

The New Economic Policy and its Political Dilemmas

Even as the delegates to the Tenth Party Congress were voting for tight party discipline and the violent repression of the Kronstadt revolt, they also approved a radical change in economic policy, this time towards greater freedom. This was the abolition of grain requisitioning and its replacement by a tax in kind set at a much lower level than the compulsory deliveries. This measure was being tried out in Tambov and had been announced in Petrograd: it was conceived as a way of taking the sting out of popular discontent without making political concessions.

The abandonment of requisitioning had, however, profound economic consequences. Since the tax was both lower and more predictable than the requisitions had been, it gave the peasant an incentive once again to maximize the productivity of his plot of land, secure in the knowledge that whatever surplus he achieved could be sold for profit on the market. This meant, of course, that the government had to restore freedom of private trade. Since, moreover, peasants could not be expected to trade unless there was something to buy with the proceeds, it was obviously important to generate at least a reasonable supply of consumer goods. In practice, the easiest way to do this was to abolish the state monopoly of small- and medium-scale manufacture, retail trade and services.

This was in fact what the government did during 1921, while keeping heavy industry, banking and foreign trade in the hands of the state. Taken together, these measures became known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). In the

urban markets the results were apparent immediately. When a hero of the novelist Andrei Platonov returned to his native town in 1921:

At first he thought the Whites must be in town. At the station was a café where they were selling white rolls without ration cards or queuing. . . . In the shop he came across all the normal equipment of trade, once seen in his long forgotten youth: counters under glass, shelves along the walls, proper scales instead of steelyards, courteous assistants instead of supply officials, a lively crowd of purchasers, and stocks of food which breathed an air of well-being.

Although some private trade recovered remarkably quickly, in general the economy was still in deep crisis. Years of war, conscription and food requisitioning had devastated agriculture, particularly in the most fertile regions. On top of this, the Volga basin experienced drought in 1920 and 1921. Unprotected by any reserves, peasant households faced two very poor harvests in succession. The result was famine on a scale that the government simply could not meet. For the one and only time, it allowed direct foreign aid inside Soviet Russia. An international relief committee was formed, which included prominent Russian non-Communists (who were all arrested once the emergency was over). But in spite of its efforts, probably about 5 million people died.

Industry, too, was in a desperate state. In the major branches of manufacture, output in 1921 was a fifth or less of the 1913 level: in the case of iron and steel it was actually below 5 per cent. The number of workers employed to generate this output did not fall below 40 per cent of the 1913 level, and here lay one of the major problems of the new era. For these underemployed workers were soon joined by a flood of new job-seekers, heading in from the countryside as soon as there was any prospect of a job, and also by millions of former soldiers demobilized from the Red Army. They joined the

labour market at the very time when industrial concerns were trying to adjust to the new conditions. Whether they were nationalized or private firms made no difference: henceforth there were to be no direct state subsidies. That meant the expenditure for fuel, raw materials, wages and further investment had to be met out of sales revenue. Firms had to balance their books, or they could well go out of business. This was a reality which workers, party and trade unions had to recognize.

The industrial recovery thus started on a very shaky basis. Initially this led to an imbalance in the terms of trade with agriculture. In spite of the famine, the ploughing and sowing of underused fields proved to be a much faster process than the re-equipment of damaged and dilapidated factories. By the summer of 1923 the shortage of industrial products in relation to agricultural ones had reached such a pitch that the ratio of industrial to agricultural prices stood at more than three times its 1913 level. What this meant in practice was that peasants who sold their produce on the market were not thereby raising enough revenue to buy the industrial goods they wanted. The danger was that repeated experiences of this kind would induce them to cut back their sowings – as they had done during the civil war – and food shortages would resume. Industrial products would then remain unsold, to everyone's mutual disadvantage. Although the fact was not immediately recognized, this 'scissors crisis' (as it was called in reference to the divergent parabolas of industrial and agricultural prices) proved to pose a fundamental threat to NEP. The disputes generated by it formed the first stage in the long-term debate on the economic development strategy of the Soviet government (see below, pages 136–40).

Another result of the uncertain industrial recovery was that the workers, who were theoretically the inheritors of the new society, in practice found it very difficult to understand their place within it. The large reserve of unemployed ensured that their wages remained low: in 1925, Sokolnikov, people's commissar for finance, admitted that the pay of miners, metal

workers and engine drivers was still lower than it had been before 1914. This in turn meant that workers' housing and nourishment was often inadequate. The factory committee of a cement works in Smolensk reported, for example, in 1929: 'Every day there are many complaints about apartments: many workers have families of six and seven people, and live in one room.... [We] have about 500 applications from workers who do not have apartments.' Food supplies, though far better than before 1922, fluctuated and so prices were unstable: again from Smolensk it was reported that wheat flour doubled in price and rye flour trebled between the end of 1926 and early 1929. 'Workers are being inadequately supplied by consumers' cooperatives [run by the soviets to cushion the workers from the worst effects of price fluctuation]..., and as a result, private traders virtually occupy a dominant position in the market.' It is understandable that workers consequently felt resentment about the peasants, who charged them such high prices, and about the specialists and officials, who were paid so much better. How was this possible in a society allegedly 'moving towards socialism' under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'?

The structure of industrial enterprises was also a disappointment to workers who recalled the heady days of October. All remnants of 'workers' control' had now finally disappeared. Factory administration was once more hierarchical, with clearly identifiable individual managers in charge (sometimes drawn from pre-revolutionary managerial staff, for their expertise and experience), while technical specialists and foremen enjoyed unambiguous authority over the ordinary operatives. Since efficiency and productivity were paramount, some enterprises (though not enough for Lenin) were experimenting with 'Taylorite' schemes for time-and-motion rationalization and conveyor-belt mass production. Lenin had once regarded such schemes as the quintessence of capitalist exploitation, but now favoured them for the higher output they

generated. As a further incentive, most workers were paid on a piece-rate system, which tied their income directly to productivity.

Before 1917 the workers would have expected the trade unions or indeed the party to act on their behalf. But both these organizations were now explicitly part of the state economic mechanism, and hence tended only to support workers in conflict with private employers. In 1925 the trade union newspaper *Trud* (Labour) itself complained that unions seemed to be 'occupied in dismissing and fining workers, instead of defending their interests'. The mood on the shop floor seems to have been volatile (though research on worker attitudes in this period is still embryonic), and quite a lot of labour disputes and strikes did break out, typically over housing, supplies, late or inadequate pay, or conflicts with specific administrators. The unions hardly ever supported the workers in such disputes.

Although further research on this needs to be done, there appears to be no link between industrial protests and any of the opposition groups within the party. Most workers, in fact, seem to have regarded the party as 'them', a part of the structure of authority with which they had to deal. Political and production meetings were shunned as 'boring', unless they dealt with something of immediate interest to the workman, such as pay or housing. Some workers, of course, looked on the party as a way to get on in life, seeking training, promotion, and ultimately perhaps escape from the shop floor. Party workers, for their part, often complained that the workers were 'contaminated by bourgeois tendencies' and 'petty bourgeois individualism'.

Mutual relationships between the party and the class they claimed to represent were, in fact, by the late 1920s, rather cool. For a 'working-class' party about to embark on a major industrialization programme, that was a discouraging, not to say dangerous, situation.

Relations with the peasants were even worse. In the peasantry the Bolsheviks faced the only social class which

had survived the revolution in substantially its previous form. Indeed revolution and civil war had actually strengthened more traditional and underproductive aspects of Russian agriculture. The landowners, who had by and large used more modern equipment and methods and who had provided much of the pre-1914 grain surplus, had been expropriated and their estates had mostly been divided up among peasants. The 'Stolypin' peasants likewise had their enclosed plots of land taken away from them, and they were either expelled from the village or reabsorbed into the mir. Enclosed holdings were once again divided up into strips and often made subject to periodic redistribution; modern crop rotations were abandoned where they did not fit the communal pattern. The mir, in short, achieved a dominance in Russian rural life which it had never known before. This was a direct consequence of the Bolsheviks having adopted the Socialist Revolutionary programme in 1917, but that did not mean to say it was welcome to them now.

Landholdings, even among peasants themselves, had also tended to get smaller since 1917, in spite of the new awards of land. The problem was that millions of unemployed and hungry workers had streamed out of the towns, looking to resettle on the land, and many of them were awarded communal strips, where they still had claims. The revolution also seems to have intensified strains and disputes within peasant households, which provoked younger family members to break away and claim holdings of their own. As a result of all these new awards, the total number of family holdings rose from 17–18 million in 1917 to 23 million in 1924 and 25 million in 1927. The average size of each holding naturally fell also, in spite of the annexations from landowners, church and state in 1917, as did the proportion of the crop from each holding which was sold on the market rather than used for subsistence.

For the government the implications of this fragmentation of holdings, and of the reversion to primitive techniques were very alarming. As they began to conceive ambitious industrial

projects, they needed more food to be both produced and eaten; their own policies aggravated the situation. The better-off and more productive peasants were usually taxed more heavily and felt themselves to be under stronger political pressure than their poorer colleagues. They always insisted, moreover, that the policies of 1918–21 might

have been responsible for the decline in production. These factors are reflected in the agricultural production figures, especially for grain, the most vital crop for the régime. It is true that output recovered rapidly from the catastrophic levels of 1920–1, but it never quite returned to pre-war levels. Compared with 81.6 million tonnes in 1913 (admittedly an unusually good year), grain output never exceeded 76.8 million tonnes in 1926, and fell off thereafter. Livestock production did reach pre-war levels in 1926, but declined subsequently. And there were some 14 million extra mouths to feed: in 1914, grain production had been 584 kg. per head of the population, in 1928–9 it was only 484 kg., while the government was planning for an enormous growth in the number of industrial workers, who would not produce food but would certainly need to consume it. Furthermore, of the amount produced, somewhat less was being marketed than in 1914 – though Stalin exaggerated this factor in order to produce the impression that grain was deliberately being hoarded on a large scale. In fact, since official grain prices remained low, many peasants preferred to turn their grain into *samogon* (unlicensed liquor), or even not to grow it at all.

Of course it had never been the Bolsheviks' intention to let Russian agriculture stagnate in small and primitively cultivated holdings. They had always envisaged large farms, collectively owned and mechanized. Their 1917 Land Decree had been a tactical diversion from this strategy, and they intended now to return to the main highway. In the last years of his life Lenin on the whole thought that this 'collectivization' of agriculture should take place gradually, with the party encouraging the creation of model collectives whose

high productivity and prosperity would in time persuade the rest of the peasantry to join them.

A certain number of collective farms did already exist, some of which had started during the civil war, with party encouragement and help. Broadly speaking, these were of three types: (i) the *kommuna*, in which all property was held in common, sometimes with communal living quarters and childrearing; (ii) the *artel* in which each household owned its own dwelling and small plot of land, together with such tools as were needed to cultivate it, but all other land and resources were shared; (iii) the *TOZ*, or 'association for common cultivation', in which some or all of the fields were cultivated collectively. The last category might be barely distinguishable from the traditional village community, with its custom of *pomochi*, or mutual aid at busy times of year. It is no surprise, then, to find that the majority of collectives were of the *TOZ* variety, and there is evidence to show that some of them at least were ordinary village communes relabelled to draw the tax advantages of 'collective' status.

In addition, there were some state farms (*sovkhozy*), in which the labourers were paid a regular wage, like industrial workers. Even taken together, however, all state and collective farms accounted in 1927 for less than 2 per cent of cultivated land. It is significant, though, that their share of marketed produce was much higher: about 7.5 per cent in 1927. In view of this, one might have expected that the party would have begun a programme of 'collectivization' much earlier. In fact, however, the party was remarkably dilatory during most of the 1920s about pursuing its own official policy.

In part this was because of the weakness of the village soviets. In theory the soviets were supposed to take over local administration, leaving the peasant *mir* (renamed 'land society') to cope with questions of land tenure and cultivation. In practice, however, the *mir* continued to collect local taxes and to perform administrative functions, as before the revolution. A study published by *Izvestiya* in 1927

owed that the *mir*, not the soviet, was still the basic unit of local government in most villages, and that this was creating problems in the relations with the next tier above, the volost soviets.

Nor was the party any more successful than the soviets in rooting itself in the countryside. The Communists were not the ownspeople by mentality and inclination, and most of them regarded village life with indifference or distaste. It is true that the revolution and civil war did bring an influx of rural embers into the party, mostly Red Army soldiers. Yet these were often the first to be expelled in purges against the corrupt or insufficiently active, and in any case they constituted a negligible proportion of the rural population. The 1922 party census reported that party members formed a mere 0.13 per cent of the villages' inhabitants, and many of these were teachers, doctors, agronomists and officials of volost soviets. By 1928 this proportion had only doubled: out of an estimated rural population of 120 million, about 300,000 (0.25 per cent) were Communists, and of that number only some 170,000 were actual peasants.

By and large, the weakness of the party meant domination of the village by the traditional notables. While all adults, including women, enjoyed a vote for the soviet, the commune was, by custom, a gathering of the heads of household, almost invariably male. Younger men, women and the landless were usually excluded. This meant that, in spite of the equalizing tendencies of the revolution, a degree of stratification soon reappeared in the villages. Indeed, it had never entirely disappeared. Since the commune had usually controlled the process of redistribution in 1917–18, the village notables had typically tried to ensure that some elements of greater wealth – whether in the form of acreage, livestock, or tools – remained in their own hands, or with the families whom they trusted. The former landless were better off than before, but they never became the equals of their 'bettters'.

This stratification is greatly emphasized in the Soviet

studies of the subject, both contemporary and subsequent. They divide peasants into so-called 'kulaks' ('fists')⁵⁰ moneylenders, by nineteenth-century usage, but a term no loosely applied to better-off peasants), middle peasants, poor peasants and landless labourers. The definitions of these terms fluctuated, and they were used by the party on the whole for political rather than scientific purposes. Their use was intended to suggest that class war was brewing in the countryside between the richer and poorer strata. However Teodor Shanin's examination of the Soviet data tends to invalidate this hypothesis. He shows that the incomes of kulak households were only marginally higher than those of the 'middle peasants': they might own two horses, hire labour at busy times of year and have more produce left over for the market, but they were in no sense a separate, capitalist stratum. As for the 'poor peasants', while clearly a real category, their poverty was typically due to circumstances that were temporary – illness, natural disaster, military service of the breadwinner, shortage of working hands. 'The chance of a hard core of poor peasants showing lasting cohesion and ability for political action emerging was very limited, therefore.' Nevertheless, this was the layer which the party was to try once more to organize, from 1927, in the form of 'committees of poor peasants'.

Nor is there much evidence of systematic conflict *between* different classes of rural dwellers. What Soviet sources call 'kulak outrages' usually turn out, when one can look more closely at the sources, to have involved more than just the wealthier peasants, and often the whole village. It would be much closer to the truth, in fact, to say that the great dividing line was not that between classes of the peasantry, but that between peasants and the rest of society, in particular anything that smelt of the towns. Gorky, writing of his conversations with peasants in 1922, reports that they felt 'suspicious and distrustful... not of the clergy, not of authority, but simply of the town as a complex organization of cunning people who live on the labour and grain of the

country-side and make many things useless to the peasant whom they strive in every way to deceive, and skilfully do so.' There was much in recent peasant experience to substantiate this view. Since 1914 the town had called up the peasant's sons to fight in a war for aims quite irrelevant to the village, it had requisitioned his horse for the cavalry, it had taxed him heavily and offered him derisory sums for his grain; then, after a paltry land allotment in 1917, it had called up his sons yet again and also extorted his produce by force, paying him nothing for it. Quite often, furthermore, the town had closed down his church, sometimes destroying it in the process, and arrested his village priest.

The peasants' distrust, in fact, was wholly understandable, indeed rational. And although they found the products of the town useful, most peasants were still at a sufficiently primitive economic level to be able to fall back on their own resources if they had to. It was very convenient to buy candles, kerosene, matches, nails and vodka in the town, but if really up against it, a peasant could devise his own substitutes for most of these things, and cottage industry was still lively enough to satisfy many of the needs which in more 'advanced' societies are supplied from the town. If they found market conditions not to their liking, in other words, peasants could react, not by working harder and trying to make more money, but by withdrawing from the market altogether. That had been demonstrated in 1918–21, and the threat of a repeat performance always hung over Bolshevik calculations.

Altogether, then, NEP was the party's creation, but it also faced the party with unforeseen and bewildering dilemmas. During the last couple of years of his life, Lenin began to reflect on these. He suffered a stroke in May 1922, which left him partly paralysed, and another in March 1923, which deprived him of speech, but he did not die till January 1924. Between the first two strokes, at least, he remained politically partly active. For the first time since October 1917 he was able to stand back to some extent from the immediate

pressures of decision-making and come to some conclusion about what he and his party had done. His reflections were ambivalent, and his writings of these months sometimes betray a note of uncertainty which had never been present earlier.

On the credit side was the fact that the Bolsheviks seized power and held it, in spite of grave emergencies, almost all respects, however, the premises on which Lenin had urged an uprising in October 1917 had proved false. The international revolution had taken place: on the contrary, revolution had remained confined to Russia, which as a result was now surrounded by suspicious or hostile states and was rapidly resuming the outward forms of the old tsarist empire. The proletariat and poorer peasantry had not proved capable of exercising any kind of class dictatorship: the proletariat was dispersed and impoverished, and the poorer peasants, as a result of the Land Decree, had more or less merged with the rest of the peasantry. Ordinary working people had never had a chance to try their hand at administration: in their place, a growing host of appointed officials (some of them inherited from the old regime) was running the country, especially in the localities. The Bolsheviks had seized power with few definite ideas about how they would govern, and such ideas as they had possessed had been swept away by civil war, deindustrialization and famine. Lenin spent the rest of his life grappling with these unintended consequences of his own revolution, and after his death his successors quarrelled and then split over the heritage. Utopia had failed. The party now divided between those who wanted to restore utopia by coercion (the left), and those who were inclined tacitly to recognize its failure and try to come to terms with the new reality (the right).

For all that he might talk of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', Lenin recognized the actual situation and was deeply worried by it. 'Those who get jobs in factories now', he commented at the Eleventh Party Congress in March 1922, 'are usually not real proletarians, but just people who happen

up [*vsyachesky sluchainy element*].' 'Marx', he added, 'was not writing about present-day Russia.' Alexander Yaphnikov, a leader of the Workers' Opposition, taunted him from his seat: 'Permit me to congratulate you on being the vanguard of a non-existent class.' This put the matter in a nutshell. Lacking a secure social base, the party could not effect NEP as it wanted to. The economy was like a car not being driven by the man who thought he was at the steering wheel: 'Speculators, private capitalists, goodness knows who are actually driving the car . . . but it often goes not at all in the direction imagined by the person at the wheel.'

This feeling of being out of control was shared by many at the congress. Lenin attributed it partly to what he called cultural factors. Since the Communists would now have to play a more active role than they had envisaged in the construction of a new economy, it was vital that they should possess the basic skills to do this. In practice, he warned, that was not at all the case. Capitalists and private traders were usually more competent. Communist officials often lacked 'culture' – by which he meant education, tact, honesty, public spirit and efficiency – and so, *faute de mieux*, they were being swamped by the bad old ways of the pre-revolutionary regime. 'If we take Moscow – 4700 responsible Communists – and then take the whole contraption of bureaucracy there. Who is directing whom? I very much doubt whether one can say that the Communists are doing the directing. . . . The culture [of the bureaucrats] is wretched and contemptible, but still it is higher than ours.'

Although he could see some problems clearly enough, Lenin was unable to devise any solutions to them. In some ways, he thought the most important thing to do was to ensure that the best individuals were in charge – people of proven ability and probity. In his Testament he reflected on the characteristics of his possible successors from that point of view – and, significantly, he found them all wanting. He expressed particular misgivings about Stalin, on the grounds that he might not be able to use his 'unlimited authority' as

party General Secretary 'with sufficient caution'. He added in an appendix: 'Stalin is too rude, and this though quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among Communists, becomes intolerable in a General Secretariat. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way to remove Stalin from that post . . .' He also proposed administrative reorganizations: enlarging the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (which had inherited the powers of the TGA auditor-general) and merging it with the Party Control Commission (a kind of party inspectorate), so that the most capable and trustworthy people at the top could better monitor what was going on lower down. Actually that was a recipe for compounding the problems of overcentralized control, especially in view of the fact that the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate was headed by Stalin.

Lenin died before he was able to try to effect any of the changes he proposed, and the party leaders kept his flattering personal comments secret from the rank and file. With Lenin's death, the nature of politics and public life changed quite considerably. Lenin had always been confident that he was right in his ideas, but he acted by persuasion: until 1921 he had never tried to silence debate within the party, and even thereafter he often tolerated it in practice. Certainly he had never demanded consecrated status for his own ideas. Now, however, a very real change began to take place. Perhaps it is significant that two members of the commission in charge of Lenin's funeral ceremony, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Leonid Krasin, were past adherents of 'God-building', the pre-revolutionary intellectual tendency which had claimed to be a 'socialist religion of humanity', indeed 'the most religious of all religions'. Its main tenet had been that the proletariat, in creating a new and more humane kind of society, were building a new man, who would cease to alienate himself in illusions about a transcendental God, but instead would fulfil a more genuine earthly religious mission. Lenin had been scathing in his denunciation of this tendency, but, as far as is known, Lunacharsky had never

jured it, while Krasin had been a sympathizer of Bogdanov, so as the philosopher of Proletkult (see below, page 180) set to revive God-building in a new form after the revolution.

At any rate, the form of ceremony chosen for Lenin had strong traditional religious overtones, especially the decision to embalm his body and preserve it for public display in a mausoleum on Red Square, in the middle of Moscow. This was comparable with the Orthodox cult of 'relics' of saints, but it was also different: Orthodoxy had never preserved a whole body. This was, in fact, a religious gesture of a new kind. Stalin approved of the decision to embalm Lenin – indeed he may have initiated it – and although he was never a God-builder, he had a shrewd idea of the value of religious symbolism to the state, derived perhaps from his youthful study in the Tiflis seminary. In accord with the new spirit, at a session of the Congress of Soviets on the eve of the funeral, he carefully enumerated Lenin's 'commandments' and pledged himself to fulfil them, as if consciously assuming the mantle of disciple and heir.

During 1924–5 he continued this work by assembling a doctrine, drawn selectively from the dead man's writings, which he published as *The Foundations of Leninism*. Two special institutes were set up, the Marx-Engels Institute and the Lenin Institute, to gather and study the heritage of the founding fathers of the new ideology, and a journal, *Bolshevik*, was founded to publish the results. Claiming for himself the home ground of these ideological temples, Stalin could assail the ideas of opponents of the new orthodoxy, not just as misguided, but as somehow illegitimate. Traditional religions would have used the term 'heresy'; Stalin called them 'deviations'.

The first issue on which Stalin tried thus to isolate and discredit his opponents was the fundamental question of the nature of the revolutionary state and the nation it claimed to represent. NEP had initially been launched in the expectation that it constituted a 'retreat', a temporary concession to capitalism in order to restore the economy until such time as

socialist revolutions could break out elsewhere and backward, war-torn Soviet Russia receive fraternal help from outside. By the autumn of 1923, however, with the failure of yet another attempt at a Communist coup in Germany, it was becoming clear that, for the foreseeable future, Russia was going to be on its own. Did that mean that the Soviet state should indefinitely prolong a 'provisional' economic system, or did it mean that the Russians should abandon hope of external help, and buckle down to build socialism on their own?

Almost ever since the October revolution, some Bolsheviks had tacitly accepted the proposition that, for the moment at least, proletarian internationalism must mean Soviet (and even Russian?) patriotism, since Russia was the only country in which a 'proletarian' state had been established. We have seen this at the time of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and during the Soviet-Polish war. At the same time many non-Bolsheviks took a partly compatible view: that the Bolsheviks had succeeded in holding on to power because, in circumstances which threatened the disintegration of the Russian Empire, they had proved themselves to be the party best able to hold that empire together. This stream of thought crystallized in 1920 in the form of *smenovekhovstvo* (from the collection of essays, *Change of Landmarks*, which appeared in that year). Nikolai Ustryalov, its leading exponent, now in emigration in Kharbin, argued that the defeat of the Whites had demonstrated that the Bolsheviks were now the only truly Russian national force: they had succeeded in holding Russia together against all the attempts of foreigners and non-Russian nationalities to dismember her. His case was strengthened by the reincorporation of the remaining non-Russian nations into the new Soviet Union, and by the introduction of NEP, which seemed to show that, in social and economic terms as well, the new Russian state was becoming more like the old one. In a famous image, Ustryalov likened Soviet Russia to a radish - 'red outside and white inside'.

This point of view found some support among émigrés, but

even more perhaps inside Russia itself. It was close to the outlook of probably the majority of former Imperial Army officers who had joined the Red Army. Many of the bourgeois specialists' would also have sympathized with it: indeed, Jeremy Azrael, the historian of the managerial stratum in Soviet society, goes so far as to call *smenovekhovstvo* 'the ideology of the specialists'. Some writers (especially the 'fellow travellers') and clergy took a similar view. At a time when émigré books were still published inside Russia, and links between Soviet citizens and émigrés were strong, these ideas, while not universally accepted (especially in emigration) did play a part in reconciling the traditional professional classes to the new system.

Obviously the Soviet leadership could not simply take over *smenovekhovstvo*, since it was avowedly non-socialist and anti-internationalist. But there were good reasons why they should evolve their own version of Russian patriotism. First, because they needed to appeal to the specialists on whom they still depended so much: and it was cheaper and more effective to gain their willing compliance than to rely on compulsion alone. Secondly, even the party apparatus itself, now growing so fast under the guidance of Stalin's card-indexers, could not be expected indefinitely to work enthusiastically for a system that was only provisional. They too needed to feel that they were doing something constructive, 'building socialism', even if only in Russia, and not just marking time till the world revolution, now apparently receding, should at last break out.

It was with them above all in mind that Stalin began in 1924 to reconsider the party's theoretically absolute commitment to international revolution. In an article entitled 'October and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution', published in the newspapers in December 1924, he first raised the possibility that socialism might be achieved in one country alone, even if that country were less developed economically than its neighbours which had remained capitalist. Such a victory he deemed 'perfectly possible and even probable'.

It is significant that this idea, packed with scanty authentic quotations from Lenin, was directed against Trotsky. Stalin's article was in fact a salvo in the power struggle for Lenin's succession. The theoretical differences between Stalin and Trotsky were mainly ones of emphasis; even Stalin conceded that the 'final victory', as distinct from just the 'victory', of socialism required an international proletarian community. But Stalin depicted Trotsky as someone who lacked confidence in Soviet Russia, and in the 'alliance of the proletariat and the toiling peasantry', which had brought about the socialist revolution in Russia, and could, according to Stalin, now make possible the construction of a socialist society. This was a classic example of a weapon Stalin was to use increasingly: exaggerating and distorting the views of his opponents, and applying crude labels to them, as though from a position of unique and guaranteed rectitude. 'Trotskyism', 'the left deviation', 'the right deviation' – these gradually became equivalent in Stalin's rhetoric to 'non-Leninism', and hence to 'anti-Leninism', which 'objectively' meant supporting the imperialists. By stages, in fact, Stalin was able to insinuate that all his opponents were nothing less than enemies of the soviet system.

At any rate, as far as 'socialism in one country' was concerned, there was at least as much justification in Lenin's writings for Trotsky's assertions that primacy should be given to international revolution. But it was Stalin who managed to occupy the temple, to represent his interpretation as the only truly Leninist one, and to gain the institutional backing for it. The Fourteenth Party Conference, in April 1925, resolved that 'in general the victory of socialism (not in the sense of *final* victory) is unconditionally possible in one country'.

Thereby 'socialism in one country' became official party doctrine, and its implications had to be absorbed. The economic ones were the most pressing. It was generally assumed that 'building socialism' meant developing Russia's

industry. Lenin had hoped to do this by attracting foreign concessions to the country, recognizing frankly that Russia needed help from abroad, even from capitalists. But, although a few significant deals were concluded, foreign concessions still accounted for only 0.6 per cent of industrial output in 1928. This was scarcely surprising, in view of the fact that the Bolsheviks had deliberately defaulted on all past Russian debts: it took them many years to regain a reputation for financial probity.

At any rate, it looked as if economic development would have to come out of Russia's own resources. The Opposition, which was beginning to crystallize around Trotsky, felt this could only be done through rigorous state planning and the diversion of resources from the private sector to feed heavy industry. The manufactured products thus created would feed into all sectors of the economy, including consumer industry and agriculture, and would ultimately make them all more productive. Admittedly, there would probably be some years of austerity, while consumption was cut in order to concentrate resources on industrial investment. The Opposition's main economic spokesman, Evgeny Preobrazhensky, even called this process 'primitive socialist accumulation', and likened it to the 'primitive capitalist accumulation', which Marx had described in *Capital*. He argued, however, that it would be far less objectionable than the capitalist variety, since (a) it would bear mostly on the 'bourgeois' sector of the economy, and (b) the surplus value generated would be used for the ultimate benefit of everyone, not just for the conspicuous consumption of the few.

The Oppositionists were moved by a dislike of NEP which was widely shared in the party. They were repelled by the raucous, untidy, money-grabbing peasant markets, by the debauchery of the nightclubs, by the furs and silk dresses at the theatre, all to be seen again just as if the revolution had never taken place. Even prostitutes had reappeared on the streets. Preobrazhensky warned, with Trotsky's support, that if the socialist sector of the economy were not given deliber-

ate advantages, then the country was in danger of being dominated by kulaks and *nepmen* (as the traders, retailers and small manufacturers were contemptuously known). Fast industrialization, on the other hand, would enable agriculture to be mechanized, and this in turn would draw the peasants into collective farms, as Lenin had recommended. 'Only powerful socialized industry can help the peasants transform agriculture along collectivist lines,' Trotsky argued in the Opposition's platform of September 1927.

Spokesmen for NEP were quick to point out the drawbacks in the Opposition programme. 'Squeezing the private economy' meant above all squeezing the peasantry: might the result not be the same as during the civil war — severe shortages and the revival of the black market? If Russia was now really on its own, could the nation afford a policy which would endanger the relatively smooth trading arrangements between town and country created by NEP? Or, to put it in Leninist terms, was it prudent to jeopardize the 'alliance between the proletariat and peasantry' which had made the October revolution possible? In his Testament Lenin had warned: 'Our party rests upon two classes, and for that reason its instability is possible, and if there cannot exist an agreement between those classes its fall is inevitable.'

It was precisely in order to preserve this alliance that Bukharin and the party's right wing, including initially Stalin, rejected the recipes of the Opposition. With experience of NEP, especially in its contrast to War Communism, Bukharin increasingly came to see the peasant economy as bearing the key to Russia's economic future. For that reason, during the 'scissors crisis' he recommended easing the terms of trade for the peasants by cutting industrial prices. For the same reason in 1924–5 he recommended easing restrictions on peasant hiring of labour and leasing of land. Both these proposals were put into effect, and helped to stimulate an upswing in agricultural production and marketing. If the peasant economy developed at its own pace, he argued, then the benefits would be felt in all sectors of the economy. The

produce the peasants grew would feed the urban workers, their buying power would create a reliable market for industrial products, and their taxes and savings would fuel future industrial investment. The artificial forcing of industry, on the other hand, as Bukharin saw it, would create an unbalanced economy, in which workers in highly modern steel works would not have proper food, clothing or housing. This would be to the detriment of all sectors of the economy. At one stage, in 1925, Bukharin went so far as to call upon all strata of the peasantry: 'Enrich yourselves, accumulate, develop your economy!'

Bukharin never fully faced the political consequences of what he was saying, but his opponents did. As they saw it, giving primacy to a non-socialist sector of the economy would result in conceding to the 'petty bourgeoisie' a great deal of political influence. Bukharin partly accepted the logic of this. He did not favour the establishment of opposition political parties, but he did envisage a degree of pluralism. He thought it important to encourage the emergence of 'hundreds of thousands of small and large rapidly expanding voluntary societies, circles and associations' in the economic, cultural and social fields. These associations, from agricultural cooperatives to learned societies and chess clubs would express the interests of the different strata of the population and foster 'mass initiative at lower levels', opening channels through which the people could influence the government, learn about politics, and thus gradually 'grow into socialism'. The existence of such legally protected voluntary organizations he saw as a guarantee against the 'bureaucratization' of society, a danger which, like Trotsky, he increasingly discerned behind the growth of the party-state apparatus.

This vision, though Bukharin never really developed it fully himself, has remained, though in embryo only, an alternative view of socialist society, as a one-party system in which the rule of law would guarantee individuals and groups against the otherwise crushing power of the state. It has never been

properly tried out – but more than a quarter of a century later, Bukharin's views, unacknowledged, were to influence some of the post-Stalin attempts to find 'alternative roads to socialism', especially in Eastern Europe.

Since the economic component of Bukharin's theories in fact underlay party policy in 1921–7, it is important to inquire why the party never accepted the social and political corollaries.

Fundamentally the answer seems to lie in the nature of the emerging party apparatus and of its leadership. As we have seen, by 1922, when Stalin became general secretary, the system of appointing all party officials from the centre was already well established, and was being extended to the regular appointment of non-party posts in all social and public organizations. This system was not created by Stalin: it grew naturally out of Lenin's theories as well as the exigencies of the civil war. But it was Stalin who now perfected it and transformed it into a base for his own personal power. To his comrades in the party leadership he was known, rather condescendingly, as 'Comrade Card-Index' (*Tovarishch Kartotekov*): they were content to leave him to assemble and classify the personnel files, not yet realizing what power was accumulating therein. Most of them, being well read in the history of past revolutions, were obsessed by a very different danger: that of finding the revolution hijacked by a general, another Bonaparte. One can understand their fears. In 1917–21 power had certainly 'grown out of the barrel of a gun' (to use a later expression). If there was any authoritarian figure waiting to take over, then most would have guessed it to be not Stalin, but Trotsky, the man who had hired the old regime generals to win the civil war. It was in fear of him that Lenin's two closest old colleagues, Zinoviev and Kamenev, principal party secretaries in Petrograd and Moscow, initially allied themselves with Stalin, forming what was generally known as the 'triumvirate'.

Trotsky was no less authoritarian a figure than Stalin, but in rather a different way. In his pamphlet *Terrorism and*

Communism, and in his schemes of 'labour armies' he had conceived some of the most extreme versions of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. But for him authoritarianism was always indissolubly linked to the revolutionary spirit, to the emotional impetus of defeating enemies and creating a new world. Stalin, though no stranger to this type of authoritarianism, could accommodate himself to more peaceful and settled conditions – indeed he needed them to consolidate and perfect his kind of politics, which Trotsky contemptuously and somewhat misleadingly stigmatized as 'bureaucratism'. This basic incompatibility of temperament, as well as long-standing personal differences, engendered the split between them which came into the open after Lenin's death.

In this way Trotsky himself became from 1923 what earlier observers would least have expected, a spokesman for all those in the party who were worried about the increasing rigidity and unresponsiveness of the apparatus. He had rejected earlier warnings, from Rosa Luxemburg, from the Mensheviks, that suppression of free elections, freedom of the press, of association etc., would be bound to cause the atrophying of the body politic and the triumph of 'bureaucracy'. Yet now, though without making the causal connection, this was precisely the sin he castigated.

The first immediate occasion was an outbreak of working-class unrest in the summer and early autumn of 1923, in which members of two underground groups in the party were said to be involved ('underground' because of the resolutions of the Tenth Party Congress). Their leaders were arrested. In October, Dzerzhinsky requested that members of the party should be placed under a formal obligation to report to the GPU (as the Cheka was now known) on 'fractions' opposing the official leadership. In a letter to the Central Committee, Trotsky objected that the encouragement of 'spying and denunciations' was symptomatic of the unhealthy atmosphere that had grown up inside the party. Participation of the masses in the party had now become completely 'illusory', in fact 'the present regime . . . is much further from any workers'

democracy than was the regime of the fiercest period of war communism.' The election of party officials had atrophied, and 'appointment of the secretaries of provincial committees is now the rule. That creates for the secretary a position essentially independent of the local organization.' As a result, 'secretarial psychology' had grown up, 'the principal trait of which is that the secretary is capable of deciding everything'.

The events of 1923 amply substantiated Trotsky's new found perspicacity. Criticism of NEP, of concessions to the 'bourgeoisie', suppression of the workers, was by now very widespread in provincial party organizations, in the *Komsomol* (the party's youth organization) and in university and army party cells. It found expression in a 'platform of 46', circulated to members of the Central Committee only a week after Trotsky's letter. Although he himself did not sign this platform, many of those who did had been associated with him in the past, and its sentiments closely echoed his own. Starting from wide-ranging censure of the regime's economic policy, the signatories traced its shortcomings back to a 'one-sided recruitment policy', to a division which had opened up between 'a secretarial hierarchy and "the quiet folk" . . . who do not participate in the common life'. Serious discussion of issues had stopped, because 'members of the party who are privately dissatisfied with this or that decision of the central committee . . . , who privately note this or that error, irregularity or disorder, are afraid to speak about it at party meetings, or even in conversation, unless the partner in the conversation is thoroughly reliable from the point of view of "discretion".'

Like Trotsky, the 46 were not in favour of inner party democracy on principle: they too wanted to restore 'real unity in opinions and actions', but of a different kind from Stalin.

The triumvirate decided to respond by promising free discussion of serious issues within the party, and opening up the pages of *Pravda* for the expression of opinions. It soon turned out that Trotsky and the 46 did indeed have widespread support.

Meetings were held in party organizations: it transpired that the Opposition had a majority not only in many of the provinces, but even in the Moscow city party organization, and indeed in the enormous party cell of the Central Committee itself. Stalin got his personal assistants to collate the voting figures and keep records of them, and in the following months used them to start making changes in the personnel of party organizations: Antonov-Ovseenko, for example, was dismissed as head of the Political Department of the Red Army, and a selective purge of secretaries was carried out in the Komsomol, as well as in provincial organizations which had voted for the Opposition.

At the same time Stalin used a ploy suggested to him by Trotsky, and thus gave the appearance of making concessions to the Opposition. Trotsky had pointed out that workers formed only a small minority, approximately one-sixth, of the party's membership. The reason for this was that some workers had left since 1921 (when working-class membership of 40 per cent had been reported) in disillusionment, some had been promoted to official positions and ceased to be 'working-class', while yet others had been expelled for belonging to the Workers' Opposition or other 'underground' groups. For Trotsky this was ample evidence of the 'degeneration' and 'bureaucratization' he discerned. Stalin responded with two massive recruitments of workers in the year after Lenin's death. This 'Lenin Enrolment' brought in some 500,000 workers, doubling party membership and dramatically improving the proletarian share of it. The effects, however, were opposite to those Trotsky had intended. The entrants were admitted with the minimum of scrutiny and formality, in contravention, strictly speaking, of the party rules. They were of course beholden to the secretaries who recruited them, who in their turn were beholden to Stalin. In this way Stalin created for himself an abundant fresh reservoir of patronage. Some of the new recruits made excellent careers for themselves, and became prominent figures in the 1930s. Many more were able to use

the party ladder to escape from the working class, as the following figures from the 1927 party census suggests:

	'Social situation'	Current occupation
	%	%
Workers	55.7	30.0
Peasants	19.0	9.9
Employees	25.3	42.8

Quite apart from the fact that the 'current occupation' rubric leaves 17.3 per cent unaccounted for, the figures suggest that nearly half of those members who had been peasants or workers on entry had moved up, mostly in a very short time, into the 'white-collar' category. The party, in fact, was now the major channel of social mobility in Soviet society. Education and other factors counted for very little. It is scarcely surprising that domination of party patronage had become such a powerful weapon in politics.

A comment is necessary on the term 'bureaucracy'. When Trotsky – and indeed Lenin in his last years – used it, they intended to imply that petty officials from the old regime were creeping back into the new regime and restoring their 'petty bourgeois' practices. As applied to the state machinery, that reproach may have been partly correct, but it certainly did not apply to the party. Nor is the term 'bureaucracy', in the sociological sense, very appropriate to the emerging party apparatus. In the Weberian usage, the term implies a compartmentalized and specialized body of administrators, obeying the law and written instructions, and operating on rational criteria. Party secretaries did not behave in that manner at all: they would have been sacked if they had. They were expected to be generalists, to obey 'revolutionary consciousness' rather than law, to cope with emergencies at all hours of the day and night, to use violence where they

thought it necessary, and in general to get on with the job at all costs. Stalin described them as 'an order of Teutonic Knights at the centre of the Soviet state', and this image certainly conveys far better their conviction, their devotion to duty, their often brutal methods, and even their frequent sense of being an occupying force among a sullen and suspicious population.

At any rate, Stalin was able to utilize his tightening grip on appointments to weaken his potential rivals. In January 1925 a conference of political commissars called for and obtained Trotsky's resignation from the post of people's commissar for war. Zinoviev and Kamenev, alarmed by Stalin's growing power and his policy (short-lived, as it turned out) of concessions to the peasantry, went into opposition, and they too soon found themselves deprived of their power bases in the Leningrad and Moscow party organizations. Yet they found it difficult to work together with Trotsky to concert their opposition to Stalin. Years of personal differences impeded their rapprochement. Trotsky was, in any case, a difficult person to work with. A towering figure in revolutionary upheavals, he seemed incapable of stooping to the daily infighting of ordinary politics. With the mixed arrogance and humility of those who believe history is on their side, he disdained the conciliatory gestures and the menial bonhomie of the politician who needs allies. It was not until 1926–7 that he, Zinoviev and Kamenev managed to form a United Opposition. They were joined by other members of earlier groups, such as the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition. Many of the great names of the revolution were in the United Opposition, but now they lacked any local or institutional power base, and any organized mass support. Their moral authority had been weakened by their inconsistencies and their mutual quarrels of the past. As Anastasy Mikoyan tellingly remarked at the Fourteenth Party Congress, 'When Zinoviev is in the majority, he is for iron discipline.... When he is in the minority, he is against it.' All of them had acquiesced in the crushing of the other parties, so

that now there was nowhere for anyone to go who wanted to resist Stalin and his 'secretarial regime'. Besides, most of them felt, like Trotsky, that 'history offers no way of being right but through the party.'

Stalin exploited their weaknesses, their doubts and their potential divisions very skilfully. Defeated at a Central Committee meeting in April 1926, the Opposition tried to present their case at the Fifteenth Party Conference in October, but were denied the right to speak. When they tried to appeal direct to the mass of the party by addressing meetings of workers in factories, party militants turned up, tried to rouse those present against the Opposition, and if they failed, broke up the meetings in disorder. This was the first time violence had been used by the party against its own members. Workers who tried to attend clandestine gatherings of the Opposition found themselves under investigation by the GPU.

More research needs to be done in this area, but it is difficult to avoid the impression that working-class support for the Opposition was at a low level. This may have been partly a result of party and police repression, but at the same time, as we have seen, there was ample reason for workers to feel alienated from all wings of the party. Some of the members of the Opposition, notably Trotsky himself, had been among the most forthright in their schemes for depriving the workers of political and economic rights.

When the Opposition tried to prepare a statement for the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927, they had to work in secret, for under the provisions of the Tenth Congress they now constituted an illegitimate 'fraction'. Their clandestine printing press was discovered by the GPU, and this associated them with 'criminal' activity. Stalin was thus able to obtain the expulsion of all the leading members of the Opposition from the Central Committee, and in the case of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party itself. To compound their political defeat with a moral one, Stalin offered to readmit them if they would repudiate their oppositional

activities and confess their mistakes before the party. This early example of a subsequently familiar Stalinist ritual did split the Opposition. Zinoviev and Kamenev agreed to recant and to denounce 'Trotskyism', while Trotsky and some of his closest associates refused to do so and were deported to Central Asia the day after the Congress. Pseudo-religious politics had already taken its grip. Crushed by the party whose monopoly position and internal rigidity they had enthusiastically helped to build up, the Opposition left the stage unsupported and unlamented by the workers whom they had disdained in their days of power.

Of those who remained, some, such as Zinoviev and Kamenev, made the required self-abasement, in order not to be left without a role. As I. N. Smirnov put it, 'I can't stand inactivity. I want to build! In its own barbaric and sometimes stupid way, the Central Committee is building for the future. Our ideological differences are of small importance before the construction of great new industries.' Others refused to compromise their consciences before brute power, and sat helplessly in their apartments, drinking glasses of tea and discussing politics and literature, while their comrades were arrested one by one. There was not the slightest chance of doing anything, for they were under the closest surveillance. Victor Serge reckoned that in his Leningrad apartment where about thirty people lived, three were reporting regularly on him to the GPU.

The desperate nature of their plight was well summed up by a man who was not a member of the Opposition, indeed had been thought of as a pillar of the regime, but who was nevertheless soon to share their fate: Bukharin. In 1928 he was secretly in touch with Kamenev, to see whether anything could still be done to halt the rise of Stalin. 'What can one do before an adversary of this kind?' he asked in bewilderment. 'A Gengis Khan, a debased product of the Central Committee. If the country perishes, we all perish. If the country manages to recover, he twists around in time, and we still perish.'

With Stalin's newcomers in the ascendant, and many of Lenin's once closest comrades in a mood of impotent foreboding, the party moved on to cope with the economic problems thrown up by NEP.