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NATIONAL TRADITIONS AND TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS IN SOVIET SOCIETY

In the United States a runaway technology, limited only by its own ability to expand, has dominated the social and cultural evolution of the country. In the Soviet Union technology has, in effect, been geared down to the limits of absorption of a very traditional society, thus alleviating to a degree the problem of adjustment. In this article Professor Demitri B. Shimkin examines the interaction between tradition and technology in the Soviet Union since the death of Stalin.

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College

by

Professor Demitri B. Shimkin

Today, I am going to try to cover a very large field in a brief period. My main topic is the problem of national traditions and technological determinants in Soviet society. In my discussion I will try to sketch major changes and developments in the Soviet Union since the death of Stalin; in addition, to make selective comparisons with the United States; and, finally, to seek to bring in some alternatives that appear to be inherent in this interaction between traditions and technology which every country in the world faces to a greater or lesser extent.

In the Soviet Union the ending of the Stalinist era in 1953 brought very many differing forecasts as to the future of Soviet society. Among a considerable fragment of both academic and U.S. Government people at that time, there was a good deal of optimism. Allen Dulles, for example, was a protagonist of the viewpoint that the rise of economic standards in the Soviet Union would inevitably bring about greater liberalization and a closer approach to the patterns of American society and that over a period of time there would be a social convergence between the United States and the U.S.S.R.

Another hypothesis of a generally different nature was expressed by people who were, to varying degrees, disillusioned Marxists. James Burnham, in his *Managerial Revolution*, felt that the rise of a bureaucracy was the major feature of both Soviet and American society and believed that there would be an increasing emphasis of control by a new class. This, of course, was also the position taken in a somewhat later work by the Yugoslav heretic, Milovan Djilas.

The third kind of viewpoint was that of the orthodox Marxists, namely, that Soviet society would become more and more socialist, more and more egalitarian, and would approach paradise within a definable period.

It is quite clear, by 1969, anyway, that none of these predictions has been very exactly brought out. In some

respects, the Burnham/Djilas viewpoint of a managerial "new class" type of predominance is the closest to the truth. But even here there are some very large reservations to be taken into account, with the problem being to discover why. In other words, what were the factors that led to the changes which took place and which also seem to have inhibited the development of still other changes?

In reviewing this problem, I think that we have to take into account two broadly different periods: the first, essentially from 1953 to 1964, dominated by Khrushchev; and the other, the period since 1964, marking Brezhnev's rise to power.

The Khrushchev period can also be thought of in two phases. One was essentially that of the restitution of a social order which, in many respects, was deeply disturbed, on the verge of fundamental deterioration, corrupt, and ready to go into violent spasms of social upheaval at the time of Stalin's death. I think the evidence today is clear that it was only the intervention of the Red army and the solidarity of the Politburo in 1953 that prevented civil war between the apparatus of the secret police and other claimants to power. Khrushchev's subsequent achievements were of great importance in giving Soviet society essentially a new deal. One of his most important steps was the prompt destruction of the secret police leadership and the reduction of secret police power throughout the Soviet system. This included the abolition of most of the slave-labor camp system, the elimination of military components of the secret police, and the reduction of their economic facilities. All of this opened up Soviet society considerably. Under Stalin's regime there had been a destruction of the legal structure of the society. In Khrushchev's period, particularly from 1958 to 1960, a great many restorations of due legal process, leading to a much more regular social order, were inaugurated. This was a notable achievement by the Soviet lawyers, and it represented the elimination of some of the worst features of terror that had been prevalent before.

Another important step was the elimination in 1956 of the State Labor Reserve Act of 1940, which had permitted the drafting of 14-, 15-, and 16-year-olds for compulsory service in the cities, railroads, and industries and which had also set up an extremely restrictive body of direct labor controls. This was a particularly sore point for the rank and file of Soviet citizens. Khrushchev also placed much sharper emphasis upon the needs of the consumer, particularly in the plans for agriculture and the plans for housing.

The Khrushchevian reforms instituted a limited thaw in intellectual freedom, although much of this was highly pragmatic. The Soviet scientists felt extremely isolated. They knew that they had to get into the mainstream of world scientific knowledge, and that this meant much more interaction. There was something of a creative revival, particularly by writers, the culmination of which came in the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, above all, in his important work, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* This work among other things, is an extraordinary historical pun. The name, *Ivan Denisovich,* belongs not only to an individual Stalinist prisoner in north Russia, it is also the name of an historic leader of the Old Believers (Protestant-like revolters against the central church and state in the 17th century). Thus, the story is, in addition to being an account of Stalinist prison life, a well-understood parable on the position of the peasantry in the presence of Stalinism. Because of this, Solzhenitzyn's work is an extremely important political tract which was tolerated, with some backing and filling, at the peak of the reform period.

Khrushchev, however, was not content with this kind of development. He was also greatly concerned with

rejuvenating communism as an internal ideology and with consolidating communism as a world movement. He began, particularly after 1958, a series of experiments which ultimately led to his downfall. For example, to assure a rejuvenated communism, he felt that the priority of party controls over all elements of the system had to be asserted. Thus, the party began to intervene directly in the affairs of the bureaucracy, the army, and other areas where, previously, there had been much more of a live-and-let-live situation. Another important fact was that he was also concerned with the social changes needed to shift the Soviet Union from a mostly preurban society to a modern urban one. He sought to end the continuing emphasis upon small property holdings, e.g., among collective farmers, which he viewed as a survival of the past. Therefore, Khrushchev launched severe attacks on private property and on engagement in private pursuits—the so-called "anti-parasite" laws. Added to this, his concern with Communist ideological vitality meant an increased fight for atheism.

Now, all of these drives were in contradistinction to forces and institutions which had survived the Soviet period to that date. The peasantry, despite all of its changes, was then and is now very deeply religious; this applies both to the Slavic peasants and to the Muslims. It also persists in maintaining old economic organizations centered on the extended family, the private plot, the household cow and pig, and other aspects of peasant economics. Khrushchev's reforms, including his tremendous emphasis upon shifting from collective to state farms, shook up the peasant element of Soviet society, and, through the peasantry, the great supplier of manpower for the army, disturbed that powerful group very greatly. In addition to this, of course, neither the army nor the party itself were very happy about the drive toward ideological purity, toward that self-sacrificing Communist who was a little too much of the true believer for the hardheaded actual members of the Communist Party elite.

Finally, and notwithstanding his role in the Hungarian intervention, Khrushchev also sought to change Soviet relations with other Eastern European countries, particularly in regard to the previous strong emphasis upon direct Soviet control. He sought to get some greater reciprocity in relationships; he had even, a point of especial heresy, suggested that people like the Poles and the East Germans might have social innovations, such as those associated with the so-called "Comrades' Courts," which the Soviets might want to emulate.

All of these experiments, all of these threats to established ways, were instrumental in the final fall of Khrushchev in 1964, where I believe that internal problems were considerably more important than the dubious outcome of the 1962 missile crisis.

In general one of the first problems of his successors was to reestablish what they felt were essential national priorities. This has been done with increasing emphasis, year after year, in the period following 1964. The period of Brezhnev domination can be thought of essentially as a kind of pragmatic and rationalized Stalinism. I want first of all to emphasize rationality. In contrast to the old system and in contrast even to Khrushchev, who had notions from time to time of being an agricultural specialist and a genius in other ways, the present regime is extremely matter-of-fact, and has permitted scientific people to do scientific work. This has been true not only in the physical sciences but in agriculture, and this policy is one that has paid off well. For example, Soviet improvements in sunflower cultivation in the last 5 years have been so substantial that the position of soybeans, one of the United States major exports, is

very seriously threatened by the new oil output from the Soviet Union, as well as palm oil from the Pacific. Unquestionably, too, the Soviets have effected a permanent change in their increasing capacity to feed themselves.

An especial point of interest is that in areas of the social sciences, and in others such as neurophysiology, the Soviet advances have been very impressive. Their acceptance of new techniques has been exceedingly broad. Let me give you two clear-cut areas where we know that Soviet acceptance of new ideas has been particularly effective:

One is in the rapid expansion of sociology as a means of control. The public-opinion poll has provided new armament for the Communist Party, which is now able to perceive areas of discontent and to meet those, thereby isolating structural dissatisfaction among relatively few grave malcontents from situational distresses among the many. This public-opinion polling has become increasingly sophisticated; there is evidence that the Soviets are using probability sampling and other modern techniques; and there is no doubt that there is a high responsiveness to mass reactions in a way that did not exist in Stalin's day.

On a quite different level, Soviet neurophysiological studies have led to some extremely important results which we ourselves in the United States are beginning to utilize. For example, there has been the Soviet discovery, and the later demonstration with quite rigorous methods in this country, that behavioral disturbances such as mood changes, changes in sleep patterns, and other types of carefully observed but apparently minor indications are extraordinarily sensitive indicators of major physiological injuries. The Soviets have particularly stressed that animals which are conditioned to perform certain exercises will break down this conditioning under acute stress and illness. One illustration of this was provided by our own unhappy space monkey, Bonnie. The fact that the space monkey was no longer doing the work to which it had been conditioned should have called for its immediate grounding, because the animal was desperately ill; yet we were not then alert enough to such behavioral indications, and thus the space monkey died.

This work has led the Soviets into pioneering in a number of areas where environmental stresses and modern technology, ranging from microwave radiation on, appear to be impinging on man and particularly threatening high cognitive performances. Such kinds of developments and performances are critically important, because modern societies are becoming increasingly dependent upon precisely such high cognitive controls. If an aircraft pilot has a stress pattern which causes a deterioration of his hand, eye, or brain reactions, or if a tower controller or someone who handles missile operations is disturbed, you've got trouble. In this critical area of environmental stress and cognition, the Soviets are doing extremely impressive work which we in the last 2 years have been able increasingly to confirm by independent means but which we are not yet systematically matching.

To really ensure internal controls, the present Soviet regime is also rejuvenating old elements of preventive terror. There has been an official revival, through legislation, of the MVD, of a whole system of slave-labor camps of varying degrees of severity, with the maximum being for "special political prisoners"--and this is spelled out in the legislation. Also, extensive camps for juvenile offenders, particularly the so-called "hooligans," have been set up. Here again the Soviet authorities have unquestionably been deeply perturbed by the restlessness of youth as reported from the United States and Western Europe, and they are determined to have none of it. Additionally, there has been a progressive elimination of vocal

people, the underground writers, and especially those people who have raised questions of utmost sensitivity. That, I would say, applies to the so-called "Tatar" trials (Kadiyev and General Grigorenko), which offer a few indications of the degree to which the Soviet Union is desperately concerned about dissidence among the Moslem or formerly Moslem population.

The most impressive changes effected by the Brezhnev regime have been the attempts to consolidate support, particularly from the bureaucracy and from the peasant. The bureaucracy has, in general, had greater economic support. The various new incentive systems, the so-called "Lieberman systems," are particularly designed to make for wealthier and happier managers. We also find, for example, the establishment of luxury apartment buildings with gyms and swimming pools and so on for these economic elite. One of the complaints is that the servant proportion in the luxury apartment complexes is much too high: in one, it was reported that 16 percent of the residents consist of various service personnel. I suppose there are few luxury apartments in the United States that have as many.

On the side of the peasantry, the main factors in the seeking by the party leadership of renewed support has been a very deliberate maintenance of high prices for food and of relatively high returns in agriculture. In general, also, the trend toward establishing state farms, as opposed to collective farms, has been stopped, and the collectives have been given renewed authority to engage in all sorts of industrial and other enterprises. Additionally, the peasant rights to keep private flocks, sell produce, and engage in other kinds of activities have been strengthened. Moreover, except where there are problems of security, there has been a reestablishment of peasant self-government: use of customary law, considerably more toleration of local religious cults, and so on. All of this means that the pressures felt by the peasants under the Khrushchevian reforms have been gradually lessened.

The Soviet Union, as we all know, has intervened in Czechoslovakia—but not in Rumania. This, again, represents a pattern of limited, carefully thought-out actions wherever the Soviets feel that their vital interests are most seriously concerned. In general, apart from rationalized Stalinism, there is no doubt that the greatest concern of Brezhnev's regime is with international security. This is measured by heavy resource allocation to broad categories of defense, including enormous investments in Egypt and in Vietnam. There is no question but that the closing of the Suez Canal, for example, has resulted in greatly increasing costs to the Soviet Union of the Vietnam involvement.

Another general element marking the Brezhnev period has been that of social change, slow but perceptible. Some of this has been measured in such basic areas as family law, where the repressive and regressive Soviet legislation on bastardy has been finally abolished. The Soviet Union was the only country that for years prohibited the mothers of illegitimate children from putting the father's name on birth certificates. This denial of rights, this exclusion of the illegitimate from Soviet society, was much more extreme in the Soviet Union than in other nations. It was one of the many areas where they have been much more conservative than the United States, and it has only been a year ago that reforms in this field were introduced. But such practices as the obligation of children to support parents in old age and their legal subordination to parents, even as adults, are still maintained.

Another important thing is that the Soviets have been most careful in introducing elements of social and physical mobility into their society at a very slow pace. They are still only talking, as

in the plan for the seventies, of universal secondary education. Contributing to the comparative physical immobility of the society is the fact that the Soviet Union at present uses fewer passenger vehicles than any other major country in the world. In the United States we have over a hundred million vehicles; in the Soviet Union the annual production is only 280,000 passenger vehicles, and the stock, much of which is for official use only, numbers approximately 4 million. This means that people stay residentially fixed, that there is social differentiation and compartmentation; and that principles of government which were actually inaugurated by Catherine the Second are still in practice. An elite that is sophisticated, broadly educated, adaptable to change sits on top of a country which is oriented very strongly toward tradition.

Now, this kind of a solution in which technology is concentrated only in the areas where the state has supreme interest and in which, on the other hand, old traditions are specifically emphasized and promoted so as to encourage popular support has some real elements of strength. But there are at least three areas where the Soviets run into severe trouble and will be running into trouble, as time goes on.

One is the fact that this policy is highly inefficient in terms of the use of natural resources and physical resources. We find that even to this day the Soviets are still using an agriculture which is hyperextensive. They are cultivating over half a billion acres of land, which is not only terribly costly in terms of resources but which limits their reserves for the future. The Soviets still are poorly equipped, too, even in their factories, with such items as calculators, typewriters, copiers, telephones, and so on, the whole armament of decision-making which is common to the United States, Western Europe, and Japan today. This means that their resources in personnel are badly used technically.

Demographically, the Soviet Union also faces some very serious questions of the future. Essentially speaking, the native Russians are barely increasing. Conversely, we find very rapid population increases in Central Asia and the Caucasus, with only a relative trickling into the cities of these peasant people, who have but slight urban job opportunities. The Soviet Union has acute discriminations against its minorities, particularly in its school system, via different standards for Russian-language and native-language institutions. Generally speaking, technical jobs and better jobs overall are not available to Turks and other minorities, even within the Union Republics of these very same people. They have not, however, been physically displaced in the way that our black people have been forced from the South by the agricultural revolution of the last 25 years. So, thus far, the Soviets have compartmented their problems. But the fact is that there are substantial underemployment and real discrimination, in Central Asia; long-term problems which the Soviets simply do not know how to handle and about which, as I have mentioned, they have enormous sensitivity.

And the final area of severe problems is that of the competitive capacity of Soviet society in a world of change. If the rest of the world did not change very rapidly, and we are speaking particularly of Japan and Western Europe, the Soviet Union's policies would be highly effective. But unfortunately, from the Soviet standpoint, change has taken place.

Now, I want to say a few words about the situation in this country and certain alternatives that come out of the total picture. In general, the American picture is almost the reverse of the Soviet. Rather than having a situation where technology has, in essence, been geared down to the limits of absorption of a very traditional society, we are permitting, we have permitted, a

runaway technology to dominate American society. There are several areas where this has been most evident. The policies we have had over the last 25 years, in the mechanization of agriculture, have reflected not only the inherent economic advantages of, but also extremely heavy subsidies for, mechanization. These had led to disastrous results throughout our rural population: mass migrations, a whole set of disinvestments, breakdowns of small towns, deteriorations of rural and urban school systems and other services. For example, in the Midwestern and Plains States, we have over 200 counties where the population no longer reproduces itself, where essentially only the aged are left. And, of course, social costs in the ghettos, up to and including riots, have also been expressions of an agricultural policy that has been exercised without the slightest understanding of its consequences.

Another clear area of this sort has been in the television industry, where, in essence, the process has been one of reducing information and increasing amplification. The actual information content provided to the public in the shift from newspapers to television represents, in most cases, a reduction from 50 to 90 percent in terms of variety of messages. What you get is emotional-shock reinforcement; thus, less and less capacity in the public to manage more and more complicated situations. And this is the essence of a very serious problem, because, at a time when *more* information is needed to handle great domestic and foreign issues, we are actually getting less information than before, given the highly repetitive and extremely fragmentary nature of television messages.

Finally, we have something known as "diplomaism." This something that has come out as one of the great American diseases, which was augmented by the scare American education suffered in 1957 with the first orbiting of Sputnik I. Sober analysis has shown that most increases in so-called "standards" in our job positions are simply not justified by actual work changes. We are calling for immense increases in requirements without actual relation to jobs. I give you a simple illustration:

Our Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health at the University of Illinois is very much involved in a community-development program in black areas of Mississippi. One of the key elements of that involvement is a major health program. Ninety percent of the investigatory operations, including electrocardiagraphs, are being or will be done by trained technicians drawn from the local poorly educated,

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Born in Omsk, Siberia, in 1916, Dr. Demitri B. Shimkin is a derivative citizen of the United States and a veteran of World War II. He received his A.B. degree in anthropology from the University of California in 1936 and his Ph.D. from that institution in 1939. As an Army officer and a member of the War Department General Staff (Military Intelligence Division), he attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in 1944, after which he served as an instructor at the National War College. Before accepting his present position as Professor of Anthropology and Geography at the University of Illinois, Professor Shimkin served as a Social Science Research Council Fellow at Princeton and for 5 years as a Research Associate in the Harvard University Russian Research Center.

Dr. Shimkin has lectured at the Naval War College since 1952 and at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces since 1957. He has also served as a consultant for the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group, U.S. Department of Defense, and as professorial lecturer in Soviet Economics at The George Washington University. His recent interest and research have focused upon the socio-economic problems involved in the rural-urban population shift.

black population. We know, too, from other experience, e.g., the Mile-Square Health Center in Chicago, that this can be done with excellent results. In other words, much of the "mystique" of pyramiding requirements for modern medicine in the United States is more a justification for limiting services than it is of actual gains in performance capabilities. And this is of immense importance, since American medicine is not providing health services comparable to those in about 20 countries; our benefit-cost rate in this field is exactly one-half that of Canada.

To summarize: where does all this lead us?

In any modern society, the conjunction of technology and of the national historical pattern is a central problem. The question is not simply the choice between extreme conservatism and a surrender to whatever happens, but rather of seeking alternatives that gain *both* progress and social continuity. Are these possible? I will simply say here, "Yes, we do have alternatives about which we know a great deal already." It is possible, through our existing knowledge and the advances in systems analysis, for example, to do environmental forecasts, to provide far more effective ways of understanding the probable consequences of all sorts of changes, and then to control them for our maximum welfare.

We have little exploited capacities, for example, for reproducing information; literally speaking, it would be possible to get the contents of all scientific journals in the United States in one daily newspaper the size of *The New York Times*, that could be distributed universally at about the cost we are now facing for fragmentary and slow dissemination via antiquated systems of communication.

The problem therefore comes in of going to the next generation of social and technological capabilities, and this is the essence of both our national problem and that of the Soviet Union. The country which has the vision *to use and to control* the technology, including the technology of the social sciences, of tomorrow is going to have the capacity to order its society in a progressive and effective way, and I think that this may well be the decisive element in world leadership in the next century.

Thank you.

Having precise ideas often leads to a man doing nothing.

Paul Valery, 1871-1945