

Political Economy of the Soviet Intellectual

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The news media have given saturation coverage in the past six months to two developments in the USSR: the detente with the West and the activities (both in the USSR and abroad) of the Soviet¹ liberal dissidents. As this article tries to show, the two events are not unrelated. It is important to understand the background to both as well as the significance of the emergence of a largely right-wing intelligentsia. The latter can best be understood in terms of the repression of the left together with the evolution of an ideology which fits their own socio-economic position.

(i) *THE DIFFERENTIAL NATURE OF SOVIET REPRESSION*

There has been a steady stream of statements and more detailed literature from the Soviet underground, to which the authorities have responded with increased persecution. It is important, however, to realise that the repression in the USSR varies depending on the social group and the viewpoint of the particular group of dissidents. The suppression of the left – those who are genuine

1. The word Soviet is used simply in reference to the country without any implication as to the nature of the regime. Russia cannot be employed as it does not embrace the non-Russian nationalities.

Marxists or who want the working-class to achieve power – has changed little since the days when the left opposition was physically liquidated in the thirties.² Today, as then, there is no worse crime than that of being a 'Trotskyist'. The regime's attitude towards the left is shown in their much more vicious treatment of those who are genuine Marxists. The trials are not publicised or known and the sentences are harsh. It is enough to take part in a study-group reading the less obtainable works of Plekhanov or Djilas's *New Class* to receive a prison sentence. It is impossible to gauge the strength of the left because they will not turn to the Western bourgeoisie for support nor leave the country. Because of the atomisation of the population the left is separated into numerous small pockets which are broken up by the K.G.B. almost as soon as they are formed. Thus Amalrik's description of the different political groups in the USSR is dubious for two reasons.³ Firstly, like anyone else in Soviet society (excluding the K.G.B.) he could only have based his conclusions on a very small sample of the society. Secondly, not being a Marxist himself he is not able to distinguish between those groups who merely use Marxist language and those who are in favour of working-class power. In other words he is wrong in describing certain currents as Marxist-Leninist. His examples are nearer to the earlier Evtushenko who is best described as being on the left of the elite.⁴ That is why they have been more readily tolerated.

Apart from the particular views of a dissident, the second determinant of the severity of the penalty depends on his social group. Thus Sakharov has been doubly protected, both by his position and by his elitist liberal or right-wing views. This does not mean that he has not been victimized or that the governing elite would not like to see him silenced. It should be noted, however, that it is only in the last year or so that he has constituted such an embarrassment to the elite's foreign policy and his persecution hitherto, indefensible as it is, has been mild compared to that inflicted on others. From this example it is clear that there is a third factor which affects punishment of dissidents. The nature of action taken, if any, is bound to be of considerable importance. Those who take up arms or who act on behalf of foreign intelligence agencies (Penkovsky), or who work with organisations like the NTS obviously related to them, are sure to receive harsh sentences. If we exclude those who take up arms and those who act in one way or another with foreign powers, the basic determinants for the nature of the repression remain social position and ideology.

The fact of the matter is that the great change brought about by Khrushchev, in the name of the elite, was to render the upper stratum, whose members had suffered considerably under Stalin, more or less independent of the secret police.

2. For an account of the liquidation of the Trotskyists see Joseph Berger: *Shipwreck of a Generation*, Harvill Press, London, 1971: pp.96-8.

3. A. Amalrik: *Will the USSR survive until 1984?* *Survey*: Autumn 1969.

4. See Evtushenko's *Precocious Autobiography*, Penguin, London 1965, p.88, where he says inter alia: Stalin's "greatest crime was the disintegration of the human spirit he caused." Somehow he has also avoided the working-class in his work.

Whereas under Stalin the question of loyalty to the regime was of some importance, by the 1950s the new enlarged elite had been formed in the post-1917 period and purges could only be economically counterproductive besides being politically and personally intolerable.⁵ By the time Stalin died the elite's increased size and relative stability meant that there was no longer any need to give the secret police a free rein but, if the elite was at least united (as it clearly still is) on the need to have an elite (themselves), the same cannot be said of the rest of society. For the latter, therefore, there could be no change as regards overall secret police control, although the form that this takes has clearly been changed. If previously people were executed en masse, or gaoled for merely making jokes, this was ended. Repression now takes the more subtle forms of dismissals, deportations, blocking promotion and making it impossible to get a job or enter an educational institution. The economy is no longer partially based on camp labour but people from the working-class or ordinary intelligentsia who take part in real protest are still incarcerated or suffer a worse fate.

Concretely this means that Litvinov is exiled while others are gaoled; Sakharov has his family victimised and Rostropovich his passport withdrawn for a time. The ordinary Ukrainian protesters lose their liberty and even their lives. The point is not that certain types of protesters who are members of the elite or close to the elite are not subject to repression but that the repression is less than it would be if they were not in that social group. Undoubtedly a member of the elite who urges foreign powers to attack the USSR or who is a Marxist – whether Trotskyist, Maoist or what have you – will find that he eventually winds up in a camp. An ordinary member of the intelligentsia or a worker, however, who is involved even in peaceful protest against the regime is likely to incur a prison sentence and his fellow Marxist dissidents still harsher punishment.

If anyone doubts this view of the regime's attitude let him look at the major libraries of the USSR and examine which literature is regarded as dangerous by the censors and which is not. He will find nothing of the great figures of the Soviet twenties and precious little of the work of Western Marxist writers whose views do not accord with the current orthodoxy. Bukharin does not even appear in the latest Soviet Encyclopaedia⁶ while modern attacks on Trotskyism and the Western left have become so voluminous that one might have supposed that Soviet youth would move en masse to the Fourth International in the absence of the vigilance of the Soviet press.⁷ Samuelson's economics textbook, however,

5. The incarceration of the wives of Kalinin and Molotov provides one of the most grotesque examples of the means employed to control the members of the upper stratum of Soviet society in this period.

6. *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, third edition, Moscow 1971 Vol. 4.

7. Books like 'Trotskyism the enemy of Leninism' Moscow Politizdat 1968 have been accompanied since by numerous articles like that of M. Basmanov in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* p.14, of 4.4.1973 entitled (my own translation): 'Powerless bombs, in whose interest is 'revolutionary' extremism?' The point of the article is to smear all left groups, Trotskyist, anarchist and Maoist as mad bombers. Since the journal is not widely read in the West it is clearly intended to inoculate the locals. The reference in 1968 to Cohn-Bendit and Marcuse as werewolves put them in the same category as Sinyavsky and Daniel.

was translated almost a decade ago while many modern Western economics texts are available in the Lenin and various other libraries. The same is true of other disciplines such as sociology. In other words, bourgeois literature is available while Marxist is not. The reason is not far to seek. A Marxist analysis of the USSR would be critical of the regime to the point of advocating its overthrow and replacement by a classless, non-elite society. It would also point to the need for the organisation of the potentially most powerful group in the society, the working-class. The Western bourgeois critic, however, invariably accepts the need for a ruling class or elite. Change from their point of view is in any case normally a gradual process. Bourgeois methods of running a factory accord with the views of the Soviet elite and hence functionalist economics and sociology are not altogether unacceptable. It might be objected that Marx himself was no slouch when it comes to a revolutionary method, that he is subversive and that nevertheless his works are in wide circulation. This is true but it should be noted that Marx's works have not always been so readily available, while many of the best introductions were simply not reprinted for thirty years. That Marx's statue in central Moscow took forty years to erect was no accident. Nonetheless his works are available today and do constitute a contradiction of the regime. The problem is not serious today since Marx's method is not easy to learn under any circumstances but it is peculiarly difficult for someone living in a regime using, or rather misusing, Marxist language to understand the difference between form and content. What is dangerous is the application of Marxist method to the circumstances of the USSR and that is why it is proscribed. The overall result has been described by one old Bolshevik as a society where it is more difficult to argue for socialism than in the pre-revolutionary period.

(ii) *THE RIGHT-WING VIEWS OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA*

The evolution of public opinion in the USSR in the past twenty years has been one of a constant shift to the right. If in 1956 there were clear signs of a Marxist intellectual tinge, in the Khrushchev period social democracy emerged as the dominant current. The evolution of Sakharov is indeed typical of the Intelligentsia itself and therein lies his great importance.⁸ His first essay was a more or less naive social democratic venture.⁹ The technocratic elitist attitude in this work was also fairly typical of much written by other intellectuals. Nonetheless this elitism was often tempered by a respect for the common man. This is seen for instance in the work of Solzhenitsyn.¹⁰ The pessimism of the intelligentsia, however, was deepened by the failure of the attempted move to the market under the 1965 Kosygin reform and the very slow rise in living

8. In a Letter to the Editor of the *New Statesman* of 26.10.1973 L. Vladimirov says in reply to earlier arguments that "a disastrous gap seems to be opening up between the radical dissidents and the bulk of the Soviet intelligentsia": "In fact Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov and other dissidents are worshipped by the Soviet Intelligentsia — to an extent that must be seen to be believed — and there is no gap at all". Much as we may prefer him to be wrong, there is no evidence to the contrary.

9. A. Sakharov: *Progress, Co-existence and Intellectual Freedom*, Penguin, London 1968.

10. This is particularly applicable to his earlier work especially in relation to the peasantry.

standards in the 'sixties combined with the increased repression which followed the growing manifestations of discontent. The result has been that anti-socialist attitudes such as those of Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov have become very widespread. Regret is expressed that the October revolution took place.¹¹ Western countries, formerly worshipped for their high standard of living are now taken as examples of what capitalism could do for the USSR.¹² Nixon appears to have been warmly received by the intelligentsia on his visit to the USSR. Solzhenitsyn's scoffing at intellectuals who condemn racialism and the regime in Greece and Spain for not understanding the real nature of repression as exemplified by the USSR,¹³ is indeed a typical view of many in the elite and higher intelligentsia. Perhaps the final act, beyond which lies only Fascism, has been the implicit endorsement of (or at the least failure to condemn) the Chilean regime by Sakharov.¹⁴ Although a study of the Samizdat material including the *Chronicle of Current Events* shows that there is a range of opinion from Marxist to what can only be described as Slav Fascism, the dominant view is liberal or pro-capitalist.¹⁵

There are those who argue that the yearning of Soviet intellectuals for capitalism is simply a reflection of the confused state of a population subject to a differential censorship, or, as more generally expressed, to atomisation. The left-wing alternative has little attraction because, inter alia, it does not exert power in any country. There appear to be a few admirers of the Chinese model but as long as the Chinese continue to venerate Stalin and, by implication, approve the mass terror, the regime can mobilise the population behind itself in anti-Chinese campaigns, however groundless they may be. The ideas of the New Left are so distorted as to be unrecognisable and their exponents in the West are caricatured as crazy intellectuals engaged in bombing campaigns.¹⁶ Despair about the future of the world, however, does not, by itself, necessarily have to make the ordinary intellectual — as is unfortunately the case — anti-working-class, oppose aid to Viet-Nam,¹⁷ or call on the United States to stop the juggernaut of Communism before the world falls before its embrace.¹⁸

It is absurd to argue as do the Stalinists for the repression of those intellectuals who are only expressing the unspoken views of many of their social group. Their courage has to be admired even if their words have to be fought. To under-

11. See for instance the poems of the popular Soviet poet Galich in his collection of poems entitled *Pokolentya Obrechennykh* where he attacks Lenin, Engels and all socialists who wish to introduce a new society from the October revolution onwards. His very popularity shows the strength of anti-Marxist feeling.

12. Such are articles written in the underground Samizdat works by Kazakov and Babushkin.

13. *New York Review of Books* 4.10.1973: Interview with Solzhenitsyn.

14. See the Letter to the Editor of the British newspaper: *The Guardian* 3.10.1973 by Mark Cook. Sakharov's remarks were not reported in the U.K. press.

15. See the *Chronicle of Current Events* number 17 as an example.

16. See note 7.

17. This came out for instance in the attack on aid made in the Appeal to the Workers document issued two years ago.

18. See Sakharov's remarks: . . . "as a result the whole world would be disarmed and facing our uncontrollable bureaucratic apparatus". The London *Times* 5.9.1973.

stand how they came to hold their views is far more important than to condemn them. In other words, the right wing nature of modern Soviet thought is a compound of the atomisation under which the population lives, of which differential repression is a part, and their socio-economic position.

(iii) *THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE SOVIET INTELLIGENTSIA*

The nine million graduates in the USSR belong to at least two socio-economic groups which we may call the higher intelligentsia and the ordinary intelligentsia. The higher intelligentsia includes academicians, professors, writers and artists of note, successful journalists, medical specialists, much of the factory management as well as many in the political, military and police hierarchy. They are highly privileged and form a large and increasing part of the elite. Indeed, as any study will show, the upper echelons of the party are increasingly run by this intelligentsia. Because of their sympathies with the aspirations of some members of this stratum, Western right-wing academics and others of their ilk are invariably provoked by the assertion that these intellectuals should be classed with the Politburo as members of the elite.¹⁹ In terms of their socio-economic position, however, they are part of the upper stratum or elite of the regime but at the same time it is necessary to distinguish here between the governing elite and the rest who are not immediately and directly involved in making the important political decisions in the society. (This is the same in principle as the difference between the governing and non-governing sections of the ruling class in capitalist countries). Any elite or ruling class delegates immediate political power and this has two effects. Firstly, when there are divisions and contradictions in the ruling group of the society one section must impose its will on the other or others. The methods employed depend on the level of contradiction and tension both within the ruling class or group and between the classes or groups. Secondly, individuals (as opposed to groups) have to accept or reject a view imposed in their name but they can do little about it. Thus, for example the individual factory board in the West may not like price controls, even with all the possibilities for evasion, but they have to accept them, or, if they reject them, take the consequences.

In the USSR both effects are clearly at work. On the one hand, that section of the higher intelligentsia which is not governing has its own demands – freedom of speech, foreign travel and currency, more secure and easier living standards for their families – to which the state machine cannot accede. This is not because they may not agree with these demands themselves. Indeed such evidence as there is, on the other hand, would suggest that individual members of the government machine would support their demands.²⁰ The problem of governing remains one

19. I have defined the intelligentsia as all those who have higher education. Elite I define as those in charge of administration or who are associated with it, ideologically or technologically, etc. It should be noted that no writer can become successful without agreement of the administration and once successful he exerts an important influence over publication.

20. See for instance the Political Diary, excerpts from which have appeared in English as in *Survey*, Summer 1972. The point is that it is a critical journal written by middle rank administrators.

of dealing with the society as a whole and of avoiding the explosive situation that might develop if the demands of the upper reaches of the society were met at the expense of the necessarily inarticulated demands of the working-class. As a result the intellectuals' demands have to be contained. The lessons of Poland have been learnt. When the protests of this group are of little political importance they can safely be permitted. When, however, they involve either pressure through foreign agencies or direct forms of organisation, some form of action, however reluctantly, is bound to be taken. While it is probable that only professional secret policemen are opposed to free speech in principle, no government will permit it if it is likely to lead to a highly unstable situation. Since, as we have argued elsewhere, the system only survives because of its all-pervading atomisation, to satisfy the demands of many intellectuals would amount to a leap into a situation fraught with danger for both the regime and these same intellectuals. To safeguard their collective privileges they must be restrained both as a pressure group and as individuals.

Since the elite is, in my view, largely in agreement with much of the programme of the higher intelligentsia but, because of fear of the consequences, cannot implement it they are driven to indirect means of satisfying both the ordinary and higher intelligentsia. (The ordinary intelligentsia is discussed in more detail below but may be regarded as being in sympathy with the attitudes of the higher intelligentsia. Though they do not share their privileges they aspire to them.) Thus, in terms of freedom of speech, it is not accidental that the debate on the economy has continued unabated. Naturally, there are no left-wing opinions expressed but there are a wide variety of elitist works which offer solutions ranging from administration based on a complex all-embracing computer model to the perfect market. The sociological works also show very different approaches, though of course they never touch on the elite itself. In addition because the elite cannot use the market to raise the incomes of intellectuals they have announced that during the current five year plan intellectuals' incomes in particular would be increased. The planned increased availability of consumer durables is of greatest importance to the intellectuals as the group most able to obtain them. The road of the elite has been well described as the road of the peps generation: with few concessions on freedom of speech goes the attempt to satisfy all the material prejudices of the intelligentsia. The main problem is that they have not been able to deliver much more than pepsi-cola. Naturally, many think the state could be more efficient and become vocal while the state uses such time-honoured means of government as nationalism and anti-semitism to maintain support. The result is that willy-nilly the state antagonises sections of the intelligentsia including that part belonging to the elite.

In any event, the elite does not suffer the same forms of repression as the whole population so that it can make available banned works to its own members. Thus top people can see otherwise restricted films at special cinemas while they do not suffer for collecting the works of underground artists. Furthermore since the repression can arise through the operation of sectional interests, as through

the activities of a particular group of artists in control of important bodies, it does not follow that the whole elite has to follow the canons of that particular group. Nonetheless those discriminated against can become well known as dissidents although much of the governing elite may be in agreement with their views. The result is, therefore, that the governing elite is often publicly opposed to the private actions of many of its members. Where the same men publicly flail certain writers but privately admit the correctness of the writers or attack private enterprise but buy their clothes from underground tailor shops, the system appears to continue only because the governing elite is afraid to change it.

I have argued in this last section that the elite would like to satisfy the demands of the intelligentsia but even indirect means of fulfilment have not succeeded. The reason for this lies in the structure of the society and the socio-economic position of the elite and intelligentsia. These, in turn, reflect in the last analysis the relations of these groups to the means of production. It seems to me, as I have argued in *Critique 1*, that while the elite administers the economy it has not been able either to establish title to property or establish real control over the means of production. To show that they have control it must be argued that real planning exists in the Soviet Union. In fact, however, their plans are seldom fulfilled in a way that realises the intentions of the planners, except in a very partial and distorted fashion. One cogent example has been provided by their failure to shift the economy away from dependence on producer goods to a consumer goods orientated economy. Their inability to deal with their own demands and those of the intelligentsia is only a reflection of their more general lack of control over the society.

(iv) *THE HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL NATURE OF THE REGIME IN RELATION TO THE ELITE AND INTELLIGENTSIA.*

Considered theoretically and historically, the backwardness and isolation of the USSR in the twenties made impossible the transition from nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange to their socialisation. The retreat, in the New Economic Policy, posed in sharp form the contradiction between the forces demanding planning and those which stood behind the market. The social relationship which lies behind planning involves society as a whole and therefore first of all the working class. It stands directly counterposed to the individualistic units of the peasantry and petit bourgeois Nepmen. The Bolshevik left and right did not really differ in their negative assessment of the market. Where they did not agree was on the question of how far the market could be brought under political control. In the event, the state administration had to choose between the two sets of forces; it failed to choose and instead produced a solution which was essentially neither plan nor market. They could not yield to the peasantry and urban capitalists because this raised the spectre of returning property to the former capitalist class whom they had dispossessed, and because their power and privilege rested on their administration of industry. Their very

existence as a bureaucracy depended on the growth of state industry. When market forces threatened to undermine their power they acted to crush the source — the private peasant. On the other hand they could not allow working-class control of any type because this would mean their own dispossession. In this unstable situation a semi-stability has been achieved by the deployment of a monumental secret police apparatus which mediates all relationships in the society (with the partial exception of those internal to the elite itself). The effect has been to make real communication impossible for fear of the consequences. As a result the planners seldom receive a genuine picture of the economy or the parts of the economy with which they are concerned at any one time. A second consequence is that every individual in the society has been atomised and so privatised that he can consider little above his own personal interests. Instructions from above are, therefore, necessarily executed but in a way perverted to the interests of those in charge of the enterprise. The inevitable result is that the plans are unreal but even when real they cannot be fulfilled.

At whatever cost, however, for their own purposes, industry had to be developed and the working-class therefore increased in strength and size. This, however, threatened the administrators with possibilities of revolt or other forms of working-class action, so that they had to act to pulverize them as well. This they did in terms of direct control through passport restrictions, draconian labour laws and labour camps. While it may be said that in the early years the elimination of the market and the growth of industry served the working-class in however distorted and costly a fashion, it is difficult to maintain the argument much beyond this period. The growing elite extended both its privileges and its atomisation of the population so effectively disfranchising the working-class.

The fact that the regime has a dual aspect in being at once both anti-working class and against the market, has been the cause of disputes that have generated more heat than light. Individuals and groups have seized on one aspect to the neglect of the other, and on such a partial basis have proclaimed the class nature of the USSR either as a workers' state or as state-capitalist. As a result they miss the fact that this contradiction lies at the heart of the regime, making Soviet society one with a peculiar internal dynamic of its own. Because of its historical origins and its anti-market nature, therefore, the elite apparently promotes and maintains features of the society which however corrupted contradict its own existence as, for example, the teaching of Marxism. Much more fundamental examples of the same thing are its persistent attempts to plan. These attempts, however, are carried on over the heads of the people, and without their participation. The effect of this as I argued in Critique 1, is that they fail to plan at all and succeed only in organizing production. For planning to be possible they would have to democratize the society and abolish themselves in the process. Hence the regime is, in a sense, inimical to its own administrators. For the elite, the upper intelligentsia and those aspiring to enter those social groups, the constraints which most affect them individually are those which involve their personal consumption. These are discussed in more detail below. The essential

point is that these constraints are now intolerable to them under contemporary conditions.

What has changed their attitudes is that the elite has established itself numerically and occupationally within the economy. There appears to be an urgent need to modernize the relations of production in accordance with the forces of production which have been developed over the past forty years. The elite has, as it were, served its historic role and is casting about for another.

The elite is superficially no longer threatened by the previous contradiction of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie on one side and the working-class on the other. The regime appears to its intellectuals to be very stable. The reality, however, is that it is a society with a uniquely high level of contradiction. It possesses this distinction because it is not a socio-economic formation. The clearest possible indication of this is the fact that the ruling elite lacks any form through which to control the means of production; it lacks ownership which is the market form of control, and it lacks the possibility of planning which is the socialist form of control.

I have described these contradictions in some detail in my previous article.²¹ For present purposes it is enough to draw out two aspects of the situation which demand the introduction of change. The first is the barrier to a rise in living standards because of the inordinate waste produced by a system of neither plan nor market. The second is that the, historically determined, constraints on the elite itself have become intolerable. There are three possible solutions. The elite can eliminate itself in favour of genuine socialisation of the means of production, something no ruling group has yet done in history. Secondly the elite can move towards the forms of correspondence of the elements of the mode of production present in Western capitalism, however gradually. Thirdly, and this solution can only be temporary, the elite can introduce techniques of control in industry borrowed from modern capitalism. Together with this last method goes increased debts to the West to finance imports and therefore dependence on Western capitalism. It is this last which is the currently adopted method.

It is important to understand that the contradictions that manifest themselves in a socio-economic formation like capitalism are one thing, but those which are manifest in the USSR which has elements of several formations but is not one itself are quite another. Differences in the ruling class of the United States, for example, may temporarily paralyse some of the operations of that class. The internal conflict in the USSR, however, is not temporary, it is inherent (as are the paralytic consequences) and results from the fact that profit has been replaced by the operation of self-interest which necessarily conflicts with the needs of the central planners. This is what I have called the conflict of the laws of self-interest and organisation. It is this aspect of elite division which has to be eliminated in order both to satisfy the discontented sections of the elite and

21. See *Critique* 1.

higher intelligentsia, and to remove the cause of the recurring failure of central plans. To be in a position to discuss what expedients might be available to the elite to meet the demands of the discontented intelligentsia, it is necessary to be clear about whether it is possible to implement any such expedient without at the same time initiating some change in the matter of control over the means of production. This, in turn, is a specific theoretical problem subordinate to the more general theoretical question of the connections between distribution and the relations of production.

Mandel has argued that the "Soviet economy is marked by the contradictory combination of a non-capitalist mode of production and a still basically bourgeois mode of distribution."²² This appears to contradict Marx's view that the distribution of the products among the population is dependent on the distribution of the instruments of production, and hence on the distribution of the population within the process of production. Marx writes: "The distribution of products is evidently only a result of this distribution, which is comprised within the process of production itself and determines the structure of production."²³ The expression "this distribution" refers to distribution in the wider sense of distribution of the instruments of production. It is true, as Mandel notes, that in the Critique of the Gotha programme, for example, Marx envisages contradictory combinations; first phase communism is precisely such a combination, specifically one in which first phase socialised means of production combine with a distribution of the product based on a one-sided bourgeois right. First phase communism, however, is clearly understood to be a temporary transitional stage in the movement from one socio-economic formation to another. It is also understood that it is a situation with an internal dynamic towards replacing the bourgeois form of distribution of the product with a communist form that will integrate with the already socialized means of production. This dynamic is absent in the USSR, and for this and other reasons it will not do to analyse the USSR in terms of the central contradiction of a transitional society. A Marxist analysis of the USSR must accommodate the relations which Marxism establishes as essential, between distribution of the product, distribution within production and relations of production. The only way of doing this which accords with all the facts is to recognise that there is a degree of correspondence between the elements of the mode of production in the USSR, inasmuch as the means of production and process of distribution are alike in large part outside the control of the elite.

In other words, distribution within the production process conforms to the relations within production in general. Thus, in the USSR, because the elite does not control the means of production, its control over appropriation is imperfect. On the one hand the elite allocates privileges to itself. On the other hand it has to hide them and distribute them in non-monetary form. As a result the inheritance of elite status and privilege is also rendered more difficult. Since this must

22. E. Mandel: *Marxist Economic Theory*, Merlin, London 1968, p.565.

23. Marx: *Grundrisse*, Pelican, London 1973, p.96.

be arranged in large part through the educational system it normally involves acting illegally to ensure an obstacle free path for the children of the elite. The result, not surprisingly, is that such efforts cannot be guaranteed success. The situation is made worse by the fact that different sections of the elite and so higher intelligentsia will have greater or less difficulty and individuals may be more or less competent in the task of pushing their offspring. Worst of all it is a tedious and humiliating process. It is not the form that they would have dictated themselves, but the one which corresponds to the original contradiction between their dependence on the working class and their antagonism to it. By their control over social administration, however, the elite is able to arrogate to itself a share of the surplus product of the society. There is as a result a correspondence between their positions as administrators and income receivers, and between their lack of control over the means of production and relative lack of control over their own incomes. The question is, of course, not one of individuals lacking control since this applies to any society. It is obvious that under capitalism a man may go bankrupt and enter the proletariat from the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Indeed the mode of appropriation is hedged around with restrictions under most circumstances. In the USSR, however, these restrictions are so much greater as to constitute a qualitative difference. As a result the elite is less secure (and that is why it is an elite not a class) than a ruling class under capitalism. Nonetheless they are able to ensure that they receive privileges and the working-class does not; and, although their power to do so is derived from the division of labour in the society, it is only maintained and implemented through their political control over the society.

In a situation, therefore, where the elite administers, but does not control, the means of production its appropriation of a portion of the surplus product must rest on its political power even though the basis of the division is economic. This does imply that there is an asymmetry between the elite's role in production and its role in the distribution of the product. Their privileges are to a considerable extent centrally determined. They are also allocated away from their jobs; for instance food is acquired at special shops or pharmaceuticals at special chemists. This is only possible because of a political decision outside the plant of which a man may be a director. Although the elite has an administrative function in the economy it does have the economic position to extract the surplus for itself. The only way it can do it is through its political arm. This brings us back to the point made by Mandel. Where I differ from him is in stressing that production and distribution follow similar norms and are within the same framework in the USSR. Hence it is not a question of counterposing non-capitalist production to bourgeois distribution, but of pointing out the need for the intervention of the state to ensure distribution based on the social relations of production, which in themselves lack the power to ensure distribution. To counterbalance the lack of economic control, political control is essential. Nonetheless, to sum up, even in distribution the control is very limited.

The conclusions to be drawn from this theoretical discussion are important.

In the first place it means that the members of the intelligentsia see their salaries in political terms, as being subject to decisions taken by the centre, and therefore have a political consciousness in those terms. In the second place, although they might see their salaries in this way, it does not follow that the elite can actually alter the salaries paid to the intelligentsia as a social group, in a meaningful way. In the third place, like the intelligentsia, the elite itself is probably in favour of altering the production relationship towards one based on the market so that distribution itself could be based on the market. It could then take a monetary form rather than that of special access. This would make their problems of obtaining, maintaining and transmitting privileged income much simpler.

(v) *THE INSECURITY OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA*

The insecurity of the elite, and in particular its members in the higher intelligentsia, in terms of its income or consumption shows itself, for instance, in the means used to victimize Sakharov. His children have had trouble, according to newspaper reports,²⁴ in getting access to educational institutions, jobs, etc., with the result that they can not only be kept out of the elite but even possibly out of the intelligentsia. What is obtained by political means can be removed by political means. This case illustrates a quite different proposition: that because so much depends on individuals in various positions, it makes the elite itself, both governing and non-governing, dependent on its individual members who consequently have the power to penalise those who require "assistance" from them. The inevitable consequence must be that particularly those sections of the elite who are not governing will try to express their discontent. Members of the government can express their views privately and can, in any case, obtain what is required somewhat quicker. Because the non-governing elite can only obtain redress on an individual basis, those persons or sections which experience greatest difficulty in this respect will inevitably rebel. This leads to an escalation from the original discontent based on personal grievance, which is essentially economic, to the political demand for the right for freedom of expression. It is easy to see how the higher intelligentsia finding its own extensive privileges dependent on others will regard the regime as a bureaucratic juggernaut to be fought the world over. When, however, distribution is performed through the superficially impersonal hand of the market, the individual who has money, such as a member of the higher intelligentsia, is secure from other individuals and can protect his family as he wishes. As the regime fails to satisfy their requirements, therefore, these members of the elite are bound to move to a position of demanding capitalism as the only socio-economic formation which can guarantee their independence.

It is an important historical fact that intellectuals *not in the elite* are

24. London *Times* 5.9.1973. (Interview with Sakharov).

totally dependent on the regime. Whereas under capitalism the anarchy of the system allows them a relative degree of independence, this is not true of the USSR. As a result the individual's income and position are totally at the mercy of the regime. The effect is, firstly, that political protest is dealt with normally through socio-economic mechanisms, which have been referred to above, and, secondly, that the individual finds himself very much dependent on the whims of his superiors and colleagues. Although this has similarities with capitalism, it is unusual for a member of the intelligentsia or salaried personnel under capitalism to find that his accommodation, town of residence, job, promotion, education, further education, pay and acquisition of consumer goods are so totally dependent on so very few people, or for the loss of one of these items to be accompanied by the loss of them all. Usually, under capitalism, these aspects of life are governed by a number of different organisations with little interconnection while the salaried individual with higher education can often accumulate savings, or obtain loans, with which he can establish himself separately, at least for a time. In the USSR, therefore, many in the intelligentsia have as their goal the individualistic existence of the intellectual in Western capitalism. The fact that they often idealize monopoly capitalism is neither here nor there. The rational kernel of their aspirations lies in their bureaucratic dependence. A socialist society would not permit such a degree of individual administration: Democratic control would be at one and the same time impersonal and more humane. Furthermore, the lack of control over production and distribution would be ended, and with it would go the buffeting of the individual from one agency to another dealing with his problems, which occurs essentially because no one can solve his questions.

The ordinary intellectual, therefore, sees the problem in terms of civil rights. The political enforcement of the distribution of earnings appears to him as one more feature of the system re-enforcing his view of the overpowering state. The effect of a situation where the elite are privileged and the working class are improving their position relative to the intelligentsia, is to drive the intelligentsia to desperation. The movement of relative wages has been constantly against the ordinary intelligentsia. The following table shows very crudely the relation of wages among the groups produced in Soviet statistics.

TABLE: AVERAGE WAGES OF PERSONNEL AS A PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS IN THAT SECTOR.²⁵

	1940	1950	1960	1970
A. Industry				
a. Workers	100	100	100	100
b. Staff*	220	180	150	140
c. Clerical	110	94	82	77

19.

	1940	1950	1960	1970
B. Construction:				
a. Workers	100	100	100	100
b. Staff*	240	220	160	130
c. Clerical	150	130	100	90

* Technicians, graduate engineers, executives (ITR)

In fact, because of the aggregation involved in group b, the figures hide the well known fact that many graduates entering factories prefer to become foremen or advanced production workers owing to the relatively high wages to be earned in these positions. The problem is compounded through the fact that such entrants, even if they do work in their profession, have a considerably lower expectation of mobility today than they had formerly. In other words, these figures reflect both a relative decline in the whole group's wages, and a quantitative growth of lower paid sections within it. The striking change in the fortunes of the clerical group requires a separate discussion, as it is intimately linked with the nature of women's role in the USSR. Suffice it to say that today group c is largely female and their dissatisfaction is partly dependent on their husbands' attitude as the chief wage-earner of the family. A similar note has to be sounded on the lowest paid sections of the intelligentsia, the doctors and teachers. Their incomes, as women, are interrelated with those of their husbands and the family has to be taken as a unit for present purposes. The importance of women's exploitation can probably not be underestimated in terms of its importance to the regime in the USSR, but it is another question.

The ordinary intelligentsia, then, (that is those in the intelligentsia who are neither in charge of anyone else nor associated with those who are) finds itself in a situation where a market orientation would give them both more independence and also higher real incomes. Since the working-class appears to them to be well off relative to themselves and unlikely to be agents of change, they in fact turn towards the solution provided by their own elite. It is remarkable that there should be samizdat documents arguing that the standard of living has declined since the revolution, but it is quite explicable. A member of the intelligentsia who compares the standard of living of the intelligentsia in Tsarist times or under contemporary capitalism with his own today must inevitably conclude that life is much easier under capitalism for such as himself. He does not know that graduate unemployment exists or that his wife may not find a job at all in such a situation. He cannot understand the leftward swing of the Western graduates and consequently finds himself on the right and even on the far right. It is important, however, to distinguish his situation from that of the higher intelligentsia in the elite. He does, after all, often work with or in the working-class,

25. *Narodnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR 1922-72, Statistika*, Moscow, 1972 p.350. Table calculated from the ruble totals to two significant figures.

and the market will make his job more insecure and more demanding. It might well be better than his present situation, but could easily be worse than it would be under socialism. The men of the elite will undoubtedly lose position, income and privilege in a socialist society. Hence, as long as the working-class remains atomized, and capable only of sporadic action, the ordinary intelligentsia will follow the higher intelligentsia. But when an alternative presents itself internally and externally it is bound to polarize. Obviously there are those with a more principled position, and when they observe the working-class moving against its exploitation they will respond favourably for ideological reasons. For most, however, a movement to the left will be governed by the breakdown of the atomisation which separates the intelligentsia from the working-class as well as the forces which have already caused them to move closer in position and pay to the workers.

Theoretically the reason for the convergence of wages and salaries has to do with the elite's lack of control over production and distribution. Statements in various journals have often indicated that they intend to raise the pay of the factory intelligentsia. The problem is that the workers can manipulate norms, wage-grades and piece-rates, and the factory director has to concede in order to maintain his own position. There is no such problem with the ordinary factory engineer or technician, whose productivity is not easily measured, and who has no latent power, feared by the elite, as does the working-class. The real way the pay of the ordinary intelligentsia can rise is through political decree. But if there are no goods in the shops, the increased length of the queues could actually make the situation worse for everyone. We are left, then, with the original alternatives facing the regime. They can turn to the market with all its anti-working class implications and hope somehow to control the working-class; or they can turn to the West to obtain the goods required to raise the standard of living of the intelligentsia, and so broaden their social base. That, of course, is their present policy.

(vi) *THE SOVIET TURN TO THE WEST*

It is true, as Sutton has detailed,²⁶ that the USSR obtained much of its technology from the U.S.A. and other Western countries during the twenties and thirties. But those deals are not comparable in scale with those of today. It has been estimated that Soviet debt presently stands at some £8,500.²⁷ If it is remembered that total exports to the developed Western countries came to around \$2,500 million in 1971,²⁸ it would appear that the combined total of foreign debt servicing (interest payments) and repayment of capital could be standing at around 40–50% of the 1971 export figure. Nor is it as if that total

26. A. C. Sutton: *Western Technology & Soviet Economic Development*, Hoover, Stanford 1968 (2 vols. 1917-30, 1930-45).

27. *The Economist*, October 6th 1973.

28. *Vneshnaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1971 god*, p.10.

debt figure is likely to fall, in spite of the recent cyclically good harvest. Foreign trade with the U.S.A. this year is expected to reach a total of \$1,500 million dollars compared with an amount of around two hundred million in 1971.²⁹ The real question is how the USSR can pay for these imports. Its industrial exports may increase in the West but this is likely to be very limited. The recent reports in British newspapers on the Moskvich car complaining of the dangers inherent in a car of low quality illustrate the problems of marketing Soviet manufactured goods. Siberian oil and gas, which require a separate discussion, cannot provide any solution for quite a few years, if ever. There are, in fact, only three other methods by which the Soviet Union can increase its exports. The first is to increase exports of formerly embargoed raw materials, e.g. uranium to West Germany. To the extent that the West is prepared to accept exports from the USSR which it formerly banned, this represents a real increase in exports. The second is to export raw materials of importance for internal development but sacrifice the internal economy. Conservation may go by the board and certain sectors can be held up, e.g. with more timber exports there will be less furniture and paper in the USSR. This is a method already employed, but it can be extended. The third method is to improve the quality of industrial production, either by extending the export sector and its special status, or by introducing market techniques, assuming, of course, that they do not introduce the market itself.

The opening to the West returns the elite again to the problem of waste in the economy. It is unlikely that they have thought out the consequences of the economic detente. The immediate internal political consequences have been seen. On the one hand there have been the concessions on the Jews, and on the other there is the embarrassment of an internal political opposition supported by the West. Sakharov has specifically appealed to the United States to use its trade as a bargaining counter for more civil rights. What has been secured is relative freedom of expression for Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. The result is of considerable importance. If the bourgeoisie, as someone once wrote, chooses man's heroes it has clearly selected those two for the USSR. Effectively they have become established as a pole of opposition in that country through the efforts of Western agencies. This means that the only vocal opposition is a right wing opposition. Increased dependence of the USSR on US trade can only strengthen that tendency.* This shows that Nixon and Kissinger understand the needs of US foreign policy better than Sakharov. As the USSR struggles to repay its deepening debt it must be forced to increase the resources devoted to the export sector disproportionately to its output. It will also be forced to confront its need to introduce a market. The contradictions involved in both are such that political concessions are probably inevitable. As long as the West can supply sufficient consumer goods to the USSR the regime will remain afloat. How long it can do this given the anticipated recession in the world economy is dubious. A ceiling on foreign debt must come.

29. *Izvestiya* 4.10.1973.

* The nature of Soviet dependence will be discussed in a future article.