out of the factory on wheelbarrows, sent managers and priests to the front, and forced the wealthy to dig trenches. Fortunes were confiscated, rents abolished, and warm garments requisitioned for soldiers and the poor. In Vologda Province, propertied peasants were

ordered to share a stated portion of their grain with the poor; and in Ekaterinoslav, one of the many phantom governments there occupied the governor's mansion, carved a large Turkestan carpet into equal squares, then distributed them to "government" members. Some people, according to a lament by Bukharin, thought that all wealth should be divided equally among the poor, "according to God's will," and that this would solve all problems.¹⁷

Bolshevik leaders worried about the excessive iconoclasm which sometimes accompanied the levelling process--but for the most part when the doctrine of egalitarianism was directed against the rich and the privileged of the old order, it met little opposition. But what of equality in the new order? Anarchists, Left Bolsheviks, workers, some peasants, and scattered intellectuals believed in the traditions of equality after the revolution and the elimination of privileges in work and life. Even a Menshevik, M.E. Shefter, working in the Bolshevik government, suggested in the spring of 1918 a fully planned economy and equal distribution of all consumer goods. During the February Revolution, Saratov's largest factory donated money to improve workers' conditions; most workers thought this meant dividing it equally among themselves rather than support of factory committee and trade union work. In the early years, commissars lived plainly and received the modest salaries of skilled workers. But there were exceptions--

and the exceptionalism grew with each year. Zinoviev, Radek and others outdid themselves in the enjoyment of preferential treatment, residence, travel, and amenities, in contrast to the living styles of Lenin, Trotsky, Chicherin, and others. The party program of 1919 reminded the workers that "equal remuneration of all labor" lay in the future--under communism. Already in the Civil War, under so-called War Communism, engineers were being excepted from requisitioning of housing space and personal property and Lenin was justifying salaries for specialists that were 5-6 times higher than those of skilled workers. Even "left" communists like Bogdanov opposed "equalization", which meant loss of personal responsibility. Both communist authorities and their anarchist enemies used differentiation of food rations--and Maxim Gorky openly opposed sending artists to the front in the name of equal liability for service. There was always a good reason for granting a privilege: after the Revolution, for example, mothers with babes in arms were allowed to move to the front of queues; but pretty soon people began borrowing or renting babies for the purpose.¹⁸

One of the most visible gestures of the egalitarian revolution was the forced sharing of living space. Anarchists had pushed for it earlier and soon after the October Revolution the Bolsheviks "municipalized" all housing, formed house committees, took over the premises of mansions, evicted or relocated the families of nobles or landlords to smaller quarters and brought in the families

of workers and soldiers who had lived in cramped rooms, cellars, workers barracks, garrison housing, or servants' quarters (often this meant the floor). In five months--in the winter of 1918-1918 --almost 13,000 workers families were relocated in this way! The occupancy by the poor of spacious mansions and apartments designed for the elegant life style of the gentry and the urban rich had elements of an epic or a fairy-tale, with the world turned upside down. It brought together in almost daily association two kinds of people who had been as from different planets before the Revolution. Former servants emulating the solemnity of their old masters and displaying the new won dignity of the world-historical role of the proletariat, would read out in ungrammatical Russian the rules of comportment for the newly occupied building to yesterday's arbiters of social life. In the country, manors were rarely made into homes but rather turned into public buildings, left to rot, or burned to the ground. Neither the masses nor the government had much sympathy with the losers. "Here is a home" ran an anarchist broadsheet; "go in and settle down. Let the owners of the houses and palaces roam the streets and feel their own teeth chatter." Lenin caused much levity when he told of a Voronezh professor who complained about being ordered by a local house committee to sleep in the same bed with his own wife. Personal items of use were confiscated and distributed to the new residents as well; luxury and art works were remanded to museum committees. A doctor in Omsk who begged to keep his piano had to let working

class children come and practice lessons on it. But in the end--and from the beginning--"special" people were immune from confiscation and were allowed larger and better living space for their homes.¹⁹

A more deliberate and conscious effort to introduce absolute equality into living space was the experiment with communalism that lasted all through the 1920s. Rural communes dined together from a common kitchen, worked cooperatively and often distributed their product in equal shares or according to needs. Some of the religious communes also arranged communal housing and tried to make equality well-nigh complete. (It should perhaps be added here that the sharing of women under the aegis of communism was not a part of the revolutionary experiment, anti-Bolshevik propaganda to the contrary notwithstanding). Urban communes--mostly of students--tended to be more ideological and purist in their modes of communing. Not only was property and money shared equally, but also personal items, sleeping space, time, and even friendship and affection--the latter causing a number of insoluble problems for the communards. In a wholly different arena of activity, a Moscow orchestra was formed in 1922 for the explicit purpose of performing without a conductor. The conductor, it was said, not only interfered with equality, spontaneity, and democracy by his authority, but by monopolizing knowledge (of the entire score) he alienated the worker-musician from his labor and stripped him of the dignity gained by discussing and learning the score and working out the interpretation collectively.²⁰

In the Summer of 1917 at the Cinizelli Circus in Petrograd "a grey-haired lady argued that Esperanto would save the world Revolution. Nobody listened," recalled Ilya Ehrenburg in his memoirs. The Esperanto movement was a distinctly middle-class affair which attracted those who wished to unite the world and promote equality, brotherhood, and peace through a universal language. But Ehrenburg was right; nobody listened. Esperantists were eventually hounded out of existence by Stalinist terror. But the language of everyday address did undergo changes in response to the egalitarian impulse of the Revolution. Gospodin, a term of deference, disappeared almost at once and was replaced by grazhdanin (citizen) in the spirit of the citoyen of 1789. Tovarishch (an old Russian word but given its modern meaning by being the translation of the German Marxist Genosse) rivaled grazhdanin in many situations. But simple people often could not grasp their meaning (peasants called delegates from Moscow "gospodin tovarishch" on one occasion); and both terms declined in use at the expense of name and patronymic. More important was the revolt in the use of "you-thou" (vy and ty in Russian). Before the Revolution ty was used by superiors to inferiors, adults to children, husbands to wives, people to animals, bosses to employees--the superiors expecting vy in return. The power implied by vy-ty usage was almost palpable--especially in the army. The 1860s radical Yakushkin became enraged when police addressed him and others as ty; a worker of the 1890s was partly converted to Marxism because

his agitator called him respectfully vy; in 1912 the famous Lena gold field strikers listed use of vy by employers as one of their demands. Workers used reversal when possible: a flysheet of 1905 called the tsar ty; and workers' papers demeaned the right-wing Vladimir Purishkevich with the diminutive "Volodya." Ty, comrade, and familiar names floated across the revolutionary landscape in 1917 and after. Count Fredericks was deeply offended at being addressed as ty; a noblewoman became hysterical when a streecar conductor called her "comrade." The struggle for vy was seen by revolutionaries as a struggle for the dignity of the lower classes.²¹

Some dreamers of the past had proposed identical costumes for inhabitants of future utopias, and some science fiction writers predicted uniform, functional, and unisex apparel. But there was little agreement in the first years of revolution about how to dress. Clothing had certainly been related to class status in prerevolutionary Russia: ermine cape, pince-nez, frock coat, bast shoes, bark boots, sheepskins, and rags having easily discernable social symbolism. Uniforms abounded in the military, the civil service, the universities, and the church; and there was a dazzling array of folk, regional, and national costumes. But what should revolutionaries wear? A tunic like Stalin's? a pince-nez like Trotsky's? vest and tie like Lenin's? leather coats like Sverdlov's? work shirts and peaked caps that many Bolsheviks affected? There was no agreement on this. For the avant garde and the bohemians freedom and equality meant wearing anything one wanted. In the

early 1920s "women with pretensions to smartness wore soldiers' faded greatcoats and green hats made of billard table cloth. Dresses were made of wine-colored curtains livened up with Suprematist squares or triangles." The painter Rabinovich wore an emerald colored sheepskin; and Esenin appeared in a shiny top hat. Some intellectuals and artists believed that clothes should be functional and reflect the production process--and they even designed proletarian outfits. But most writers demanded a simple levelling of dress to something like what the average proletarian wore. This was a latter day "nihilist" contempt for finery. Uncombed hair, unkempt clothes, and even dirtiness were seen as virtues by some workers and their emulators. But others said that if pizhonstvo (foppery), silks, cosmetics, high heels, and the rest were "petty bourgeois", so was dirt and untidiness. Since citizens with clean nails had been shot in Sevastopol by the Reds, and passerby with calloused hands had been shot by the Whites in the Urals -- personal appearance seemed to be an ideological issue. But the issue was never solved in the 1920s, since no one had the power or the will to do so.²²

One of the most enduring socialist teachings of the 19th century was that every able-bodied person ought to work--to the best of his or her capacity. In revolutionary practice, this took many forms, including the confiscation of capital, the control or abolition of private rent and interest, the limitation of inheritance, the economic emancipation of women, and so on. On a more direct level, Anarchists, House Committees, local

Soviets, and individual authorities performed rituals of reversal by putting those who had presumably lived off the physical labor of the poor to work. In the first winter of the Revolution, committees registered residents of dwelling places and assigned them to work details. Upper class people who had never performed manual work in their lives were now set to cleaning courtyards, shovelling snow, and performing other chores assigned to them. Egalitarianism, slumbering anti-intellectualism, levelling, and social vindictiveness mingled together in rituals of reversal and acts of social reordering. A counterworld of symbolic retribution was fashioned in August 1918 when, in the tiny town of Solvychevodsk, merchants, former land captains, and police of various kinds were mobilized for rear area labor gangs under the guard of watchful proletarians. But again, while the sword of egalitarianism was drawn against the exalted, it was wielded with great ambiguity within the regime itself--from the very beginning. Lenin carried a few pieces of firewood to kick off a Volunteer Saturday from time to time, but this was a purely ritualistic gesture. No one set out to define what work really was; and how much time every person should spend on it, regardless of occupation, political position, or anything else. Specialization of labor set in early, and though a norm of rough and ready equality remained as an ideal in the 1920s, it was no sudden or unexpected counterrevolution when, in 1932, Stalin pronounced the uravnilovka--egalitarian levelling--to be "petty bourgeois".²³

There are some striking elements in the story of revolutionary egalitarianism. The most important of these is the way in which new inequalities replaced the old ones in the very process of the replacement. After the Petrograd theaters were taken over by the authorities, children of workers (but not of other people) were given seats at special free concerts. Factories ordered blocks of the best seats for their people and planted workers in the plush seats and loges that had accommodated the affluent. When apartment buildings were taken over, an elaborate symmetry was invoked in carving out equal sized living units for each family--including former occupants. Yet commissars, military people, and other officials could get for themselves larger rooms. Specialists, actors, artists, and others--who could only be listed among the privileged, not the underprivileged of the Old Regime--were allowed to retain or augment their perquisites. Lunacharsky fought a war with the local Soviet in order to leave the style of life of opera singers untouched by the urban upheavals of the revolution.²⁴ All of this took place a decade before the so-called Stalinist reversal of egalitarianism. The issue of who would be "more equal than others" is a microcosm of what went on in revolutionary society and psychology in the first decade of Soviet power. And that was a swirling confusion and comingling of old values and new, local impulses, eclectic solutions, uncoordinated activity, spontaneous experimentation, and motivations composed of both ideals and hardheaded pragmatism.

Stalin's achievement was to reduce this miasma of parochial energies to a flat and arid plain of relative uniformity. Experiments which promoted equality in a serious way were dumped in favor of hierarchy, authority, privilege and repression, chiefly to encourage incentive for production.

Egalitarianism took its final breath at the same time that revolutionary utopianism died. Levelling in wages and in daily life was renounced explicitly and emphatically--in a way that no one could misunderstand. When Magnitogorsk was constructed, its administration building had five different dining rooms, catering to five levels of income. The lavish apartments of the elite contrasted with the crowded communal flats of millions of urban dwellers. Old forms of address were not restored, but modes of speech in the 1930s and since reflected power rather than solidarity--and popular terms of abuse were invoked to describe the "vermin" accused of betraying the Socialist state. Uniforms, epaulettes, fancy clothes, and neckties appeared at the top; and wives of the economic and political elite adorned their husbands' offices and factories with flowers and curtains instead of becoming "proletarian women toilers." All the new symbols pointed to order, rigid hierarchy, and deference--and against the spontaneous, egalitarian solidarity and comradeship which had not been so often noted in the early years of the Revolution. The orchestra without a conductor dissolved in 1932 and a new generation of music dictators occupied the symphonic podiums.

Student communes disbanded with the explanation that incentive was the order of the day--not mutual aid and the pooling of unequal talents, energies, and resources. Utopianism and equality were condemned by the more tolerant as foolish dreaming and by the more menacing as Trotskyism, Menshevism, or Fascism. The old dream of spontaneous fraternity gave way to a nightmare of enforced conformity.

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It should be clear from my previous remarks that utopianism and egalitarianism were never widespread or powerful current among the populace at large. Utopianism expressed itself in manifold ways during the revolution and civil war, but without a clear pattern. Utopian science fiction flourished for exactly a decade, from 1920 to 1930, and was accompanied by many other life experiments which attempted to work out its motifs in practice--communes, radical architecture, militant atheism, egalitarian and collectivist experiments in work and in living. Many of these were clearly motivated by a desire to keep the ideal of communism alive in the midst of the hostile environment of the NEP period of a mixed economy and a hybrid society; a defensive utopianism, as it were, in contrast to the militant and millinarian utopianism of the Civil War. The frenetic excitement of the five year plan and the revolution-from-above injected new doses of optimism and voluntarism into the younger generation and there was veritable explosion of schemes for remaking the world in conjunction with remaking the economic and

social order of Soviet Union. This era, with its central motto of "there are no fortresses that cannot be stormed by socialism", resembled the Civil War in its vigor, militance, and idealism, particularly among urban youth and migrant construction-site workers. But just as the military imperative in 1918-20 had coopted or weakened the spontaneous utopianism and egalitarianism, so the economic imperative, couched in military terms, coopted and weakened them again during the five-year plan. Individual experimental goals were wiped away by the compulsive focus on "the common cause" --the single great goal of industrial modernization and the tightening of the Soviet political system.

Why? In the first place, Stalin himself, who had achieved unprecedented power by 1934 by means of his secret chancellery, the party apparatus, a network of agents, a system of patronage, and other aspects of the political machine that have been described in great detail elsewhere, was personally hostile to all the impulses that underlay the great experiments of the earlier period: autonomy, humanitarianism, experiment for its own sake, equality, dreaming, self-management and the rest. Minutely detailed pictures of the communist future could too easily be set beside the rigors of Soviet everyday life; equality in this or that realm of existence could too easily prompt desires for more equality of power, wages, privileges, and goods. Secondly, the economic tasks (which have been also termed "utopian" in the familiar negative sense) of Stalin's industrial world were

designed like military orders on a battlefield, not as the result of consensus and debate. Cooperation from below was hoped for, but not relied on. Rigid authority, power, and enforcement were known to work in the industrial arena as on the front lines. Volunteers, exploits, individual heroes, shock troops, special forces were all utilized and rewarded as in any war--but the framework was that of the authoritarian army.

All this is familiar enough to students of Soviet history. Less well-known or less appreciated are the social foundations of the civilization that emerged in the 1930s, one in which the intelligentsia was essentially destroyed, replaced by workers and other lower class elements. The cities were now deluged by peasants coming to work the factories during the forced industrialization. With them came the values and ethos of the village, the popular tastes and habits of rustic people, and the uncomprehending hostility to urban utopians and experimenters in art, culture, and everyday life. The speculations of the Revolution and of the 1920s had required an urbane atmosphere of tolerance, a certain leisure to think, a concern for the remaking of social relations along new lines by means of separate, often isolated experiments, and some room for spontaneity. The furious tempo of Soviet industrialization, the draconian measures of collectivization, the peasantization of the cities and towns, and the harshness of the emerging political culture made these conditions impossible. Only the Great Experimenter, assisted by a circle of

policemen, planners, enforcers, managers, and military cronies, had the right to point to the future and announce the configurations of the new world. And the world he described was a twisted parody of the brave world of the utopians: it was arid, dogmatic, unimaginative, and devoid of the drama, imagery, and emotion that had been so much a part of socialist and religious utopias. The still uncultivated masses and their leaders preferred the familiar, the philistine, the vulgar, the safe, the old in culture and way-of-life to the unknown, the experimental, the exalted, the perilous, the risky, the new. The combination of political authoritarianism, xenophobic suspicion of the West (often tied to the experiments of the 1920s), and the social makeup of Stalinist Russia was more than enough to stamp out the fantasies and redirect the energies of those men and women of the revolutionary generation who had really thought it possible to realize the great social daydreams of the 19th century. For Russia the nineteenth century did not end in 1900, as chronology would have it; nor in 1914 as European historians would have it; nor in 1917 as most historians of Russia would have it. It ended in the 1930s when the reveries of the radical intelligentsia having had a decade of conscious practice in postrevolutionary Russia, were repudiated ignominiously.

NOTES

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See also Paul Avrich, Russian Rebels (New York 1972), Part III.
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5. Decembrists: M.V. Nechkina, "Dekabristskaya utopiya" in Iz istorii sotsialno-politicheskikh idei (Moscow, 1955) 376-84. The literature on the Petrashevsky Circle is huge, but see: N.V. Terekhov, "Ekonomicheskie idei utopicheskogo sotsializma Petrashevtsev," in Moskovskii Oblastnoi Pedagogicheskii Institut, Uchenye zapiski, vol. 162 vyp. 4 (Moscow, 1966) 254-68. On the influence of Chernyshevsky on utopia-building, see R. Stites, Women's Liberation Movement in Russia (Princeton, 1978), ch. 4 and Anatole Kopp, Changer la vie--changer la ville (Paris, 1975) 50 n. 7. For Taneev, see B.P. Kozmin's article in Iz istorii cited above, 664-73.
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7. V. Shishkin, Velikii Oktyabr i proletarskaya moral (Moscow, 1976), 21, 37. I. Steinberg; In the Workshop of the Revolution (New York, 1953) 44-45, A. K. Gastev, Poeziya, 5th ed. (Moscow,) F. Panferov, "Chto Takoe kommunizm," Oktyabr, 37 (Jan. 1960) 103; I. Ehrenburg, First Years of Revolution, 1918-21 (London 1962), 84.

8. Cargo cult in Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis, 1965) 41, H.G. Wells, "The Dreamer in the Kremlin" in Russian in the Shadows (New York, 1921) 145-68. Sorel is discussed in J. Cammett, Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism (Stanford, 1960) 124. For a general discussion, see Pethybridge, Social, 22-67 and E.H. Carr, introduction to N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, The ABC of Communism (Harmondsworth, 1970), esp.49-51.

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11. F. Gladkov, Cement (New York, 1929), 98.

12. Mayakovsky in E.J. Brown, Mayakovsky (Princeton, 1973)28, 88-9; Grachev: P. Avrich, Anarchists in the Russian Revolution (London, 1973) 64-66; B. Arbatov, "Oveshchestvlenneya utopiya" Lef 1 (March, 1923) 61-4, discussing Lavinsky; S. Kruglikov,

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17. Semen Frank's comment in Vekhi cited in J. Brooks, "Vekhi and the Vekhi Dispute," Survey (Winter 1973) 28. Kerzhentsev's in S. Fitzpatrick, Commissariat of Enlightenment (Cambridge, Eng., 1970) 153. Examples of levelling psychology and behavior: H.H. Fischer, The Famine in Soviet Russia (New York, 1927;1971) 81; L. Kleinbort, "Rukopisnye zhurnaly rabochikh," Vestnik Evropy, 7-8 (July-August, 1917) 280; A.V. Krasnikova, My novyi mir postroim (Leningrad, 1967) 43-4; K. Mehnert, Youth in Soviet Russia (New York, 1933) 220; Vestnik otdela mestnago upravleniya (December 27, 1918) 14; Vestnik Oblastnogo kommissariata vnutrennykh del (September, 1918) 178; Arbatov, "Ekaterinoslav", 86, 117; Bukharin quoted in A. Kopp, Changer, 122.

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