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# The Afghan War: The Crisis in the USSR

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## A DESPERATE ELITE IN DESPERATE EXPANSION

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There are by now a number of well defined views on the reason for Soviet expansion into Afghanistan but there is very little analysis. An attempt will be made here to show the close interconnection between the invasion of Afghanistan and the internal contradictions of the Soviet system. The latter involves two dimensions: the developing national question in Central Asia and the disastrous economic situation. In turn there were two political-economic pre-conditions which permitted an external solution to the internal problems of the elite: a rise in price of gold and oil (and other exportable commodities) providing the USSR with considerable foreign currency, and a shift in power within the elite towards the Nationalists and disciplinarians. The immediate catalysts were the rise of Iranian nationalism and the failure of the new regime in Afghanistan, which then threatened to expose the USSR all along its Asian flank from Turkey, through Iran to Afghanistan and China. Finally, the effects of the invasion have been of considerable benefit to the elite in its new phase: a war psychosis has allowed the introduction of a campaign to tighten discipline over the working-class and clean up dissidents.

### *The National Question in Central Asia & the USSR*

The immediate cause of the invasion of Afghanistan lies in the problems of Central Asia. Historically, from the early days of the Soviet Republic, all the border areas from Turkey, through Iran and Afghanistan to China had national revolts with local elites or bourgeoisies opposing imperialist control, which concluded friendship treaties with the USSR. Whatever the vicissitudes, the effect was to isolate the Soviet population of Central Asia for most of the period from political infection, of whatever kind. This was particularly necessary as the local populations were closely related to the populations of the countries on the Soviet Asian border. The Turkic language of the Azerbaidjanis, Uzbeks, Turkmeni, Kirghiz, Tatars and others who are along the borders of the USSR is shared with Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and China. The Tajik people today are two million in Tajikistan and five million in Afghanistan, but speak, unlike the rest of Central Asia, Parsee, which they share with Iran. The other group shared with Afghanistan is the Uzbeks who are two million in Afghanistan and nine million in the USSR.<sup>1</sup> Collectivisation was, as elsewhere, brutal, but the local population had the option of crossing the border to Afghanistan and China. Nomadic tribes are not easy to collectivize under the best of circumstances, but where they have sanctuary across a frontier which it is impossible to police particularly for a foreign army (Slav), concessions and great force had to be applied. The result has been

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1. Statistics are taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica 1979 Yearbook* and the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaia Entsiklopediya*.

that the Central Asian population has a common history of resistance to Stalinist rule.<sup>2</sup> The backwardness of the non-Soviet regions combined with the agreement of the local rulers, later sanctioned by the imperialist powers, virtually gave the Soviet elite a free hand in pacifying the region.

This situation naturally led the Soviet elite to support the Shah as the guarantor of stability in the region. So stable was the region seen to be that other nationalities could be deported to it such as the Crimean Tatars, the Mskhetians (both Turkic) and the Volga Germans. Indeed it was a region of voluntary exile for those who were trying to escape the purges, not to speak of the involuntary exile of Trotsky and the Trotskyists in the twenties.

The overthrow of the Iranian monarchy changed the whole situation of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The local population was never content with the imposed regime and maintained its opposition through its internal cohesion, largely conducted through its religion, Islam. Contact with the border countries could never be lost because of constant unpolicable traffic, however diminished it might be. Thus the underground Islamic forms of Sufis, Tariqas etc., remained largely unpenetrated by the Soviet secret police and continue to constitute the backbone of a passive ideological resistance.<sup>3</sup> It should be added that the Soviet Islamic priests preach demands for genuine socialism<sup>4</sup> not for the restoration of capitalism as is the custom of the Catholics and most other Christian sects. The priests propagate not private enterprise but a blend of the Asiatic mode of production with socialism. This indeed makes the situation worse from the point of view of the Soviet elite as the critique appears to come from the left and is based on the clear inequalities and failures of the Soviet regime, particularly in relation to the national group involved. It is easy to label the Ukrainian or Baltic nationalists as right wing or foreign dominated since they often are so characterised. It is less easy to label the Islamic malcontents in the same way. They could not restore private enterprise where it did not exist before and where today it would simply be unviable. Asian countries today are either of a type with nationalized production as China etc., or else they have very substantial state sectors. The private sector, or private capitalist class, is important but limited, making a simple demand for private enterprise or the market essentially a plea for the small firm or for the right to set up shop. Attractive as this might be to the right-wing intelligentsia in the USSR, it is of limited appeal to any sensible or thinking member of the intelligentsia in Central Asia. What has much more appeal is the Iranian situation which clearly has played a central role in the whole strategy for invasion. After years of defending the Shah as the guarantor of stability, the Soviet elite cannot easily find a *modus vivendi* with the present regime.

Reports of the meetings in Mosques following the Iranian events are probably true and must have provided the essential background explaining the fear of the Soviet

2. C. W. Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1957. P. 163 provides description of peasant uprisings in 1930, 1931, 1935, 1937. For contact across the border: W. Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies*, Philip and Son, London, 1952, p. 289. Not only did Tajiks cross the border but there was an invasion from Afghanistan in 1931. Katz, Rogers and Harned, *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, Free Press, New York, 1975, Ch. 14. Teresa Harmstone-Rakowska, *Tadzhikistan and the Tadzhiks*; p. 329 describes present contacts across the border legal and illegal.

3. Alexandre Bennigsen, "Several Nations or One People: Ethnic Consciousness among Soviet Central Asian Muslims" *Survey*, Summer 1979, p. 52.

4. *ibid.*, p. 54.

elite of the possibility of Afghanistan going the same way. As the latter country shares the common population and history outlined above, any ruling group would be worried.

What is most important, however, in explaining the situation in Central Asia is the social structure. This may be characterised in the following summary. The area has remained, where the local population is in a majority, overwhelmingly rural. Local industry is confined to a limited range of consumer and food production, or primary production (fuel and electricity). Thus 80% of the Tajiks, who share the largest border with Afghanistan, are rural.<sup>5</sup> The towns are more Slav dominated, and in industry the higher posts are Slav held. Thus, in Tajikistan two-thirds of the population are rural, a proportion which has altered little in the past twenty years, but the urban population contains the roughly 400,000 Slav speakers in the total population of 3.7 million. There is an exactly similar situation for the two other border republics of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, with the result that the traditional loyalties of the local inhabitants have been reinforced both by their rural backwardness and the discrimination found in the towns: The very backward nature of these areas can be partly explained by their position in relation the Soviet spheres of influence across the border. In other words, there was no need for the Soviet elite to embark on an industrialisation programme in order to compete with any Asian country. In any case the indigenous inhabitants were better off in terms of education, health and consumer goods than their cousins across the border.

The backwardness of these areas of the USSR gives the lie to those who accept the propaganda that the USSR has a mode of production which tends to industrialize as it reproduces itself. In point of fact, only in the central USSR has industrialisation occurred at a rapid rate. The reason lies in the fact that only there did an elite form which had defeated the peasantry and which was thus able to extract the surplus product required for industrialisation from the demoralised peasantry on the land and from the half-starved peasant-proletarians of the cities. Everywhere else, unless already industrialised, the rate of industrialisation has either been slow or at least relatively slower than the central USSR European regions. Even where the peasantry was effectively defeated, as in the Ukraine, the region remained less amenable to the formation of the atomised proletariat required. In other words, it was easier to permit the Ukrainian resistance to spend itself harmlessly in its rural backwaters, controlled through the earlier form of the protected hamlet: the kolkhoz. Thus the importation of Russian workers had a particular political economic function. The situation in Central Asia was more extreme than in the Ukraine in that the area was more backward, rural and non-industrial, given the considerable resistance and the effective absence of a local social group to rely on, the central elite had no alternative but to colonise these regions in order to establish political control.

Behind the political problem lies the more intractable political-economic problem: the Soviet elite has an unstable and partial relation to the extraction of the surplus product. The result, from the point of view of the national question, is that they have been unable to establish a functioning economic mechanism for the extraction of the surplus product.

In consequence the so-called economic planning mechanism has to be maintained through direct administrative direction and allocation. The administration has had two forms: direct instructions and a form of co-ordinated bargaining. The problem is

5. Population statistics are derived from the relevant *Narodnoye Khoziasstvo* and the last census of the USSR in 1970.

that unless the number of units is relatively small, whether through backwardness or a high level of integration, it is not easy to organise this system. Hence the necessity for tightening up under present circumstances, where the number of units is considerable. This question is discussed below because it is fundamental to understanding the other great reason for the invasion: the poor performance of the economy. From the angle of the national question, the administered economy can be best administered where there is a concentration of the large number of units in a particular area. This makes supervision easier and allows inter-enterprise bargaining, however reflected through the economic machine, to proceed more smoothly under control of the centre. In the second place, the tendency of the elite to develop fissiparous tendencies internally in virtue of being based on relatively independent units can be controlled. In the third place, the development of proletarian centres has had to be carefully controlled and it is clear that where there existed a cohesive local population industrialisation posed political dangers. All these three aspects led to a policy designed to maximise the control, which already existed in a weak form, over the formation of industry. Planners would naturally think twice before siting a new project in a new area, when they knew that construction time-periods tended to run out of control even in the central industrial region. Inevitably, they would reckon the greater unpredictability and longer time periods unworthy of investment. The economic consequence was that each region was effectively left to fend for itself; socialism in one country became socialism in one region. The Nato experts view was summarized by one participant in a Nato conference, Professor A. Nove, as the Stalinist policy of regional self-sufficiency (held by other participants, like Theodore Shabad, who used the phrase regional autarky) – which Nove rejected in favour of his own viewpoint that planners concentrate on short-term results. <sup>6</sup> Both viewpoints are only superficially true, and have to be explained. After all, concentration on short-term results might lead to backward regions being developed, where there is a pliable population.

The existence of local resources, like oil, coal, iron and minerals of various kinds necessarily led to the development of these regions even in the Stalin period, but the tendency to regional development on its own resources necessarily meant that those republics could develop furthest where least surplus was extracted. Since the more rural areas had most extracted, the more rural republics were effectively exploited by the more industrial regions. The existence of industrial bases and strong national elites, as in the Ukraine, meant that certain concessions had to be made, even in the Stalin period. For Central Asia the situation was worse because of its greater backwardness and its relatively weak elites. Post-Stalin, however, the ending of the period of the extraction of absolute surplus through forced labour and massive exploitation of the countryside meant that concessions had to be made to the regions in the interests of raising productivity. This meant the rapid education of the population of the regions and growth of that industry judged most immediately suitable for those regions. A certain dynamic is set up once this process is begun, and it is this which has collided with the system to produce a higher level of discontent and nationalist fervour than in the past.

Concretely, this process has involved the formation of an indigeneous working-class and urban intelligentsia, which are in less responsible jobs than the Slav-speaking group. This has meant that the workers tend to be in less-skilled jobs, but because the

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6. NATO: *Regional Development in the USSR*, Oriental Research Partners, Newtonville, USA 1979: A. Nove: Summary.

urbanisation is relatively recent they are also younger and, given the rural Islamic tradition, they contain a higher proportion of males than in Russia. Thus, surveys in the mid-sixties showed that over two-thirds of workers in refining, textiles etc. in Turkmen towns were below the age of 35.<sup>7</sup> Similar Soviet surveys showed the proportion of Turkmen women in refining and construction industries to be of the order of 3 - 4%. The growth of the working-class is illustrated by the example of Kizyl-Arvatskii railway repair plant which grew from 936 persons employed to 949 between 1960 and 1968 but expanded its Turkmen component from 318 to 400 in the same period. In 1961 the Ashkhabad Textile factory had only 300 Turkmen out of 1301 workers of which 175 were female. Later figures are not available but these ones illustrate both the low proportion to the local inhabitants and the relatively low proportion of women workers in what is a traditionally female occupation for the USSR. In order to have some idea of the number of more skilled workers, statistics show that in one of the Turkmen oil training schools for workers only 20 out of 70 completing in 1965 were Turkmen. In another apprenticeship school, 259 out of 710 workers were Turkmen. What is thus occurring is a process of absorbing increasing numbers of the local population into industry, with an increasing proportion of more skilled workers. The problem is illustrated by the cement factory at Bezmeinskii, where trained workers came from Ulyanovsk, Saratov and Bryansk in 1948. Some 470 persons were involved. By 1959, 94 out of 384 workers were Turkmen; but by 1964, 400 out of 852 were Turkmen. Given the tendency for promotion to be related to age and period of factory residence it is obvious that the cement factory provides a microcosm of the national question in Turkmenia.

Statistics of those in charge of factories show that they are not indigeneous, as for example, in the Krasnovod refining plant where in 1965 some 17 out of 286 persons in executive or engineering posts were Turkmen. To this must be added the fact that there were some 30,000 Turkmen with higher or technical-higher education, by 1965. It is obvious that the professionally trained in the Republic do not go into industry if they are indigeneous. Indeed, figures show that for these Republics, around half of those in higher education go into teaching or cultural activities.<sup>8</sup> Since schools are segregated according to language, there is a certain protected employment for the indigeneous inhabitants. The effect may be illustrated with the data from Tajikistan where teachers constitute around half of all specialists as opposed to one in three for the USSR as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the proportion of male teachers is much higher than in the RSFSR, nearer to 60% as opposed to 30% for the RSFSR. In one Turkmen industrial town in 1965 only 200 out of 567 teachers were Turkmen, although almost two-thirds of the children were Turkmen. The partial explanation of the discrepancy lies in the fact that only 7 out of 17 schools were Turkmen.<sup>10</sup>

These statistics illustrate the essential problem of the present, which is not the small proportion of the indigeneous population as against the non-indigeneous in this or that, but the rapid change now occurring in the working-class and intelligentsia. |

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7. The examples taken from Turkmenistan are derived from Sh. Annaklychev, *Byt i Kylltura Rabochikh Turkmenistana*, Ashkhabad, 1969, and the relevant pages are 110 to 115 inclusive.

8. *Narodnoye Khosyaistvo Uzbekskoi SSR*, 1975, p. 290. *Narodnoye Khosyaistvo Tajikskoi SSR*, 1975, p. 166.

9. *Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSSR*, 1975.

10. Sh. Annaklychev, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

They are increasing in numbers more rapidly than for the USSR as a whole. (The rate of urbanisation is lower owing to the high increase in the population). The consequence of the increase from the point of view of the intelligentsia is that they are being kept out of jobs which would otherwise be held by their own national group. Hence discontent is bound to show itself as it did in the case of the Tashkent riot of 1969 when students and others rampaged through the town with slogans opposing Russians.<sup>11</sup> What makes it especially dangerous is that there is conflict at three levels in the society: town and country, skilled and less-skilled workers, workers and management – with the native intelligentsia standing aside from the conflict in the factory, in that they have been partially excluded from the executive positions in the factory. As a result an alliance among the workers, intelligentsia and peasants with similar national grievances is inevitable. As long as the area was largely rural the discontent was containable, but the new alliance, typical of a national movement, constitutes a real threat. The logical concession, which has been made, is to expand production there faster than elsewhere, but this only exacerbates the situation in the short run. In fact, it only reflects the contradiction of the regime that it tends to the formation of independent units operating in their own interest, to the detriment of the interests of the centre. Politically, this has meant that the individual republics have tended to demand an increased share of the surplus product and hence more rapid growth. The difference with the imperialist dominated countries in the colonial phase is that the political positions are largely held by local inhabitants of indigeneous extraction which has ensured some degree of stability. The charges of corruption levelled against the Uzbek leadership, however, and the relative tolerance of the Tashkent riot, showed that the central elite has to be wary of the political leadership in these republics, and hence in the present situation make the required concessions.

Concessions, however, create the problem that the political and economic ties binding the peripheral areas to the centre will be weakened. In particular, the leading role of the non-indigeneous inhabitants has to be removed, but that would remove the political-economic control used to offset the limited control held by the centre. The movement from self-sufficiency to specialisation would create in principle a dependent economy, but this movement is constantly contradicted by the nature of the regime itself, with the local areas demanding more economic control of their own. Hence, the regime cannot deal with the growing national movement simply through growth by specialisation, and has had to resort to the maintenance of settler-management and, where required, the use of force. The invasion of Afghanistan thus appears as a logical necessity, which could only be avoided by accepting much greater concessions to the local intelligentsia and possibly to the working-class in these areas. That, in turn, would create problems with other national groups and ultimately with the other social groups in the system, reaching into the Russian republic itself. If the economic situation or the level of discontent were less pressing, the solution could be fudged and the invasion would have been less necessary at this time.

### *Zero Growth and its Causes*

The economic problems of the present are partially discussed elsewhere by Michael Ellman and have been extensively ventilated both in the USSR and the West. It is, however, of interest here to discuss the reasons for the present plan failure and its likely consequences. One consequence is clear: the Afghan invasion has provided the

11. This riot has been cited frequently. See for instance Katz, Rogers and Harned *op. cit.*; Donald Carlisle, *Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks*, p. 310.

pretext for the introduction of administrative measures over the economy, which otherwise would have encountered more passive resistance than can now be the case. The Afghan war has produced, parallel to the war campaign of President Carter and the British Conservative Government, a war psychosis in the USSR. Indeed the reaction of the West under the Anglo-Saxon ruling class has provided a perfect justification for further administrative and political measures in the USSR. There is no more powerful force in Soviet consciousness than the threat of war. Brezhnev's speech on Afghanistan bristles with the use of the war threat to ensure national discipline.<sup>12</sup>

The discipline is necessary for economic reasons because of the nature of the regime, which has historically zig-zagged between the use of force and administrative discipline and the attempt to use market-type incentives if not the market. This, in its turn, owes its origin to permanent economic difficulties of the regime. The present economic failure is merely the most recent of many since the twenties, and indeed it is not altogether clear to what extent the working-class has suffered as opposed to the intelligentsia, who have undoubtedly been hard hit in terms of food, housing and availability of consumer goods. In other words, the problem is not one of the simple increase in standard of living or of growth rates. Formally, there was a virtual per capita zero rate of growth, with an increase of 2% in national income produced by an increased work-force of 1.8%.<sup>13</sup> However, the fetishisation of growth rates, beloved of Stalinophiles, leaves out of the picture the accounting procedures and the meaningfulness of the figures. In particular, it should be noted that the USSR has decided to end the procedure whereby incomplete construction projects are counted as fulfilled to the extent they are judged complete.<sup>14</sup> Thus, hitherto it was possible to have an enormous growth rate without any visible effect for years, other than a reduced standard of living caused by the need to finance the projects involved. The Soviet system of accounting could create the impression that there were increases in national product when there were actual decreases. When the projects proved to be failures or partial failures no adjustment would be made retrospectively. In principle, then, though more rarely in practice, it would be possible with the Soviet system to have nominally huge growth rates which only led to a decline in the standard of living. In this way the real growth rate has always in practice been below the nominal level. Thus, too much should not be read into the present low growth rate. Rather, the overall tendency for stickiness in certain indicators such as housing, food production (particularly meat), and consumer durables provides a much better guide to the contradictions of the system.

The explanation for the consumer failure must go back to the problems of producer goods — which are shown as well down in important items this year. The cause ultimately lies in the social relation in the USSR. Previous articles have analysed this relation, but here specifically the point needs to be made that the decree on construction referred to above relates to the evident failure of the USSR to control capital investment, which tends to overrun periods of allotted time by an enormous factor; this factor being, worst of all, wholly unpredictable. There has been a creeping tendency for uncompleted projects to increase since the fall of Khrushchev. Thus the ratio of incomplete construction to capital investment per year has steadily increased

12. *Pravda*, 13 January 1980.

13. *Pravda*, 26 January 1980.

14. *Pravda*, 29 July 1979.

from 69% in 1965 to 85% in 1978.<sup>15</sup> When it is noted that it stood at 92% in 1955 and went through a similar cycle under Khrushchev, it becomes clear that there is a tendency of a cyclical kind operative in the USSR. The special feature of this last year, 1979, is the concatenation of three features: the agricultural failure which caused the decline in agricultural production of some 4%, the continued decline in the availability of labour power, with which is associated a decline in the productivity of labour associated with labour-power itself, and the cycle in investment of the kind referred to above. What lies behind all three aspects is the refusal of the worker to give up control over his labour process. As a result, the more integrated complex equipment requires more controllers to check production, and breaks down more frequently requiring costly repairs, and an ever bigger repair sector. Secondly, this same problem leads to the practice of introducing innovations through new construction instead of inside existing factories, which in turn then faces the same problems of labour discipline. In the end, all production is drawn towards the vortex of construction, repair and spare-part production. The chain has to be halted by the centre, and a trough results. The essential point here is that the social relation of the USSR, where the elite conceded control over the work process to the individual worker so atomising and hence controlling him, constitutes its own contradiction leading both to the cycle outlined and to the increasing problems of the economy. Hitherto they were masked by the use of the absolute surplus or absorption of labour from village, household or from other countries, not to speak of the use of force and the long working hours. This period is at an end, and the cycle is in its trough. Thus the increase in capital investment for this last year is shown as only 1%, while the increase in the industrial work force has also declined relative to the early seventies. This also relates to the numbers required for control and checking, particularly over distribution, etc.

Since the fall of Stalin the elite have been grappling with the same problem: how to provide for the demands of the Soviet population without losing their own position. Once force was abandoned and the exploitation of the peasantry was ended, the elite were left with the twin poles on which the system rests: concessions to the self-interest of the individual and hence to each unit (ultimately leading to the introduction of the law of value or the market), or increased administrative control over the worker and hence the units. The re-organisation under Khrushchev became permanent and achieved limited success, but at the price of alienating the elite itself. The insecurity so engendered made the market solution much more attractive. When it became clear, via the 1966 Kosygin reforms, that this solution would only antagonise the working-class and render the whole system more unstable, the elite tried to use both aspects. On the one hand they tried reduction in total employed in plants with re-allocation of earnings, i.e. linking wages with productivity which was made legal in 1975; increased provision of goods to make the piece rate system more effective; various technical reforms using the price mechanism all of which failed. On the other hand they introduced administrative measures, such as the trust, as a means of increasing central control. This period of playing with both aspects of the polarity between self-interest and organisation which was characteristic of the seventies has now come to an end. It has become quite clear that the West will not provide sufficient aid to permit the introduction of the market, while the working-class and the working aspect of the intelligentsia would necessarily oppose it in the absence of a rising standard of living. At the same time, the overall economic failure demanded a solution. That has come

15. *Narodnoye Khoziastvo SSSR*, 1978, p. 351.



with the decree of 29 July 1979, already referred to above. This takes a clear step away from the use of profit and price indicators back towards the use of direct controls. This has to be supplemented by the decree on labour discipline of January 1980,<sup>16</sup> which will have the effect, if it is obeyed, of increasing the absolute surplus by ensuring that workers stay on their jobs, stay at the same factory for longer periods, etc.

The situation has not arisen fortuitously. The system of peaks and troughs in the investment cycle can no longer be masked through ready redeployment of resources without much graver economic costs. The integration of modern production combined with the absence of the previous labour-time pool effectively means that the troughs will be deeper and will require even more desperate measures than they do today. No market can deal with such a situation except through the mechanism of unemployment and the writing off of resources. This is impossible for the USSR, and hence the only solution is indeed the administrative mechanism which must drive them to tighten up on control over the worker. The alternative of the moratorium on new construction under Khrushchev demonstrably failed in that it led to major disruption and unemployment. Given the necessity to maintain or raise the standard of living the option of such a moratorium is closed, with the result that only a direct attack on the worker is left. This has been relatively mild hitherto though of great importance. It is doubtful whether the elite will have either the will or the ability to carry the decrees through to their logical conclusions. If carried through they would lead to a system where the worker no longer had the control he presently exercises over his work process so de-atomising him and forcing him towards collective action.

The other solutions that have been tried have been pragmatic. The intelligentsia was permitted to emigrate, there is more tolerance in what can be written and said as long as the system is not directly criticised. Factories of particular size and importance received, as in the past, special allocations of goods otherwise unobtainable. Without doubt, the market solution appears a failure, with direct controls over both distribution and production. In this situation the Afghan invasion provided an ideal opportunity for imposing discipline in the name of exceptional crisis on worker and intellectual. Henceforth dissidents could be rounded up, and the real discontent of the intelligentsia arising from their declining material situation could be dealt with under the rubric of war.

### *Potentiality for Change*

There are, however, reasons to believe that there is a real potential for change, quite apart from the obvious effects of the turn to discipline, which must cause a reaction in the working-class.

In the first place some 10-15% of the industrial work force, depending on definitions, are now ordinary engineers, i.e. there is a highly skilled white collar work-force. These people have certainly lost out in the last twenty years, and can look forward to no future at all under the present system. The elite dare not concede substantially to them without either antagonising the working-class, or alternatively lowering the privileges of the elite itself. The increasing proletarianisation of this group is inevitable both in terms of the foregoing, and through a gradual change in their role in the factory away from the dual position of having control over the work force and being working-engineers, towards the position of pure white collar workers.

16. *Pravda*, 12 January 1980.

Another process has gone along with this: the development of the social sciences. To raise productivity it has been essential to permit greater discussion, more Western literature and hence greater depth. This has not meant a turn to the left, but it has meant a greater openness to socialism and Marxism than hitherto, and the teaching of Marxism not always being formal and Stalinist. In a mood of cynicism induced by the Western depression, the intelligentsia is now open to alternatives in a way it has not been before. (This is a separate subject, which is due to be discussed in the next issue of Critique.<sup>17</sup> The point is clear: the intelligentsia has begun to move from its frozen absurdities into a cynicism and corruption which is leaving sections open to the obvious alternative of democratic socialism as originally conceived in Marxism. The 42nd Volume of Marx's collected works, the one containing the *Paris Manuscripts* is sold out. The others are not, of course, but the trend to Marxist humanism evident in other East European countries passed the USSR by until recently. Other trends have also shown themselves in various blends, such as the journal *Poiski*, or the group of Leningrad youth. These groups are no more than versions of social democrats, but this is itself an advance on the pro-capitalist or pro-feudal views hitherto dominant. In sum, therefore, the twin forces of proletarianisation and greater openness, both induced by industrial expansion, are driving a section of the intelligentsia towards the working-class.

At the same time the working-class, unable to act collectively, has simply continued to act in its atomised way to an effect more disastrous than ever before. In spite of the campaigns alcoholism shows no signs of decline. Indeed the campaigns are a sign of the reverse. Absenteeism and labour turnover are bitterly complained about in the labour decree and in subsequent government leaders' speeches. A new factor has also entered the scene: the decline in social mobility and limited opportunities for using skills have inevitably led the younger workforce to go further than the earlier generation of workers in alienated resistance. Higher or specialised education is no longer regarded as meaningful.<sup>18</sup> Reports speak of any pride in work which remained being discarded. The only objective becomes a "good time".<sup>19</sup> The potential for this resistance to learning could only exist once a certain level of subsistence had been obtained which it now has, but with the contradictory effect that the incorporative nature of the system is producing decay. The increased homogeneity of the workforce is thrusting the working class towards entering the historical arena. To deal with it, the elite have tried to concede on incomes as indicated above.

At the level of the elite the stories of corruption are now legion. The important change is now its institutionalisation to the point where the ruble may become a limited form of money for certain layers in the population. Indeed, it may now be said that there is a layer of the elite which acquires its privileges through money.

### *Russian Chauvinism & National Discipline.*

The picture of the society is one of decay with increasing loss of control at the

17. The next issue will contain a report and discussion of trends observed when the author was in Moscow in August 1979.
18. F. R. Fillipov, "Deti v strane razvitogo sotsializma", in *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya*, 4, 1979, pp. 60-61. He brings out the trend away from higher and specialised education towards going directly into work from the 8th class.
19. These reports appear regularly in the Soviet press and are reported in *The Times*. The last case appeared on 22.3.1980 in *The Times*, London, where a report is given of the black market operations of a 16 year old girl and sneering reference is made to the "jeans" youth.

centre. One wing of the elite wants in effect a national revival to halt the process. That wing is Russian Chauvinist and would have a programme of cleaning up corruption, increased discipline, rejection of Marxism even in its vestigial forms, anti-Semitism and the establishment of Russian power wherever convenient. Signs of this group have already been shown largely through anti-semitism and Russian Chauvinism. The situation, however, is now worse since the group of the elite involved have now turned to producing leaflets which have been handed out to the workers. The populist nationalist strategy is quite clear and it is equally obvious that success would not be possible without at least the connivance of the secret police or at the very least a section of it.

The total abandonment of Marxist verbiage could only come as a surprise to those who regard the USSR as a workers' state, or who have not been there in the last few years. Given the necessity of moving between using market-type incentives without the market and increased organisation, it is inevitable that the amplitude of the swings should increase with failure. On the one side, there is an attempt to introduce the market and eventually state capitalism, while, on the other, there is the attempt at total control which can only be achieved through hierarchical discipline, ultimately based on some populist ideology such as nationalism. The latter appeals to the 'lumpen intelligentsia' of the USSR, i.e. those elements envious of jobs held by non-Russians, bureaucrats envious of the *nouveau riche*, upwardly mobile individuals who are ruthless and efficient in an organisational sense though not in their jobs, and the sections who blame everything on the indiscipline of the worker. At the same time, sections of the lumpen (or alcoholised) proletariat may believe the fault lies with the Jews, foreigners and the corrupt self-seeking intelligentsia. That the ideology is contradictory is irrelevant and so is the fact that its appeal is bound to be limited in scope. The real point is that there is an appeal below the level of the elite itself. While the members of the elite who are identified with this position constitute a kind of Russian national elite there can be no exact identification with individuals, because the ideology has long been implicit in the Stalinist ideology of socialism in one country and hence is shared by all the elite. There are sections of the elite who reject its worst aspects, but it would appear, nonetheless, that the section which most fully expresses the view of the "New Right" is now in the ascendant.

Thus, the turn to National Discipline corresponds to the nature of the regime and to the political changes which have now occurred. For this section of the elite, the cancellation of international conferences, the Olympic Games and so forth, is no loss, since contact with foreigners only undermines the system from their viewpoint. Hence the reaction of the Western ruling classes, and particular that of the U.S.A., only plays into the hands of this group. Of course, the historical role of this group is long exhausted: it will necessarily fail to change the decline in rate of growth, over any length of time. They will then be compelled to return to the market. This time, however, it is more likely that such a change will be more dramatic. As long, however, as the Carter-Thatcher Cold War lasts such a change cannot take place, and hence there is a de facto dependence of the two sides on a belligerent posture. This is because the USSR requires substantial assistance to make its turn to the market, something which Kissinger understood earlier. In the present situation, then, there has been a partial turn towards the more nationalist wing of the elite, with the possibility that it may go the whole way before it runs its course. The statement in *Pravda* on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Stalin is ominous with its accent on the need for "vigilance", a subject on which the General Secretary was a past master. The three enemies which he successfully combated appear as the right, left and nationalist oppositions. Such are

clearly the enemies today with the exception that nationalism means all nationalisms other than Russian nationalism.

### *The External Situation and Afghanistan*

The external arrogance of the Soviet elite cannot be attributed only to internal problems, as there have been important external changes which have affected it. The rapid rise in the prices of gold and oil has meant that the USSR has been able to pay off part of its debt to the West and even to attempt to pay off ahead of time. It has now given a hard currency loan to Poland of some one billion dollars, which would have been unthinkable a year ago. The amount of gold that it could sell on the world market judging by previous years would be of the order of 300 - 400 tons per year, giving them some 6 to 8 billion dollars per year. This is a bonus of at least 3 - 4 billion dollars after inflation. This is just equal to their largest yearly trade debt to the West, with possibly 1 billion to spare. After other factors are taken into account, such as the higher oil price, tourism etc., it is clear that, even with the need to continue importing wheat and machinery, the USSR at this moment can import what it requires without being dependent on the West for loans. In any case, the dependence of West Germany on trade with Eastern Europe is today so great that it cannot do anything other than continue trading with the East, providing the loans required when needed. Since US trade is largely in wheat, it has little to lose industrially. Britain has even less to lose given its balance of payments deficit with the USSR. Thus, the USSR can safely reckon that the Anglo-Saxons can vituperate without doing anything substantial.

The only boycott which will count is that of wheat, so it is interesting to note that Argentina has not accepted the boycott. It is very probable that the USSR will recoup a considerable percentage of the wheat required from various sources around the world. Gold is a powerful incentive which has normally prevailed over boycotts. Even assuming a boycott, the logical strategy is to use reserves or permit the slaughter of pigs and cattle so providing meat in spring, and then purchase the dairy and meat products from the Common Market and other third world countries. The assiduous cultivation of Argentina will undoubtedly pay off. If necessary they could overcome scruples in buying from other less repressive regimes. Thus the overall effect in terms of food production could actually be negated through a clever import policy.<sup>20</sup>

The boycott has focussed on agriculture as the Achilles' heel of the society, and it is quite likely that the concessions made to the private plot will be extended and that forms of decollectivisation on the collective farm will be introduced on a bigger scale. Thus the tendency to the extension of the market and private enterprise in agriculture will be assisted by the American action. This, however, will exist in contradiction to the overall trend to increased administration, and is likely to assist the return to the market policy after the failure of the policy of National Discipline. There is, however, no need for the USSR to change its policy immediately in order to cope with the boycott.

The long term situation is quite different from the immediate failure of the West to secure the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan. The failure to revive the economy will inevitably cause a review of the costs of maintaining control over Afghanistan. Whether this leads to withdrawal depends in large part on how far the West is prepared to go in assisting and financing the guerillas in Afghanistan. If they are prepared to go to the limit the subsequently prolonged Soviet presence would cause

20. *Observer*, 9 March 1980, carried a report which confirmed this prognosis written a month earlier. It now seems that the USSR will be able to avoid the boycott and that the boycotters will only harm themselves.

discontent among the Soviet army and the relatives of the army personnel. It would also lead to problems of staffing defence establishments in various parts of the USSR and Eastern Europe, which might be probed by the West and China. This might lead to an extended period of national service and so withdraw labour from the economy.

To the costs engendered by the war, must be added the price of the rupture with the USA limited though it is. If meanwhile the price of gold or oil drops, the USSR will find itself in dire difficulties.

It will then be caught because withdrawal, however desirable for socio-economic reasons, would lead to problems in Central Asia as well as in Eastern Europe since the rejection of the USSR by one country will provide hope for others. Indeed, at such a juncture, if the USA pushes hard enough in terms of trade boycotts, fighting in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Angola, with some sabre-rattling in Western Europe, the USSR will be in mortal danger of breaking up. Unable to satisfy the demands of its own population, with rising opposition in republics and total opposition in Eastern Europe, it will be unable to maintain a policy of repression and discipline. It will then either have to switch to a liberal market policy or else accept the evolution of Eastern Europe with further internal repression. This could only lead in a short time to failure and a return to the first policy.

At the moment they are clearly stuck with the invasion unless they want even worse to befall them. They will attempt to control agriculture in Afghanistan through collectivisation or some co-operative form which will allow political control, to develop some limited industry and to inject the secret police and bureaucratic controls into the society. If they succeed they will control the society for a period of years but the likely decline in living standards, outside of education and possibly health, will only mean that the discontent will show itself again in more or less violent form depending on the extent of outside aid.

There are those (like certain left-wing persons illiterate in Marxist literature and in empirical material) who believe that the Afghans have something to be grateful to the Russians for. While Afghanistan is formally poor, the peasantry was not starving and might even have, in part, a higher meat intake than many in the USSR. The war however, is quite likely to make them very hungry, while efforts to control them are certain to make conditions worse. The Soviet record shows that it has not industrialised other countries, but has simply imposed on them certain organisational forms which do not necessarily raise the standard of living. If there is resistance to education on the grounds that it is godless, the Afghans will have gained nothing and lost quite a lot. To move from the Asiatic Mode of production in degenerate form to new forms reminiscent of the old is no progress, especially if the result is to create a coalition against all change and a hostility to socialism. There is no point in calling, as some have done, for uprisings of workers when there is no working-class. The Afghans have to be allowed to choose their own destiny, instead of having imposed on them an external form which will be overthrown the day the conquerors leave, only to be replaced by a form even more dangerous than previously because of its militant anti-communism. Wherever the USSR has entered, it has left a tragedy in its wake. It destroys the indigenous forces making for socialism, and makes for a militant nationalism, demanding a link with the West. Inevitably this can only mean a national capitalism, which cannot be changed for at least a generation because of the bitter experience of Soviet occupation.