

THE SOVIET WORKER*

- Social Stratification and Political Perceptions -

#9

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Any treatment of the Soviet worker's political views -- of the outside world, of his own regime, of his place in the hierarchy of power and allocation -- must be in large measure impressionistic and unsystematic. The reasons for this are many.

First, Soviet social science research of the sort which, however imperfectly, has deepened and broadened our knowledge of various concrete aspects of everyday life and concerns, has not touched on critical political questions. It has, for the most part, been confined to the sorts of problems which fall within the ambit of administration and management -- technique problems -- rather than those of politics itself, where critical choices are demanded. ¹

Secondly, that social science research has been constrained in its inquiry by a major postulate of Soviet governance -- that political loyalty, support for the system "as is", and views on particular political topics are not differentiated by social stratum membership in the USSR. Neither origin stratum (that in which one grows up) nor destination stratum (that in which one's work places one -- the same or different from one's original stratum depending on whether one has been occupationally mobile or not) are assumed to be differentiators of political views. This, of course, amounts to a denial of much of what Western political sociology (as well as that of socialist Yugoslavia and Poland) have revealed -- and thus preempts investigation of some questions of great interest.

Third, it can be argued here (already relying on largely impressionistic evidence) that the political views of Soviet workers would be rather hard to characterize, even if we (or Soviet researchers) had free access to them. The political vocabulary of the working class (though not this class alone)

is deficient in analytic and evaluative terms. This in itself is in large measure, I think, a product of formal education and informal socialization. The political component of Soviet education, from elementary grades through university, is for all but a small and select minority an exercise in learning to speak, and to some degree to think, in narrow, conventionalized terms about the Russian and Soviet past, and the present. Even compared to the older, somewhat self-congratulatory "civics" education afforded American grammar and high school students (which, seemingly, has increasingly given place to texts with a more critical and historically "revisionist" emphasis) Soviet political education is designed to mask the realities of power, the process of government, the narrow arena in which "politics" takes place. The same, of course, is true of the organized political socialization which proceeds from level to level in the Oktiabriata, the Pioneers and Komsomol.

Informal socialization as well is conducive to limited political perception. If an adult generation knows little of politics, thinks of its leaders as "they" and sees a gulf between them and the people as natural and eternal, little can be expected by way of heightened political sophistication among their children. This is not to say that children do not learn ways of accomodating to, and manipulating the system at a "low", personalized level, in the family -- for it is surely a major sources of such tutoring -- but only that, for the Soviet majority and surely for the majority of the working class, political sophistication, and the ability to articulate sophistication, is not a legacy of family life.

These qualifiers stated, the dimensions and limits of what we can say become, perhaps, a bit clearer. We proceed now to examine (1) the degree to which general indications point to the possibility of a "class"-oriented view of Soviet politics on the worker's part; (2) sources of working-class

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support for the system; (3) sources of working class disaffiliation and neutrality vis a vis the system (opposition, I think, is too strong a word).

Class-ness and Classlessness

Whether the Soviet "working class" has its own particular perceptions in the political sphere depends, analytically and concretely, on whether the workers constitute a "class" as this is understood, however roughly, by political philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists. It is a thorny question. Certainly, no official claims are made that the USSR is a classless society -- the formula which divides it into two nonantagonistic classes, workers and peasants, on the basis of their relations to two forms of socialist property, and one stratum -- the toiling intelligentsia -- still holds. (Although for purposes of sociological investigation, this distinction has been found to be too general even for Soviet sociologists.²) Western commentators miss this point when they tax a supposedly "classless" Soviet society with its evident disparities in income, prestige and power -- these evidence inequality, stratification, but not the existence or nonexistence of classes.

The point is whether the workers exhibit the set of characteristics which loosely add up to "class consciousness," a view of the workers, by the workers, ^{as} ~~and~~ a collectivity with similar interests opposed to those of other collectivities, with modes of behavior and an ethos proper to them alone. Historically, there is little evidence of such a development, of the emergence of what Feldmesser called "an effective reference group based on its own collectively defined norms."³ In the twilight of Tsarism, archaic elements in Russian society militated against such developments, despite the birth of an urban-industrial proletariat in the drive toward industrialization beginning in the 1880s. The estate system remained the sole legal recognition of social diversity, reflecting the unwillingness of the autocracy to recognize new

forces of differentiation, as well as the ancient dominance of state over society. The "workers," drawn from diverse strata but especially from the peasantry, retained links to their strata of origin -- affective, economic, administrative -- which delayed their commitment to and identification with urban factory life. At the turn of the century, some ninety per cent of urban workers were still legally classified as peasants.⁴

Still, the share of "hereditary" workers grew -- those whose fathers as well had lived the life of the factory⁵, and the concentration of workers in the relatively large factories of late-industrializing Russian conduced to the development of a common, shared consciousness. This was expressed in some measure in industrial unrest, in worker participation in the 1905 revolt and, later, in 1917. It was to this potential class-in-emergence that Bolshevik and other socialist propagandists directed their efforts.

But "big" classes can better maintain themselves as distinct entities than can small. The urban proletariat was still quite small, still quite mixed in origin (with the consequent cross-pressures on political consciousness and identity) as Tsarist Russia gave way to the Soviet Union. The aftermath of revolution saw some workers remaining in the cities, but many others less committed to urban factory life drawn back to the countryside by the promise of adequate land after Lenin's decree expropriating the large estates.

More importantly, whatever the degree of class consciousness the small stratum of workers possessed, their demographic "weight" was a source of considerable weakness. Through the years of the NEP, their numbers did not grow greatly. With the beginnings of the formation of the modern Soviet working class, the "core" proletariat was swamped by the massive recruitment of peasants. The five-year plans brought to the new factories by the millions those unfamiliar with the industrial-urban existence, who would cling to

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peasant attitudes and values for a long time. Just as, a generation later, the more class conscious proletarians of a Warsaw or Budapest would be dissolved in a massive peasant migration ⁶, so were the workers of the Russian cities. The political and literary image of the manager of the 1930s, breaking a mass of peasants "into industrial discipline," taking unskilled raw material yet "driving them into world production records"⁷ is an apt one. But to do this is to make industrial workers, not to forge a working class in the political sense. Peasants might become skilled, literate, acquire urban characteristics-- but the political focus of state concerns was to turn them into Soviet citizens, loyal and supportive, not a "working class" with its own criteria for judging whether this or that policy of the workers' state in fact responded to their needs and desires.

Thus, the "Workers' Opposition" was suppressed, "trade unionism" denounced and whatever elements of it existed in the trade-union bureaucracy purged. Thus, trade unions came to be the administrative channel for pressure on behalf of labor discipline and greater productivity, as well as for the distribution of social benefits -- but not the channel for the upward conducting of labor demands. The Soviet regime feared to contend with the spontaneous development of different class "viewpoints". Where a person would "get" in Soviet society -- from a bureaucrat's desk to a place on the assembly line, a field on a Kolkhoz, or a space on the boards of a barrack in the gulag would depend on his loyalty, his positive viewpoint. All were expected to manifest loyalty equally, to march to the same drummer -- values and attitudes in the political sphere were not expected to differ by social class or stratum, nor was such diversity to be countenanced. As Feldmesser puts it, "loyalty to a political leader and his ideology is ... the cause, not the consequence, of one's hier^{ar}chical position"⁸ --

state "omniscience," much as it existed under the Tsar, who could in law elevate or demote persons within the hierarchy of estates at will.

If these aspects of Soviet life retarded the growth of "classness" among the workers, no less so did the fact that economic development not only brought peasants into the worker stratum, but took many experienced, "conscious" proletarians out. Upward mobility in these years of the early Five-Year Plans is a phenomenon on which few reliable data exist*, but it cannot have been other than profoundly consequential. It is not so much a matter of co-optation, of the new Soviet regime promoting from the bench to the office the most "conscious," educated, ideologically committed workers -- there was some of this, but often those who rose in the vydvizhenie were not terribly valued in the factory⁹. Rather, the opportunities through all forms of rabfaks, extramural and evening education to advance oneself appealed greatly to workers, who could expect a job in rapidly-expanding state bureaucracies. No longer was one tied to one's "working-class birth," no longer need one be content in a status not of one's own choosing. Opportunities for mobility, perceived and real, operate against class-consciousness: they argue the impermanence of membership in a class, offer individual advancement as an alternative to the struggle for collective advancement. Thus, the Soviet "working class" was open at both ends -- a large aperture at the bottom through which flowed peasant recruits to arduous and predominantly unskilled work was complemented by a small but no less significant aperture at the top through which many would "escape" the proletariat and with it, its concerns.

* The Harvard project sample of emigres, reflecting the experience of the 1920s and 1930s, focuses, as the researchers involved acknowledge, on an exceptionally successful group whose "mobility" is atypically high.¹⁰

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Thus developed the Soviet "working class" (or stratum), and a Soviet Union which, by Feldmesser's earlier definition, was "classless". This characteristic, combining substantial stratification (inequality) with a lack of firmly-established hierarchical groups, with a consequent "fluidity," was not dissimilar in broad outlines to another society whose lack of "class" orientation and consciousness so struck Europeans -- the United States. Both manifested what the Polish sociologist Ossowski called "non-egalitarian classlessness". //

Under such conditions (to say nothing of the internal differentiations in skill, working conditions, and remuneration of Soviet manual workers which have been so impressive to some), it seems difficult to talk about a Soviet "working class." The rationale for this detour, no doubt to some overlong and mainly terminological, is twofold: first, the concerns and political perceptions of Soviet workers will not be theirs alone -- we can expect overlap in places with the peasantry and with the nonmanual strata, and inter-stratum differences will often be ones of degree, not kind. Second, to state what perhaps belongs among conclusions at the outset: there is little evidence of the increasingly assertive class consciousness of some other socialist proletariats in the USSR today. The Polish working class, to a lesser degree the Hungarian, and in a different manner the Yugoslav all, it seems to me, show more signs of the Marxian klasse für sich than their Soviet counterparts (though ~~these~~ too seem in the early stages of such development). For both reasons, we are better advised to talk about Soviet "workers," about the workers' stratum, than about the working class.

Support and Conformity

It is illuminating and profitable today to read Inkeles and Bauer's The Soviet Citizen -- though the book itself dates back sixteen years and its base is the views of Soviet emigres of the World War II period. Two brief quotes may set the frame for much of the discussion in this section -- the first, following upon the observation that Soviet citizens approved of the "welfare state" principle, though not of the short falls of the Stalinist era:

...it must be recognized that if the regime is able to deliver such welfare benefits as the people expect they will tap a strong reservoir of favorable public sentiment.¹²

The second, also future-oriented in the perspectives of the 1950s, but less speculative:

The younger people react more affirmatively to the "positive" aspects and less violently to the negative aspects.

...younger people (are) more inclined to favor the institutional structure of Soviet society -- state ownership, control, and planning and welfare institutions.¹³

We are today in that future, the "young" (counterparts of the emigres) are now well into middle age within the Soviet borders -- and the system has delivered. Thirty years of peace have permitted the Soviet system to provide, and the population to enjoy, a decent diet, a health system adequate if not spectacular in quality, and free public education. Compared with the Stalin years, scarcities have abated, and Soviet workers now enjoy many more of life's good things than they did in the past.

There is every reason to argue that the basic political perceptions of the workers' stratum are generally positive and "pro-system." In the sphere of material expectations, wants have been met. The Stalin-era emigres¹⁴ heavily favored the retention in any future USSR of public education, socialized medicine, and other welfare-state items. Their condemnation of the regime in no way reduced the attraction of a welfare state which would "work" -- and very few, even after

exposure to the relative affluence of the USA and Western Europe, could convince themselves that a free-enterprise capitalist economy could deliver on their expectations. Given the trends observable among these emigres, the lack of any exposure of contemporary Soviet workers to capitalist affluence (and their familiarity, through the media, with capitalist inflation and unemployment) makes them even less likely to perceive a need for change in the economy system.

The favoring of socialism is, however, less one of principle in general than of what it delivers -- as the emigre respondent sample indicated, government ownership of the means of production per se was not as salient to respondents as what they presumably received under such a system. And here, indeed, some evidence indicated that workers were less inclined to risk change in the scope of state ownership than other strata better-placed. While intelligentsia, lower white collar employees, skilled and ordinary workers all overwhelmingly agreed that state ownership and control of transport and heavy industry was worth retaining, their opinions on the light-industry sector were in general more moderate and diverged more as well. While only about 23 per cent of intelligentsia, and 24 per cent of white-collar employees favored continued state ownership in this sector, roughly 37 per cent of workers did.¹⁵ Their greater reluctance to leave uncontrolled even this segment of industry probably reflects, as Inkales and Bauer ^{argue,} the intelligentsia's ability to project themselves ^{into} the role of owners of light industry, and a lack of such ability among workers.¹⁶ The latter, it seems arguable, are likely to take a more "dependent" stance toward the state as material supplier -- although as we shall see this does not mean they, any more than other strata, are completely satisfied. It does mean, however, that they will object less to "regulated" economic life than some elements of the intelligentsia at least, as long as they are provided for.

As workers, they are protected from unemployment -- no small promoter of

positive views toward a polity which will readily take credit for providing such protection. But they are also the beneficiaries of a style of industrial organization with a fairly high tolerance for "slacking," absenteeism, etc. The image of the Soviet factory often seems to be one of a tough, repressive place, with workers undefended by their trade unions. This is not quite the case -- trade unions, indeed, are not combative articulators of workers' interests, but managerial concerns about morale, and a growing labor shortage, seem to moderate the demands the system imposes. In one oblast¹⁷, workers were estimated to have taken an average of seventeen extra days off, in addition to holidays, during six months in 1971. Official figures, high as they are, probably underestimate illegitimate absenteeism¹⁸ -- but its endemic quality is, in a sense, an index of its toleration. Labor productivity figures indicate that Soviet workers do not work as efficiently as their West European counterparts -- and part of this is due to the fact that automation and mechanization, even in a city like Leningrad, are comparatively low.¹⁹

But part as well is probably

due to the fact that Soviet workers do not work as constantly, or as hard.

This evidence of "looseness" of organization in the workplace, some will surely suggest, cuts two ways. If the relative tolerance of absenteeism and loose enforcement of the rules "against" the worker as well as those "for" him indicates a "soft" aspect of the system which workers must perceive positively, is not their absenteeism itself evidence of alienation, disaffection with that large portion of their waking hours spent at work? To this, I think the answer is "yes" -- and we will explore this in the section following -- but the point to be made here is that the relative toleration of such irresponsible behavior is a concession on which workers depend. What, after all, would be the conse-

quences for worker perceptions of the regime's policy toward them were there a real tightening of workplace administration?

Delivering on material expectations is not the only base on which the workers generally support the Soviet system. Other bases extend more into the "purely" political, normative sphere. One of these is "Soviet patriotism" a much-abused phrase, but one with a considerable reality behind it. To the degree that the common man, with little experience of, or interest in, the world at large can derive satisfaction from being part of one of the global units that "counts," the Soviet worker can -- he shares the status of citizen of a "superpower" only with his American and, perhaps, Chinese counterpart. This is no minor matter -- knowing less and caring less to know of other systems than the intelligentsia, the workers are all the more readily convinced that their system is "good," the "best" -- that it is worth defending and deserves its place in the world. The USSR was readily defended against invaders under Stalinism, once the nature of Hitler's designs became clear -- the perceived threat of China today is one which mingles historical xenophobia and a racism all the more deeply-rooted because Soviet citizens (Russians) are never accused by their own media of being "racist" in attitude, and even links conformist workers with much of the dissident intelligentsia. Whatever their occasional grumbling, the Russian, and broader Slavic component of the "working class," by far the dominant component -- shows every sign of identifying with the Soviet system, of regarding it as theirs. Not surprisingly, it is quite receptive to the regime's calls for vigilance against foreign powers with designs in the USSR. 20

Do workers in general assess the restrictions on movement, speech, assembly, etc. under which they live as a burden unjustified? a necessary sacrifice in a country still facing the possibility of internal subversion as well as external aggression? or do they see them as at all "abnormal"? The evidence, impression-

istic as it is, would seem to indicate a combination of the latter two characterizations. Historically, Russia lacked any tradition of individual autonomy -- from notions of the inviolability and "private" quality of some portion of the citizen's life to the broader range of orientations tied up in the psychology of individual entrepreneurship. Emigres of the early postwar period showed, even after exposure to the freedoms of the West, a rather authoritarian turn in their thinking, a tendency to expect and respect government which did not oppress or victimize its citizens, yet did "control" them for good purposes. This was manifested most clearly in emigres' evident enjoyment of the freedom the West allowed them as individuals, but their concern at the principles which dictated that groups critical of the government be allowed to operate openly.²¹

Little, really, seems to have changed in this respect. Twenty years and more of uncertain, up-and-down liberalization since Stalin's death have whetted the appetites of some of the intelligentsia for more autonomy -- in their eyes, the system's legitimacy is faltering. But for the working mass, that relative liberalization has removed much of what earlier alienated them, and in their eyes, the system is probably more legitimate than ever.²² It is terror, not control, that the workers feared; arbitrary punishment, not the stern paternalism of a strong state. The gulf is wide indeed between the Western libertarian notion that "that government is best which governs least" and the contrasting Russian/Soviet belief which might be rendered "that government which governs least is no government at all." The recent reportage of Moscow correspondents, reflecting the USSR of the early 1970s,²³ seems to bear out the observation of Henry V. Dicks over twenty years ago that Russians see themselves as needing a "strong moral corset"²⁴ and, fearful of anarchy, are willing to wear it, while marvelling at nations whose citizens seem to do without such accoutrements. Such empirical research as has been done on the new Soviet emigres of the 1970s again seems to

indicate concerns that the Western societies to which they have emigrated are too loosely governed, too ready to countenance anti-government and anti-social activities in the conservation of individual liberty.²⁵

One of the most striking indications of this readiness to perceive a political order, repressive and interventionist in Western perspective, as "proper" and fitting is the tendency of some -- among them many workers -- to reminisce on Stalin's time as a "good" one; a time when a strogii priadok prevailed, and whose absence has admitted new and troubling phenomena in Soviet life.²⁶ This is not retrospective political hallucination, or not completely. What seems to concern such persons (discounting that segment of persons in any society who seem authoritarian by natural inclination) is change, cultural and social, that has come with the partial decompression of Soviet life. Change of the sort that I mean here - everything from the onrush of rock, "style," display and consumption to the economic forces which, in the USSR as elsewhere, continue to loosen the bonds of family life -- inexorably moves a Russia still peasant and rural, parochial and traditional in many of its moods, toward something else. It is not a comfortable process for many. Paradoxically despite the social cataclysms represented by revolution, civil war and the "great break" which commenced in the late 1920s, the regime over which Stalin presided, harsh as it was, protected people from such change -- at least so it appears to them in hindsight.²⁷ The USSR was a profoundly conservative society, in a certain sense, under Stalin -- it remains one today, but the conservatism of some of its subjects, among them large segments of the working class, is even greater than the regime's. Hence, some yearn from time to time for the certainties, the toughness, the "no-nonsense" of the pre-1953 world they remember -- in which children would not be rude, music not raucous, besporiadok not so evident and the future more certain. On the whole, Soviet citizens do not crave "change" -- certainly not the workers --

but "more of the same"; improvements in, and increased facilities to live, the life they understand.

Thus far, we have scarcely dealt in subtlety -- the Soviet "working class" has been characterized as oriented toward a "welfare state," expecting paternalistic concern and willing to yield autonomy for it; patriotic in the general understood sense; socially conservative in the sense that the expectation of social change as a "constant" has not been internalized -- a class well-matched to a society the virtual opposite of the America Jean-Franco^{is} Revel has seen as the truly "revolutionary" one.²⁸ None of this is proper to the workers alone. Peasants, white-collar functionaries, and a majority of the officially-defined intelligentsia share, at some level of conviction or intensity, much the same orientations. Inter-class differences in "sources of support" for the regime under Stalin were not terribly marked, to judge from the Harvard Project's emigres -- there is little warrant to conclude that much has changed in this respect today. Stratified certainly, Soviet society still retains elements of the "non-egalitarian classlessness" alluded to above.

In an earlier essay,²⁹ I argued that the general Soviet political culture could be characterized as "apolitical," suffused with the individual conviction of "impoteⁿce" (to change or have significant impact on the system) and "expectant" -- of benefits to be conferred by the state. This is the mass political culture -- the various dissident subcultures deviate from it in different ways.³⁰ But if the political culture of the mass can be so characterized, then the Soviet working class must, as the major component of that mass, also exemplify those characteristics -- and, as I read the evidence, it does. Neither familial socialization, nor education, nor their own life experience encourage Soviet workers to feel that great political issues remain to be resolved, that there are great questions on which they, individually or collectively, can or must

take a stand. Their "political consciousness," celebrated by Soviet social science, is conventionalized and conformist: essentially apolitical and of a "subject" variety -- a mass characteristic on which, as the regime must understand, much of the stability of the Soviet polity is based.

They are convinced of their impotence, too -- but this is not salient to a social stratum with few alternative "images" of a polity. Amalrik may well have been correct in citing the feeling of impotence on the part of the professional and administrative strata who might like, and have a "stake" in, change ³¹ -- **but** for the workers, impotence is nothing but the natural balance of relations between subjects and "their" polity.

Expectant the workers are -- more so, if only marginally, than the rest of the population's large groups. Their welfarism is strongly engrained, their symbolic place in the system such as to give them "entitlement" to the benefits the "developed socialist society" should offer. For what it has conferred, they seem grateful -- if quiescence be, in this context, the appropriate coin of tribute.

Thus, an inventory of those characteristics of Soviet workers which render support to the system is, if general, still rather impressive. Having concentrated on one side, it is time to address the other, and identify some potential, or obvious, sources of dissatisfaction.

Disaffiliation and Nonsupport

Despite the numerous "ties," material and emotional, which bind the workers' stratum to the polity, there are phenomena as well which indicate, or suggest, particular points at which the workers are likely to perceive the political system as not working on their behalf, or at least doing more poorly "by" them than by other strata.

Consumer shortages, in both the food and durables areas, are important here. The urban social context of workers' lives, probably even more than that of the peasants, provides reasons for them to view themselves as permanently on the wrong end. In the larger cities, they are, first of all, not unaware of the special stores, the "closed" distribution networks where goods unattainable to them are in good supply -- while their feelings may be moderated by the perception that these are, after all "special" goods for "special" people, they cannot help but raise questions about fair shares. In food and other stores, workers confront in its unalloyed purity the surliness, inattention and eternal "noes" of service personnel -- whom they suspect of cheating, lying, and reserving for themselves or "special" customers the best in quality, the rarest in quantity. It is not only that workers are excluded from the special stores, but that neither their money nor "contacts" will be such as to get them very satisfactory treatment in regular retail outlets. Finally, while in calm reflection most urban workers will acknowledge that their lot is better than that of the peasant, contact between the two often takes place in a context likely to modify the acknowledgment -- the pure cash, supply and demand, charge-what-the-traffic-will bear arena of the Kolkhoz market. Workers may acquire what the state stores cannot deliver, and pay the price with minimal immediate grumbling -- yet later reflect on what peasants do with "all that money" their garden grown vegetables, melons, etc., yield.

It is unlikely that such experiences lead to articulate and reasoned critiques of the system -- the outcomes range more from the eternal grumbling over shortages to the intermittent but somewhat serious riots when food situations in some towns are perceived as critical. All this is anomic response -- unstructured, unorchestrated, and the possibility of developments beyond this level seem to me minimal. In one sense, the worker -- often a producer of things he cannot consume, a potential consumer of things others produce in quantities too limited or not at all -- is victimized by the non-market nature of the Soviet economy. His problems with food, clothing, services, repairs all in some measure go back to this. On the other hand, workers have grown used to protection from the less desirable operations of the market -- unemployment, costly fee-for-service medical care, etc. -- and thus may experience market transactions for food (the Kolkhoz market) and certain services na levo as exploitation from which they should be "protected". It is difficult to see how a particular critical "viewpoint" on the workings of the economic system could emerge from this, especially since, thus far, the economy has delivered, to the workers as to other strata, a moderate, but incremental, advance in general living standards.

The threat of a decline in career opportunities represents a second source of potential dissatisfaction. Both the rhetoric, and the past reality, of open opportunity have generated in the working class aspirations of expectations of improvements going beyond "simple" matters like prices, supply, housing conditions, etc. Over the short run, job-changing in a labor-short economy is evidence of this* -- over the longer haul, problems of greater magnitude arise.

* "Labor turnover" is, of course, high in general, prompted by quests for more convenient locations, better wages, conditions, etc. But long range geographical shifts as well - leaving areas of relative labor surplus for the higher wages and bonuses of remote areas, only to find at the destination a life not only meaner and harsher but more costly and then to return whence one came to lower wages -- reflect a pattern in which many Soviet workers may come to feel that, instead of moving ahead, they have been in circular motion.

The long-haul aspirations, of course, are those connected with social mobility across the generations. It is somewhat paradoxical, but understandable, that the Soviet regime, and those which have followed it in Eastern Europe, have at the same time exalted the working class, and legitimated desires to rise from it which some pre-socialist regimes would have rejected as "not knowing one's place." Communism, for all its collectivist emphasis, has, as a surrogate for the Protestant Ethic, legitimated individual striving -- working-class parents' desires to see their children rise to a white-collar job via education, and those children's desires to leave the world of their parents behind. As the economy expanded, as the managerial apparatus grew, "space" was created which could only be filled by the upwardly mobile. Opportunities, until fairly recent times, could match aspirations.

This is no longer the case. The "shape" of the economy (more properly, the labor force) has stabilized; the share of the peasantry declines, but slowly; the nonmanual cadres no longer swell year by year; the large workers' stratum remains large, yet given the needs of the economy appears, in prospect, too small. Working-class sons cannot assume that, down the line, an engineer's job "waits" for them, if they acquire the requisite education. Mobility aspirations, once generated, develop an independence of the real state of the economy -- but factual mobility opportunities, the real supply of "destinations" signalling an elevation of status, are linked to growth and a changing distribution of labor.

This has not meant, in the USSR, jobless university graduates, for the state has intervened to preempt such a development. The intervention has been one of inaction -- the conscious refusal to expand places in higher education to keep pace with the growth in the population of academic secondary school graduates. Places in the higher educational institutions have thus become "scarcer" in relation to a largely undiminished demand, and this, of course, has a heavy impact on the

children of workers (as well as peasants) whose at-home socialization tends, as in other countries, to be poorer in the inculcation of attitudes, habits, and basic orientations useful in educational pursuits than that received by children of the intelligentsia from their parents. Statistics showing the overrepresentation of intelligentsia offspring, and the underrepresentation of those of workers, in the vuzy are familiar to students of Soviet affairs, and the disproportions are not so great as in West European states on the whole. But Soviet parents and children do not employ such comparative standards -- thus they provide no comfort.

The social dynamics of contemporary Soviet life seem to indicate (we have not sufficient time-series data to be certain) a strong trend toward greater inheritance of social-occupational position. The Soviet intelligentsia seeks, generally successfully, to place its children in the vuzy, to insure their inheritance of status. The working class, in a less "competitive" position vis a vis higher education, tends to retain its offspring -- and for many of them, a worker's job, even more skilled, comfortable and better-paid than that of their fathers, is a violation of hopes -- just as the specialized secondary education into which official policy aims to divert them from the higher educational track is seen as no substitute.³² In this increase of occupational inheritance lies a danger -- more pronounced today in certain East European states -- which we shall take up later. It is sufficient for now to register the trend, and to note that it runs against the experience of a long period of Soviet history to which aspirations have become celebrated -- that of a society providing significant career opportunities for the energetic and talented, however humble and disadvantaged their starting point.

More broadly, the issue here is one of "welfare" or egalitarian principles vs. those of a "performance" or meritocratic nature -- a major problem in socialist social policy. Here, as the Polish sociologist Wlodzimierz Wesolowski recognizes,

inter-class (or -stratum) interest conflict develop.³³ For the educated and occupational well-placed (and their children) an emphasis on qualification, on "merit" is desirable -- a readiness to reward those who possess complex knowledge, to seek for those already demonstrably prepared for higher education, redound to the intelligentsia's benefit. Such policies, defensible in "universalistic" terms, tend to confer advantage on those already "advantaged."

They do not, however, serve the workers so well; their "interest" lies in policy emphases which stress that income differentials must be kept within boundaries tolerable for a socialist state, which are concerned with the "social profile" of higher educational institutions and placing a "floor" beneath which the share of worker and peasant origin students will not drop. Though workers would be unlikely articulators of these concerns in such terms, equality of result rather than equality of opportunity is their ^{main} concern. Soviet policy has been a compromise -- setting itself against (at least in recent years) extremes of income differentiation³⁴, stressing the search for "talent" wherever it rises on the one hand, but on the other setting itself resolutely against "quotas" in higher education³⁵ and continuing to offer various sorts of significant material rewards outside normal wages and salary to the incumbents of "valued" occupations.

Are Soviet workers' emotions exercised by all this -- do they consciously ~~feel~~ that theirs is a "raw deal"? Various observers³⁶ have stressed the seeming acceptance of "privilege" by the masses -- the "deferential" attitude of the worker and common man toward the special benefits of his superiors. I am, for various reasons, unpersuaded that the term "deferential" is really applicable here -- certainly it is less so in the USSR than in socialist societies with elements of a more traditional European social structure such as Poland and Hungary³⁷ -- but there is a seemingly mute acceptance of the inequalities which exist. The question of equality is not yet politicized, but such is not

the only index of working-class discontent. There are certain behavioral symptoms which find their most frequent (though not sole) expression in the working class, which do indicate discontent.

First, the abuse of alcohol -- a phenomenon needing no extensive documentation here -- is both an operating principle and operating expense of Soviet industry. Industrial accidents, days and hours lost, workers' health problems and the like are linked to an epidemic type of alcohol abuse which is rooted not only in a traditional Russian "drinking culture" of demonstrable pathological potential, but in the monotony of working-class life on and off the job. Soviet statistics on alcohol consumption and related pathologies are of low quality -- as are those of most nations -- but observations of various sorts lead one to conclude that for a significant segment of Soviet workers, drink is both a problem, and a solution to problems.

Similarly, the complex of educational, cultural, economic and familial characteristics of the workers' stratum, seem to generate, as they do elsewhere, an overrepresentation of workers and their children in criminal and delinquent activities. Partly, perhaps, a function of the tendency of law-enforcement agencies to concentrate attention on the groups from which they anticipate "trouble", the involvement of this stratum in public-order offenses, crimes against the person, and property crimes nonetheless does indicate "problems" in its socialization and degree of "moral integration" in the social system.

Nowhere, probably, is the "strain" between the system's enunciated rules and the behavior of the worker than in the attitude toward "socialist property" -- the failure to assume responsibility for its preservation and the readiness, in fact, to prey on it as "fair game". While statistics are again largely silent, the multitude of articles in the general press and in legal journals attest to the epidemic nature of theft by employees from their workplaces. Goods -- finished or in process, for home use or consumption, for sale, for necessary repairs unattain-

able in the open economy -- disappear from factories at a substantial rate, with little evidence of concern even on the part of workers who do not themselves (presumably) steal.³⁸

Underlying the phenomenon are two factors -- one "structural" and a characteristic of Soviet economic organization, the other, "social-psychological" and perhaps characteristic of "underdog" self-images everywhere. Evidence from American research³⁹ (by no means automatically to be rejected) indicates that persons generally opposed to theft would, if material circumstances forced them to do it, more readily victimize "large business" or "the government" than small business (or, presumably, individuals). The rationales vary. Blaming business for unjustifiably high prices, government for tax rates unjustified by the services it delivers, some saw theft from them as "redistribution" with some justification. Others simply cited the scale and impersonality of such organizations, arguing that they were thus "self-insured" or could "stand" individual thefts better than small businessmen could. Whether as employees supplementing wages they deemed too low, or as consumers/customers reacting to prices seen as too high, people in general showed a readiness to victimize "bigness."

Consider then the USSR -- where government and large business are united, where state administration, production, and retail distribution are all part of the same organizational colossus. If the logic of large organizations' ability to "sustain" individuals' depredations holds in the Soviet Union as well, little could be expected other than a high rate of "victimization" of the state by those whose rewards it controls, and who cannot see why their thefts, now and then, "hurt". As Otto Ulc appropriately observed of Czechoslovakia, in a passage equally applicable to the USSR, the socialist state, through the nationalization of the economy, became "the owner of more property than it could possibly protect."⁴⁰

Are such thefts an inchoate form of political protest by their perpetrators?

Certainly, they indicate that the official line -- that each worker is a co-proprietor of the national wealth held in "trust" for him by the state, and therefore by theft steals from himself -- has failed to convince the common man, who understands that control of the use and most of the distribution of that property has been removed from his hands. Beyond this, however, it is a matter of some interpretation.

The familiar sayings referring to theft and "slacking" in general -- "We ~~pretend to work, and they~~ pretend to pay us," "They cannot pay us so little that we cannot work even less," and, more ominously, "he who does not steal from the state steals from his family" are political in implication, at least from the outside observer's viewpoint. Yet these are, whatever their factual basis, also opportunistic rationalizations. This is deviance, not dissidence -- the worker who steals does not advertise the fact, does not make an open moral statement. Theft is not, however widespread, a programmatic expression of the dissident politics of a conscious working class.

A better way to put these actions in context, without arguing that they lack political relevance, is to borrow from the sociology of deviance -- specifically from David Matza -- the concept of "techniques of neutralization."⁴¹ Dissatisfied with explanations of juvenile delinquency in the U.S.A. which argued the existence of an elaborated and clearly-articulated "delinquent culture" or "counterculture" with its own values and norms opposed to those of the straight, conforming culture, Matza argued instead that delinquents rationalized their acts by extensions, beyond legal limits, of excuses (self-defense, insanity, etc.) recognized in law. These allowed them to "neutralize" the guilt they would otherwise feel in violating the rules of a culture from which they had not wholly seceded, though their affiliation with it might be weak. Thus various techniques such as "denial of injury" (the illegal act caused no harm), "denial of the victim" (victim deserved it, was himself at fault), and the "appeal to higher

loyalties" (the situation was covered by a moral rule more authoritative than that of the law) are utilized by the delinquent.

The sayings noted above, and the occasional insights reportage supplies into the views of Soviet workers, indicate that they are no strangers to these techniques. To take an item, or several, home at the end of the work day, saying to oneself that "the plant won't miss it" (and find that one's co-workers agree) is not necessarily to elevate theft from an exploitative employer to a principle -- it is simply to deny the injury. To go a step further -- to take, saying that "the factory will let their goods rot in storage and they'll never reach the stores" is not necessarily to indict the economic system and strike back at it -- it is to deny the victim. To say that one "pretends" to work in exchange for one's so-called wages is not to advocate wholesale defrauding of employers, but again to deny that they are victims. Finally, to steal "from the state" when the alternative is "theft" from one's family is to appeal to higher loyalties, not to deny the state any legitimate rights.

There are the sorts of explanations Soviet workers, basically "conformist," probably quite supportive of their government and its policies, domestic and foreign, in general, can give of their behavior. They are not articulations of working-class political principles or preceptions, narrowly defined, but they are political in implication. Subscribers though they may be to "official" values, the Soviet workers show evidence of what has been called the "lower-class value stretch" -- a reaction of the "underdog," of an underclass in society, whereby the pressures of economic and social location bring about behavior "adaptions" which go beyond the rules, "stretching" the values to which lip-service is still given to the point where they are, effectively, negated. If this is a correct "reading" of the meaning of drunkenness, poor labor discipline, crime economic and noneconomic among Soviet workers, then, given what we have already

argued about the manner in which they offer support to the system, there may be reasons to expect a further weakening of the ties that bind them to the system, should future events impair that system's ability to deliver. Then, just possibly, some sort of oppositional "consciousness" might develop.

We shall take up some of the future possibilities -- for now, however, perhaps the following general characterization of the situation will serve adequately. Soviet ideology still, as it has in the past, credits the "working class" with a leading role in society. This is, then, an element in what Amitai Etzioni calls the "symbolic-normative system."⁴² Granted that workers do not rule, it is nonetheless in the regime's interests to have them behave in a disciplined, efficient, "conscious" manner -- of which they fall far short. Why do workers not "conform" to these projections? Etzioni again argues that conformity requires that societal assets be so distributed as to make conformity possible, which it may not be even when persons both know the rules and are motivated ^{to} (think they "should") conform. The "assets" are both material and psychological -- and "the less the patterns of the distributive structure and the political organization parallel the patterns prescribed by the symbolic-normative system"⁴³ the more deviance may be expected.

The problem is that the Soviet "working class", while not a debased proletariat at the margins of human survival, is also not the recipient of the assets the symbolic-normative system defines as its due. Nourished on a rhetoric of equality (or pre-eminence) they cannot completely ignore (however cynically they may regard poster art and sloganeering), the workers have accommodated to their real situation in a way which is problematic for the regime, but whose ultimate political impact is questionable, and in any case yet to be felt.

Present Balance and Future Prospects

We have reviewed two sides of workers' presumed perceptions of the political order in which they live. Surely it is not going too far to say that characteristically "working class" political perceptions are elusive, if they exist at all. It is not that workers' social location -- their place in the hierarchies of power, income, and prestige -- cannot be characterized, but that no clear consciousness linked to that location seems to have emerged, and more than it has in other broad strata of the population.

The Western analyst, understandably enough, concerns himself with such things as the relative place of the worker in the system, the degree to which increase in his welfare have matched, proportionally, the improving fortunes of other groups in the decade and a half just past. We know more about this than does the worker himself -- it is we who attempt to plumb the depth, to interpolate the needed information, from the annual Narodnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR, not he. As long as things go reasonably well in his daily life, the worker finds his preferred reading in Sovetskii Sport. This is scarcely indicative of a high degree of political consciousness -- either of a critical nature or of the sort the agitprop enterprise is avowedly committed to creating -- but it is "comfortable" for the worker, and comforting to a regime with a significant stake in maintaining the apoliticism of the population.

Soviet workers are not the heirs of an industrial revolution of the Western type, marked by an interplay of individual entrepreneurial activity and state sponsorship, of market and planning, of gradual transition from a localized, low-demand economy to a complex national economy with a complex division of labor. Their heritage is that of an absolutist state, which has treated them as a resource to be used and exploited, which has dominated and "driven" society as a whole. It is a heritage whose roots predate any industrial revolution,

which goes back to the Tsar yoke and Muscovite absolutism. It is hardly cause for wonder that they do not "behave" in the manner of what we generally think of as a working class.

Does the future promise any significant alterations? It is difficult to see them. Recent times have indicated no increased "resonance" of the concerns of political dissidents among the workers -- by and large the latter remained unconcerned with, and outside of, the "democratic movement".

Will the material expectations of workers be met by an economy now middle-aged, increasingly hard-pressed to general large per annum growth figures, and facing potential shortages of labor and materials?⁴⁴ We do not have a firm grasp on the magnitude of those expectations, but can I think assume they are relatively moderate. The term "revolution of rising expectations" is much bandied about, but I cannot see that it applies to the USSR -- the issue is whether moderate expectations of progressive increase in real income can be met. Thus far, the regime has not done badly -- riots have occurred, localized temporary outbursts, but given the sort of shortages which plague the food distribution network in all but the most favored cities, the significant fact seems to be that more do not occur. The 1960 and earlier 1970s saw impressive growth in living standards, and the re-housing in new apartments of a significant number of households, workers' households among them. These changes have generated a good deal of political capital for the regime, which it has not squandered.

Workers, relatively, have not benefitted as much as other groups -- notably the Kolkhoz peasants -- from the economic changes and increased living standards which have come since 1960.⁴⁵ The gap between worker and Kolkhoznik has narrowed -- but, again, the real increase in living standards is the stuff of experience, not the comparative rates at which the lots of different groups have improved. Workers thus far seem untroubled.

Fundamentally changed circumstances -- economic disasters of sorts that cannot be made good by state purchasing abroad, etc. -- could signal a more "militant" working class, as it comes to feel the pinch as it has not for some time. But workers, again, would not be alone in response to such change -- raising again the abalytic question of whether political perceptions proper to the working class alone really exist.

Soviet workers might complain about a lack of the individual liberties they would enjoy in a Western society -- but their own socialization, and the long history of the society of which they are a part make this unlikely. They might complain about their place in the socio-economic hierarchy -- but life, in the concrete, has gotten better for them. The annoyance of Christopher Jencks and his colleagues ⁴⁶ over the lack of concern American workers show for material equality, the "unpoliticized" status of inequality, and such egalitarian critics' frustration over the fact that the common man wants more, rather than hankering for an abstract justice of distribution, finds reflection and amplification in the USSR.

1. Even one used to plumbing the depths of Soviet writings for the occasional nugget of information on "unofficial" attitudes and convictions will find a search through Soviet social-science literature barren in result when his quest is for anything like working class political perceptions. There are, surely promising titles: M.T. Iovchuk and L. N. Kogan, Dukhovnyi mir sovetskogo rabochgo: opyt knokretno-sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1972); R. A. Safarov, Obshchestvennoe mnenie i gosudarstvennoe upravlenie (Moscow: "Iuridicheskaiia literatura," 1975); L.A. Gordon and E.V. Klopov, Chelovek posle raboty (Moscow: "Nauka", 1972). But they deliver little of interest -- nor do most of the works of "public opinion research" from the mid and late 1960s, some of which are discussed and summarized in Walter D. Connor and Zvi Gitelman, Public Opinion in European Socialist Systems (New York: Praeger, forthcoming, 1978) ch. 4.
2. See two conference reports which indicate the problems of investigators indefining social strata: I. I. Kravchenko and E.T. Fadeev, "Problemy izmeneniia sotsial'noi struktury sovetskogo obshchestva", Voprosy filosofii, no. 6, 1972, pp. 137-147.
3. See Robert Feldmesser, "Social Classes and Political Structure," in Cyril E. Black, ed., The Transformation of Russian Society (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 239.
4. Jerzy G. Gliksman, "The Russian Urban Worker: from Serf to Proletarian," in Black, ed., Transformation, p. 313.
5. Ibid., pp. 314-315; Gliksman notes that ca. 1900, "between one-third and two-thirds" of industrial workers were hereditary proletarians -- an

estimate which gives us some notion of the limits on our knowledge of the growth of the early working class.

6. As Zygmunt Bauman wrote of Poland at a later date -- in works as applicable to the Soviet 1930s -- "a relatively meagre group of pre-war industrial workers. . . were dissolved in a vast mass of peasant migrants, to whom the living standards they met meant a genuine improvement in the standards they had known." ("Social Dissent in the East European Political System," European Journal of Sociology XII, 1 (1971), p. 38.
7. See Vladimir Andrie, Managerial Power in the Soviet Union (Lexington, Mass.: Saxon House/Lexington Books, 1976), p. 118.
8. Feldmesser, op. cit., p 248.
9. See Robert A. Feldmesser, "Aspects of Social Mobility in the Soviet Union" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1955).
10. See Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer, The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 82.
11. Stanislaw Ossowski, Class Structure in the Social Consciousness (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 100-118.
12. Inkeles and Bauer, Soviet Citizen, p. 242.
13. Ibid., p. 254.
14. This argument is drawn from the whole of ch. 10, ibid., pp. 233-254.
15. Ibid., p. 234, Table 57.

16. Ibid., p. 245.
17. Sotsialisticheskaia industriia Oct. 16, 1971, p. 2, as cited in Andrle, Managerial Power, op. cit., p. 79.
18. See Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta, no. 20, 1968, pp. 38-39, and Sotsialisticheskaia industriia, July 20, 1972, p. 3, as cited in Andrle, op. cit., p. 79.
19. See Andrle, Managerial Power, op. cit., p. 77, and sources cited therein.
20. Perceptions of the possibility of such negative mass reactions, readily exploitable by the Soviet regime, have prompted some to point to dangers in a U.S. policy toward the USSR which stresses "human rights" and might give the appearance that a potentially "liberalizing" successor regime to Brezhnev and Kosygin was submitting to foreign pressure.
21. Inkeles and Bauer, Soviet Citizen, p.
22. Rudolf Tökés makes roughly this argument in "Dissent: The Politics for Change in the USSR," in Henry W. Morton and Rudolf L. Tokes, eds., Soviet Politics and Society in the 1970s (New York: Free Press, 1974), p. 8.
23. See Hedrick Smith, The Russians (New York: Quadrangle Books/NYT, 1976), pp. 241-272; also Robert G. Kaiser, Russia: The People and the Power (New York: Atheneum, 1976).
24. See his "Observations on Contemporary Russian Behavior," Human Relations V (1952) pp. 111-176, reprinted in condensed form as "Some Notes on the Russian National Character" in Black, ed., Transformation, op. cit., pp 636-652.

25. Zvi Gitelman's as-yet unpublished research on Soviet emigres provides some interesting evidence of this.
26. As Smith (Russians, op. cit.) calls it, a "nostalgia for a strong boss".
27. Trotsky, viewing the social trends of the 1930s' USSR, made somewhat similar points with respect to "conservatism." See The Revolution Betrayed (New York: Merit, 1965), esp pp. 144-185.
28. Jean-Francois Revel, Without Marx or Jesus: The New American Revolution Has Begun (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).
29. Walter D. Connor, "Generations and Politics in the USSR," Problems of Communism (September-October, 1970), pp. 20-31.
30. What the dissident "subcultures" share is a politicization which, of whatever nature, distinguishes them from the mass political culture. One finds a wide variation, from the liberal democracy espoused by Sakharov and some others, to the "reformist Leninism" of Medvedev, to various forms of Russian "nationalist-centralist" orientation -- as well as some advocates of Stalinism itself. Whatever the differing potential of different currents of dissident ideology for attracting "mass" support, today the mass, among it the workers, know little of and care little about either Sakharov-style liberals or Stalinist dissidents such as the former "Fetisov group."
31. Andrei Amalrik, Will the USSR Survive Until 1984? (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). p.
32. See Mervyn Matthews, Class and Society in Soviet Russia (New York: Walker, 1972), p. 282, for some general comments along this line.

33. See Wlodzimierz Wesolowski, "Social Stratification in Socialist Society (Some Theoretical Problems)", Polish Sociological Bulletin, No. 1, 1967.
34. See, e.g., Peter Wiles, "Recent Data on Soviet Income Distribution", Survey (London) 21, 3 (Summer, 1975), pp. 28-41.
35. See, e.g., M. N. Rutkevich and F. R. Filippov, Sotsial'nye peremeshchenia (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1970), p. 144.
36. Smith, Russians, op. cit., pp. 260-264; "An Observer" (George Feifer, Message from Moscow (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 109.
37. See Walter D. Connor, Socialism, Politics and Equality (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming 1978), esp. ch. 8.
38. See L.A. Andreeva and G. A. Levitskii, "Obstoiatel'stva, sposobstvuiushchie ~~kh~~shcheniam (Opyt vyivleniia obshchestvennogo mneniia)," Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo, no. 11, 1969, p. 105.
39. See Erwin O. Smigel, "Public Attitudes Toward Stealing as Related to the Size of the Victim Organization," American Sociological Review XXI, 3 (June, 1956), pp. 320-327.
40. Otto Ulc, Judge in a Communist State (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1972), p.
41. David Matza, Delinquency and Drift (New York: Wiley, 1964), esp. pp. 69-151; and Gresham Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," American Sociological Review (December, 1957) pp. 664-670.
42. See Amitai Etzioni, The Active Society (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 328-329.

43. Ibid.
44. See Gregory Grossman, "An Economy at Middle Age," Problems of Communism, March-April, 1976; see also Murray Feshbach and Stephen Rapawy, "Soviet Population and Manpower Trends and Policies," in Soviet Economy in a New Perspective (Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress), (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), pp. 113-154.
45. The as-yet unpublished research of Alistair McAuley demonstrates this.
46. See Christopher Jencks, et. al., Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 232, 264-265.