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# Andropov: Disintegration and Discipline

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*The Disintegration of the USSR under the banner of Discipline. Andropov and his Inheritance.*

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The new Soviet leadership has now been installed for sufficient time to make possible an assessment of its likely prospects in relation to the political economy of the USSR.

The condition of the Soviet economy today, and its future line of development, is above all one of decline. The growth rate shows a continuous decline from the thirties to the present, if looked at decade by decade, excluding the war years. The official growth-rate in the last three years, has hovered around the 2-3% mark for GNP, according to Soviet statistics.<sup>1</sup> More sober figures relating to inflation can range from a figure of 1%, to cover the introduction of new higher prices for new products, to 6% as a general rate of inflation. As prices are administered, in any case the figures are little more than a general pointer to production problems. These were confirmed, for 1982 in particular, though for previous years as well, in unfulfilled yearly plan targets for between a third and a half of items produced. Again, this does not prove a great deal given the way the plan is altered over the year. Western Sovietologists produce a spurious rigour in computing rates of growth (or decline) and of quantities unfulfilled. The only thing of importance is the direction, and that is clearly downward for the last decade and for the post-war period as a whole.

If this was all, there would perhaps be a mild statement from the USSR to the effect that high growth rates were good before but low growth rates are still better. In fact, there are constant complaints from the leadership about low productivity, which are intensifying in their pitch. There is indeed a real crisis caused by the falling standard of living. It is unsurprising that food remains a problem throughout the USSR and that it is most acute outside the major central towns. The USSR is no better in producing flats than most western countries and is in fact worse given the backlog and poor standards of housing. Cars and major consumer durables remain dreams for the vast majority of the population.

No better indication of failure can be given than the declining life expectancy, which has now dropped to around 61 for men, at birth. The rising levels of alcoholism, drug-taking and hooliganism are just symptoms of a society in process of disintegrative change. In economic terms, the return per ruble is now down to 78.6% of that in 1965.<sup>2</sup> Underutilisation of capacity has

1. For a discussion of the same problems see my article in *Politics and Profit*, nos. 2-4, CSE, London, 1983. Soviet statistics come from the relevant *Narodnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR*, 1979-81 and *Pravda* 24.1.1982 & 23.1.1983 as well as *Pravda* 23.7.1983.

2. A. Bauchurin, *Planovoe Khoziaistvo*, March 1983.

been growing. The deputy chairman of Gosplan pointed out that a survey of 1600 factories constructed in the 1970s showed "a decline in the co-efficient of utilisation of existing equipment and growth in reserves of free capacity"<sup>3</sup>. He gave figures which provided a range of below 50%, for 12 ministries, up to an average of 81%. He also referred to the scattering of resources, which is usually a euphemism for unfinished construction projects. This is a hardy perennial provided year after year in the reports of his chief, Baibakov. The percentage of unfinished projects has grown year by year. To this catalogue must be added the primary problem of Soviet inability to produce high quality, reliable goods.

The principal question, is not, of course, that the USSR produces defective goods, requires large quantities of spare parts and wastes resources in constructing projects which are completed in 3 to 5 times the time taken in the West.<sup>4</sup> (I have argued these points in great detail in previous issues of Critique and elsewhere). The real question is why it should be getting worse, and whether it can be halted short of changing the social system.

That it is getting worse is not negated by the rise in the figures for the first half of 1983, cited extensively by the leadership. We do not know the reason for this rise, though the insistence of the leadership on discipline and plan fulfilment could well have produced a mere statistical rise caused by a re-shuffling of tasks or some other bureaucratic manoeuvre. Certainly, reports that the discipline campaign had been rendered nugatory after a few months by re-arrangements and by the provision of documents proving the necessity of absenteeism do not inspire confidence. (We will return later to the question of discipline).

The reasons given by Western apologists, whether Stalinoid or liberal, to explain this decline in the USSR include references to the arms race and the need for the regime to switch from an extensive to an intensive form of economy. The first argument has been given some credence by the Kidron-Cliff school of State-Capitalism who base their entire view of the world, and the USSR in particular, on the arms race. It is noteworthy that the Soviet leaders and the Soviet social science journals do not argue this case at all. Those people who actually know something of the Soviet arms industry argue that it is subject to the same problems as the rest of Soviet industry. The result is that the arms race is made worse for the USSR in that it has to devote a multiple of the resources required by capitalist powers in order to achieve anything like a comparable result. Worse still for such proponents of the "Military Theory of the USSR", it makes better sense to argue that the USSR has to rely on military might, however inferior it might be to that of the West, precisely in order to compensate for its own inherent inefficiency. In the absence of a Cold War and of means of control of both the Soviet and East European populations, the clamour for a change of the system would be insuperable, as we have in fact seen in the case of Eastern Europe, where the

3. N. Chumachenko, *Planovoe Khoziaistvo*, March 1983.

4. See my articles in *Critique* 6 and 12 in particular.

military question is less important. At any rate the rising or non-rising level of resources devoted to the military is a secondary question to be discussed, after we have examined the *primary* question of why the economy is declining in general.

The extensive/intensive viewpoint requires a detailed rebuttal, particularly since it has become the standard view of Soviet journals, of Western authors as Mandel and Nove, and of orthodox journals in general. Such a rebuttal is not possible here, but there are a few essential points that may briefly be made. The orthodox argument is essentially that the *USSR has used up those resources immediately available, or available at relatively lower cost such as oil, coal, manpower, i.e. raw materials, energy and manpower.* A weaker part of the case rests on the transfer from more labour intensive to less labour intensive industry. It is true that there has been a shift from agriculture to industry and that industry has become more equipment intensive. It is also true that energy and raw materials are less easily available.

Nonetheless, the problem with this view is that it explains nothing about the present. There has been no period from 1930 onwards, of which these statements would not have been true. The whole point of industrialisation, for example, was to provide the machinery to replace labour both in the fields and in the factories in order to increase total production. Indeed it did raise the machinery per man by an enormous figure. Again, there is no evidence that the *USSR is suffering more now than in an earlier period from shortages of energy resources.* While more oil, coal and other resources have been discovered in less accessible regions, the means of extraction have improved vastly. Given the wasteful nature of production in the *USSR*, it requires a multiple of the energy and raw material resources required in the West to produce the same item. This has always been true and one could easily take the view that the costs were greater in the thirties when the physical volume of resources then available was considerably less than at present.

If the *USSR* were a small country dependent on the rest of the world for its oil, coal etc. the argument would make more sense, though even then it would need to be considerably reformulated. Clearly a number of countries have been knocked out by the rising price of oil etc. It is true that the *USSR* has always worked on the basis of ignoring the consequences of exhaustion of men, materials, land and equipment. But a reason must be provided to explain why it has somehow reached a new stage of absolute exhaustion. This is the salient fact about the present and the orthodox view does not explain it and lacks the power to explain it because it is superficial. This is natural for such as Professor Nove, the *New Left Review*, Soviet journals and the usual American academics around the staff of the White House in different administrations, for the simple reason that they assume a theory of diminishing returns. The woolliness of this theory was pointed out over a hundred years ago; it fails to vouchsafe what it is that is supposed to be diminishing. There is no excuse for continuing with such a theory for those who want to understand reality, as those who would like to be Marxist must be presumed to want to do.

There are two evident changes in the *USSR*, neither of which is reducible to the other and which jointly explain everything referred to above. The first is

the end of the inflow of labour to the towns. Soviet leaders, like Brezhnev, often referred to the need to raise productivity now that the labour-power available had reached a fixed level. However wasteful factories may be, if new factories can be constructed output can be increased. When there are no more workers no more factories can be either constructed or operated.<sup>5</sup> (Of course the period of forced labour extended the working day, while the exploitation of Eastern Europe and China also increased the pool of labour indirectly. Furthermore the influx of women from the home has also ended. However, these aspects are explanatory of an earlier period).

The true identification of the present period of the USSR is that it is the end of the period of the expansion of the absolute surplus product. It is not that the relative surplus was not being expanded in the earlier period, for clearly it was; but its relatively low rate was greatly overshadowed by the high rate of increase in the absolute surplus product.

The second fundamental change is that the weaknesses inherent in the nature of the system have now attained their developed forms, which were only embryonic in the earlier phase. The more industrialised and intensively developed industry becomes, the more important become questions of reliability, suitable technique, punctual delivery and overall high quality. The growth rate would, therefore, naturally, tend to decline over time, though at first it would be masked by the availability of labour and the greater ease with which a less complex and smaller economy may be directed.

The effect has been to diminish still further the already tenuous control over the surplus product that the elite can exercise. Putting the same point differently, the result has been that the control over surplus labour, and hence over the worker, has been reduced. The possibilities for directing labour is greatly reduced under conditions where the workforce is static and attached to specific skills and locations. The economy of the USSR is based on these conditions, and they are conditions which allow the worker a limited control over his own work process. This, in turn, means that the elite itself cannot enjoy full control over the surplus product. The import of all this is that the form of labour and hence that of the product also is neither that of the value form nor that of the socialist form of workers self-management. Naturally, the product reflects the society which is a historical nonentity. It is not a hybrid of value and nonvalue which is a nonsense anyway, because that would imply a new form that functioned better, or at any rate not worse, than the old form of value, which is an unsustainable view. It could function in a non-viable way, but then it is not a hybrid at all. Because both worker and elite have established their own forms of control, even if it is a largely negative form for the worker, the result is the product shows this division in control which is in reality a lack of control.

For Andropov and his fellow members of the elite the problem is one of discipline. We have already cited in Critique 12, Sonin, the prominent Soviet economist to the effect (in *Sotsialisticheskii Trud*, March 1977) that the

5. The import of foreign workers from such countries as Viet Nam though crucial for the particular project, perhaps, is of limited economic significance. (See *Sunday Times*, London, 28.11.1982)

problems of the Soviet factory are reducible to discipline, and it must be clear, that is the general view. There has hardly been a speech since the accession of Andropov which has not stressed his views on discipline. Thus in the speech of Zimyanin, one of the Secretaries of the CPSU, reported in Pravda on 30th July 1983 he said inter alia: "The strengthening of discipline and order, the development of socialist competition, can only give the necessary result when connected to the perfection of the whole economic mechanism." He gave here two of the pillars on which the regime stands: discipline and a move towards the market. The latter as he makes clear is needed to strengthen control over the worker.

Disciplining the worker is the name of the game and they realise perfectly well today that it cannot be accomplished simply by picking people up in the streets and depositing them back at work. They have tried that method and it has failed. The squads of police questioning persons in various public places in order to ensure that everyone stays at work may have been the first method that Andropov, the former policeman, would think of, but it can have only a temporary effect under modern conditions. When the task is simply carrying bricks from one point to another a policeman can ensure its successful completion. But no policeman can ensure that the wall of bricks is built straight, or that complex, specialised, and interconnected industrial operations are carried out as they should be. We have already noted, and it has been reported in the Western Press, that the bureaucratic system today has answered the attempts of its controllers to impose their will. In reply to the policeman the workers in public places give fully documented, signed, and stamped reasons for their presence. Since some movement of factory personnel is unavoidable, a whole army of police would be required simply to check these new documents. Such a drafting of new bureaucrats would negate the whole intention by absorbing large numbers of potential workers, as well as creating a new set of labour camps for persistent offenders. Wisely, the leadership has retreated, deciding that discipline can only be established through the market or at least through market forms.

That has not stopped them passing further decrees to strengthen discipline. Thus in the same issue of *Pravda* cited above we read that "the Politburo considered the question of strengthening work on the tightening of socialist labour discipline. In the course of discussion it was stressed that the basis for . . . raising the standard of living of the Soviet people is their conscientious work, strict order and organisation." This was on the first page, in the editorial column now devoted to Politburo reports following meetings of that body. This prefaced the introduction of new decrees on labour discipline.

Discipline and order do not just mean control over the ordinary worker, as we learn from the regular Politburo meeting of 1st October 1983. After noting the failure of the supply of potatoes and vegetables and other food products, blame is laid on the relevant ministry and it is announced that: "Waste of products is still large, lack of management is exhibited, state and executive discipline is contravened." The statement goes on to complain of "the irrational use of transport, material and labour resources."

It is perfectly rational for the leadership to attack the problem at its base: the relationship of labour to its work process. The problem is that they cannot enforce their control unless they switch to a viable historical form. Only

socialism, which is ruled out, or market forms can work. Hence they refer above to the new economic mechanism and hence their experiments in two republics in permitting certain ministries more market-type operations. Experiment is more general than this, however, for they are speaking of introducing more incentive systems based on the Shchekino experiment, under which a certain number of workers were dismissed and the rest received the wages saved. How on earth are they to introduce the market with the unemployment and inequality based on money, thus bringing to an end the overmanning, slack working etc., which the Soviet worker expects and which are such central features to the Soviet system?

At this point it is instructive to observe the evolution of Andropov over the year. In his first speech in November he stood on a programme which was forceful and remarkably forthright. Unlike Brezhnev he did not waste time discussing irrelevancies but pointed directly to the chronic Soviet failures: inability to introduce new technique, waste of resources, poor management and labour discipline. He stated that he had no panacea, unlike all his predecessors who knew everything from Shakespeare to agronomy, but he promised action. A careful reading of the speech showed that he was facing three ways: discipline, the market and concessions on democracy. Brezhnev had already spoken of the Soviet Union's having "great reserves in democracy" in his May 1983 speech on agriculture. That the USSR had great reserves in democracy and not just in agriculture may be obvious to everybody, but it was a new departure. For the first time an open statement had been made that the USSR suffered economically because of its absence of democracy. True it referred only to agriculture but the point was made, to be picked up by Andropov.<sup>6</sup>

Since then there has been the campaign around discipline which has so evidently failed. It has been succeeded by the view that discipline cannot succeed until the market or its forms come into existence, so that there is now greater stress on the market forms. No Soviet leader has made a greater confession of failure so soon after coming to power than Andropov did in his speech in June 1983. He had begun the previous November by pointing to shortcomings in the introduction of new technique, but in June it turned out that the problem had been handed over to the Academy of Sciences and they were tardy in providing a solution. It is quite clear from that speech that Andropov simply could not find a way out of the crisis. Furthermore, his tiredness reflects the fact that he has been unable to establish his own dominance over the factions existing in the elite. He began by facing three ways and he has remained in a position where he has to genuflect to all three positions.

The stance on discipline is the obvious bureaucratic reflex at the present time. Under Stalin, force was used directly, and control was exercised over the apparatus through the secret police. Force has since had to remain in the

6. Y. Andropov: *Uchenie Karla Marksa, Kommunist*, March 1983; p. 18 "Soviet democracy had, has and it must be assumed will have problems of growth . . . The perfection of our democracy demands the removal of bureaucratic organisation and formalism, everything that stifles and disrupts the initiatives of the masses." The point is not that he is becoming a democrat but that he has to discuss the issue.

background, but organisational directives replaced it, first in a brusque and unworkable form under Krushchev and then in an increasingly decentralised form under Brezhnev. Discipline is an attempt to apply force to the organisational directives.

Although the elite is not able wholly to *control* the surplus product, it has always been able to *organise* production. That has been its mode of existence; hence its natural recourse when seeking remedies has always been to forms of organisation, whether it has been direct force or simply directives. Hence Andropov's attempt to achieve the same result as Stalin and Khrushchev is a bow in the direction of the men of the apparatus. The constant re-organisations of Khrushchev and the force of Stalin cannot now be applied both because they do not work, and because no-one in the elite wants them. The trouble is that the instructions are not really carried out even if obeyed in form. For that reason it appears to the bureaucrat that all problems would be solved if only it could be brought about that the instructions given were carried out in a manner compatible with the true intentions of the instructor. I have discussed in previous articles the basic laws of the Soviet economy which explain the divergence between formal plans and their implementation. The conflict of interest in the hierarchical structure ensures that only the form of the instruction can remain. The conception that things could be otherwise under the present social structure is a utopia much sought after by those who issue the instructions in the system. There is, however, another problem also.

In a modern economy it is simply impossible to give sufficiently precise instructions from any *centre* such as might achieve the necessary results. In any case no-one can control a large, integrated and trained work-force. Thus, the only effect of attempts to tighten control over the apparatus, particularly its lower sections, will be to antagonise it and force it in the direction of those elements below it who have traditionally ignored these instructions: the workers. Increased discipline over the workers cannot make them work better or harder, though it might make them work longer hours. Its initial effect are that more projects reach completion and that more work is done; but over time it becomes apparent that the work so done is of even lower quality than before. Furthermore, the increased discipline aggravates the workers and makes it more difficult even to do that work which was done previously. The short sharp burst could lead to something altogether more serious.

Editorial after editorial in *Pravda* has pointed to the need for consumer goods to provide incentives. It has lambasted the low level of services. Here we encounter the second group in the elite: the higher intelligentsia who want the market. Andropov has made clear moves in their direction as we have seen. They form the vast bulk of the elite and intelligentsia, running from managers through to academicians and writers. Only the police and certain sections of the apparatus can actually prefer bureaucratic instructions or direct control. The problem with the pro-market policy is that it can only be introduced with extreme caution if at all in present circumstances, if it is not to trigger off a wave of unrest. On the other hand, if it has to be done piecemeal then its advantages are whittled away by having to cope with the rest of the existing system. Thus the only way to introduce the market is the Polish method of *harsh discipline*. Whether the elite is prepared to continue with this policy and

maintain both a tight rein and mass unemployment is extremely dubious. The market is nothing without unemployment and an adverse pricing system, adverse for the majority of the population that is. The elite will, however, be forced to try this road, just as the governments of Western Europe are applying austerity little by little in order to test the mettle of the working-class. To the extent that the working-class fails the ruling class advances. Similarly Andropov will advance cautiously while maintaining maximum order. If he meets resistance he will retreat. At the moment he is advancing at the pace of a tortoise.

The third part of his policy connects with the third section of the elite namely, that section which is closer to the working-class and which wants concessions made to the working class. Unlike the bulk of the materialistic, selfish and boring Soviet intelligentsia, a certain section of the elite and intelligentsia recognises the need to consult the workers and draw them into the process of decision-making. We may call these the working-elite or intelligentsia. Agan Beygan and his group have once again made the running in this respect. He also wants the market, and indeed called for the introduction of small private firms in his *Trud* article in 12th December 1982. But it is noteworthy that the secret report he made with his group in Novosibirsk has been leaked to the West in full.<sup>7</sup> Here he calls for workers' participation in decision making, though certainly not for workers' control still less for self-management. They are quite clear that it is the effect of the system on the worker that makes the system what it is: inefficient, technologically backward and highly wasteful. Their statement of the nature of the Soviet worker bears repeating: "His common traits are a low labour and production discipline, an indifferent attitude to work, a shoddy quality of work, social inactivity, a well-pronounced consumer mentality, and a low code of ethics." The conclusion makes it clear that they have in mind some democratic and more egalitarian form: "Thus we believe that the most important source of social tension in the economy is not just a lack of harmony, but an actual contradiction of interests among vertically dependent groups, workers and team leaders, team leaders and managers; managers and ministers."<sup>8</sup> The report calls for workers to be given scope for their creative abilities instead of being treated as "cogs". The Novosibirsk economists are known for their radical stance. Their head Agan Begyan wrote a similar report in 1964 but retracted it because of a leak to the *New Statesman* in July 1965. Then he pointed to the growth of unemployment and the inefficiency of the system. Then as now he was in favour of the market. Now he has come out in favour of private property as well as for what may be called social democracy. He is certainly not in favour of working-class power. He clearly wants an inter-class alliance between managers, the factory intelligentsia and ordinary workers against ministerial bureaucrats. He argues that only the better qualified and more vigorous workers would be in favour of the market, called euphemistically 'economic methods of management'. Thus he ends up with an alliance of managers and a potential labour aristocracy. It is significant that

7. *New York Times*: 5th August, 1983.

8. *Ibid.*



he, or they, were allowed to produce the 1982 *Trud* article and hold their closed conference. He has not had to retract anything. Indeed his reference to workers and their inability to work is endorsed by the leadership. The only part which is not to be found in the speeches of Andropov is the argument that the USSR is rent with internal social contradictions.

That there was a section of the elite in favour of concessions towards democracy has been obvious for some time to anyone who reads Soviet social science journals. The effect of Poland was one reason for the discussions around the incorporation of workers in factories, but there is another reason, given by Brezhnev. If the cause of the defective Soviet product lies with the worker or relations with workers, then the worker has to be incorporated. Hence there has been a vast flourishing of Soviet sociology and psychology, previously either non-existent as subjects or reduced to meaningless shadows. Their instrumentalism has been patent. Boring studies of the degree of discontent with individual aspects of factories jostle in the journals with equally unimaginative descriptions of worker attitudes to decision-making. The sterility of the publications hides the reality of worker antagonism to the system and shows the impossibility of this solution. The elite is desperate and naturally looks to the same kinds of solutions as those adopted in the West.

Andropov can adopt all three views because they reinforce one another when combined together. But that should not hide the fact that the third faction, as evidenced by the report quoted, takes the view that the lack of worker discipline cannot be changed by imposing discipline from above. Again the pure elitist marketeers regard workers as cattle to be controlled through economic instruments. Thus the three views are distinct though they may be blended together. The distinction is important because the three views do in fact represent the influence of the three social groups in the society. The elite itself, the intelligentsia and the workers. The intelligentsia wants the market, the workers an egalitarian democracy and the elite need an efficiently running system guaranteeing their organisational interests. These pressures then produce a distorted result in the factions around the elite itself. What is today significant is the rise of a faction going beyond the elitist "civil rights" demands of the dissidents, most of whom rejected the working-class.

Andropov has three directions in which to move, none of which is likely to lead to success. The discipline campaign has already failed; in any case it was merely heir to an earlier less determined campaign by Brezhnev in 1979-80. The market cannot be introduced without leading to working-class protest. Concessions to the workers will have to be real rather than cosmetic if they are to have any real impact. However, it is more interesting to ask what the consequences of the present attempts at reform are likely to be. There has now been almost a year of permanent criticism in the press, ranging from *Pravda* complaining of the absence of democracy inside the party cells<sup>9</sup> to the constant hammering the economy is taking. The different centres of influence have consolidated themselves and Andropov enjoys little more than the appearance of strength. The appalling shooting down of the Korean plane, whether or not it was spying, showed the extent of the independence of the Armed Forces. Indeed the immobility of the previous era hid a real process of

disintegration which is now showing itself more openly. Andropov's brief was to stop this process. But by trying to introduce solutions aimed at stopping the disintegration, he will, in the very attempt, almost certainly accelerate it.

*Disintegration* may be regarded as the process in which the poles of a contradiction cease to interpenetrate and thereafter operate in parallel. As a result the entity goes into the first phase of a crisis in which its different parts operate independently of each other. Thus the workers, intelligentsia and elite are increasingly drawing away from each other. Social mobility is spiralling downward, workers ignore instructions with greater frequency, the elite tries to find ways of existing externally to the USSR and through independent institutions, while the intelligentsia has tried to leave the USSR or to bury itself in itself, in separation from both the elite and working class.

Ministries, trusts, enterprises, and academic institutions have all acquired a greater degree of independence from control than they have previously had. The ability of the centre to exercise overall control rested on its control over labour, but now that labour has become increasingly specialised, the centre cannot organise in the old manner and has instead to accept a role more and more like that of a bargainer. Thus the decline in the rate of growth reflecting this change in the nature of the surplus product has also led to a change in the power of the centre. The enormous power of Stalin rested on the large quantity of fluid labour-power analogous to that of an earlier epoch of Oriental despots. The fossilisation of the Brezhnev period only reflected the end of that era of fluid labour, and the non-existence of any alternative line of development. The question of the market is not really a question for the centre to decide. The increasing failure of relations between enterprises and the various divisions, vividly demonstrated by the complaints of the politburo in the decrees cited earlier, can lead only to increasing *unofficial* contacts between enterprises. As this process develops, there will arise a *system* of such contacts, and at a certain point in this development the market will have introduced itself.

For consumers the market is introducing itself in the most obnoxious forms. The National Health Service, from all reports, has virtually broken down. Doctors, surgeons, and consultants all demand fees, and while the penalty of not paying them may not be the American one of not getting treated, it will probably be inferior treatment. Officially, of course, the health service is free. In housing, the intelligentsia can get flats outside the normal queueing system by getting so-called co-operatives for which they pay ever higher sums. Cars are repaired privately and equipment is obtained on the black market. Increasing ties with the West has meant that most goods can be got on the black market, imported through whatever means. This has had the effect of making the ruble more like money, and hence the former corruption based on goods or contacts is being replaced by direct monetary bribery. The level of corruption, to which Andropov has taken such exception, is certainly higher now than in any other period. The significance of this is not that the

'second economy' has taken over, but that the old system is disintegrating into a market form. The formerly despised speculator is becoming an acceptable figure.

The only weapon the centre has is that of criminalisation, and it cannot prove a very effective one. The police can place any number of people in gaol without altering the progress of the process of disintegration. The process is now probably irreversible. It will be easier for the society to move towards bastard forms of the market than for the elite to introduce the market. That is why they are more likely to allow the process to continue under restraint than to do anything substantial.

It has to be noted that the system cannot simply wind down in an orderly manner. Over time the increasing independence of the higher social groups can only favour the mass of the workers. The large size of plants, some five times the average size of West German plants according to *Pravda*<sup>10</sup>, and the proximity of the workers to their plants, can only mean that at the point where control over them slackens they will become increasingly aware of their potential power. The larger Republics, larger plants and more powerful sections of the elite will obtain their demands and leave the rest in the mire.

It is Andropov's job to halt this process of disorderly disintegration. He has shown his ability to deploy the secret police to fight corruption and control individuals. He can also deploy the army in Afghanistan and elsewhere on the borders of the USSR. The drain on the resources of the USSR, estimated at billions per annum, caused by supporting Eastern Europe, the war in Afghanistan and giving aid to numerous countries will have to come to an end.

That the system is drawing to a close is understood within the U.S. government. Using a doctrine of squeezing the USSR until it is forced to concede, the U.S. administration has simply raised the arms budget to a level at which the USSR either has to pull out of the arms race, or has to reduce its standard of living so raising the already high level of discontent still higher. The Soviet elite have retaliated by increasing its militancy in the Third World and by providing considerable support for peace movements in the developed world. It has to be said that Reagan's policy has largely failed because it has given the Soviet elite allies on a scale it might only have dreamt of otherwise. Furthermore, it has given the elite occasion to use internal nationalism in relation to the threat of war. Since the United States cannot actually drop the bombs, the Soviet elite do not really have to respond with more than a minimal increase in expenditure.<sup>11</sup> Rather than develop effective counters to

10. *Pravda*, 9.12.1982: G. Kulagin: Trudno byt' universalom. He argues for small plants for obvious control reasons.

11. The unreality of the Soviet threat is well described by Andrew Cockburn: *The Threat: Inside the Soviet Military Machine*, London 1983. The fact that the US military are well aware of this fact is well illustrated by the much quoted Ivan Selin, former defence department strategist.

Cruise or Pershing, their obvious response is simply to transfer existing equipment closer to Western Europe. In a certain sense the Reagan policy has actually assisted the Soviet elite by providing them with an explanation and an excuse for their own dismal performance.

Disintegration is the first part, we have said, of a crisis. The second part is either the restoration of the *status quo ante* or open conflict. The former seems impossible. We must therefore conclude that the second part of the crisis will be open conflict, though it is not possible to tell how long this second part of the crisis will take to precipitate. The Roman Empire was disintegrating for centuries before a shove from outside caused a collapse. Having no internal support, the Empire could provide no resistance. At least that Empire was based on historically viable forms of extraction and control over the surplus product. The USSR does not have that viable form and its elite has to constantly thrash around to find it. It has survived under particular historical conditions for a relatively short historical time. Its process of disintegration has to be comparable therefore to the time during which it has existed.

## Humour

### **Six Contradictions of socialism**

*There is no unemployment but no-one works.  
No-one works but the plan is fulfilled.  
The Plan is fulfilled but there are no goods in the shops.  
There are no goods in the shops, but everyone lives well.  
Everyone lives well, but everyone is discontented.  
Everyone is discontented but everyone votes 'yes'.*

### **Old Moscow Joke ascribed to Radek;**

*Can one build socialism in one country? One can but  
God help that country.*

### **Pluralism**

*Andropov announces that he is fully in favour of democracy and socialism:  
All those that do not follow me can follow Brezhnev.*

### **The Soviet Hybrid**

*Soviet Communism is a system that takes from the Stone Age its technical level,  
from slavery its social relations, from feudalism its hierarchy, from capitalism its  
exploitation and from socialism its name.*

### **Soviet Technique**

*All hail the Soviet microchip, the largest microchip in the world.*

### **Polish Humour**

*We import capitalist goods to build up socialism,  
but we export goods to destroy capitalism.*

*Capitalism is on the verge of a precipice but socialism is one step ahead.*

Critique invites anyone who has humour of the kind printed, or any other which is socially relevant, to send in their contributions.