

The "Classless Society"

EDITORS' NOTE: Among the changes that have taken place in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death, and particularly since Khrushchev's assumption of power, two trends—seemingly contradictory, yet essentially complementary in character—emerge in sharp relief. One is the trend toward a partial lowering of the rigid social and economic barriers that separated the distinctly privileged from the distinctly unprivileged in Stalin's "socialist" society; the other has been the tendency toward gradual enhancement of the position of the Communist Party in all spheres of public life.

These two trends form the subject matter of the articles below. In the first, Mr. Feldmesser traces the progress as well as the limitations of the process of "social undifferentiation," and offers a provocative explanation of its causes. In the second, Mr. Bialer provides a somewhat different interpretation of recent Soviet developments in

this area (particularly with regard to agriculture); the bulk of his article, however, is concerned with the intricate relationship between the seemingly increased emphasis on egalitarianism on the one hand, and the simultaneous strengthening of what has come to be the ruling stratum in Soviet society—the apparatus of the Communist Party, the thin layer of political officials exercising unlimited power over the 200 million inhabitants of the USSR.

Elsewhere in this issue the reader will find other items relating to the general topic of Messrs. Feldmesser's and Bialer's articles: the book reviews (pp. 51-58), and the Notes and Views section, which features articles on the role of the Communist Party in education and journalism respectively. Future issues will carry further detailed reports on the current status of workers and peasants, as well as up-to-date surveys of the activities and prerogatives of Russia's new rulers.

Equality and Inequality under Khrushchev

By Robert A. Feldmesser

A GREAT DEAL HAS BEEN written on the emergence of gross inequalities of wealth, privilege, and official honor in Soviet society. The process, fully described and documented, may be said to have begun with a famous speech by Stalin in 1931, in which he denounced "equality-mongering" in the wage structure and called

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for a new attitude of "solicitude" toward the intelligentsia; it manifested itself in highly differentiated incomes, in a change in the composition of the Communist Party, in the establishment of tuition fees and other more subtle obstacles to higher education, in elegant uniforms and elaborate titles, and in a host of other ways. By the end of World War II, and particularly during the last years of Stalin's life, the trend was clear: The Soviet Union was well advanced along a seemingly irreversible course toward a rigid system of social stratification, in which the upper classes would remain upper, the lower classes lower, and the twain would rarely meet.

Yet the irreversible has now been reversed. With that breathtaking facility which so often startles us, the Soviet

leadership has launched a series of measures calculated to reduce the degree and rigidity of differentiation in Soviet society to a very considerable extent. Many observers have not yet fully apprehended this turn of events, if only because all its component parts had not been assembled in one place: to do so is one objective of the present study. But partly, too, the lack of comprehension is due to a reluctance to credit Soviet leaders with the desire or ability to achieve so "virtuous" an aim as social equality—or rather, it is due to a failure to appreciate the *meaning* of equality in the Soviet system. A second objective here is to define that meaning.

The "Revival of Democracy"

[He] began to trample crudely on the methods of collectivity in leadership . . . to order people around and push aside the personnel of Soviet and economic organizations . . . [He] decided questions great and small by himself, completely ignoring the opinions of others.

[He] flattered himself with the belief that all [improvements] were due only to his own merits. The more successfully things went, the more conceited he became, the more airs he gave himself.

. . . you get the impression that everything other people do is bad, and only the things [he] does are good.

These scathing remarks could well have been taken from Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU exposing the incredible extremes to which Stalin's method of one-man rule had gone. A common reaction to this speech abroad was to see in it a confirmation of the trend toward inequality. The intelligentsia, or the "state bourgeoisie,"¹ despite their privileges *vis-à-vis* other elements of the population, had long resented the Stalinist tyranny. Now, as a result of their increasing power in an industrialized and militarized state, they had reached the point where they could force Khrushchev to confess that they had been unjustly treated, to promise them the freedom of decision-making, and to guarantee the security of their status.

Subsequent comments in the Soviet press have belied this interpretation. The quotations do not come from the secret speech; they are attacks on, respectively, a *raion* party secretary, the chairman of a city soviet executive committee, and a factory director.² For, as it now appears, the secret speech was directed not only at the

¹ The term is Hugh Seton-Watson's, in an article presenting this interpretation: "The Soviet Ruling Class," *Problems of Communism*, No. 3 (May-June), 1956.

² Respectively in *Pravda*, Nov. 23, 1957, and *Izvestia*, Jan. 16, 1958, and June 13, 1959. These are samples from a plethora of similar articles.

one big Stalin, but also at all the other little Stalins who had grown up in his image. It has been followed up not with praise for Soviet administrators, but with denunciations of "*administrirovanie*"—the high-handed, arrogant ways of officials who have exercised "petty tutelage" over their subordinates; who have glossed over shortcomings, suppressed criticism, and persecuted their critics; who have been "inattentive to the workers and their needs;" who have, in short, violated the letter of Soviet law and the spirit of "Communist morality."

Denunciations of this sort are not, of course, a new phenomenon; but what is interesting today is not only the frequency of such attacks but the implicit admission that the inspiration for bad administrative habits came from very high up. Accordingly, Khrushchev's own behavior, so sharply at variance with Stalin's, has been held up as an example for others to follow: Soviet officials have been urged to get closer to the people, to pay more attention to them, and not to rely exclusively on existing channels of authority. Sessions of local soviets are being held more frequently; there have been occasional reports of ministers and department heads being subjected to questioning by deputies; in some instances, agendas of meetings have been posted and public hearings held on the items under discussion. The number of deputies in local soviets has been increased by 1,800,000, and unpaid activists have been taking on tasks formerly performed by the executive staff—as if housewives were indeed to run the state.³ Along the same lines, there has been a large-scale effort to reinvigorate the system of worker and peasant correspondents, to protect them from reprisals by the targets of their criticism, and to have them do more of the newspapers' work in place of the professional journalistic staff.⁴ A party journal has told *raion* newspapers that they were not limited to criticizing "only rank-and-file workers and 'second-rank' officials of *raion* organizations."⁵

The appeal for "popular participation" to reform the deeply ingrained bureaucratic habits of Soviet officialdom has even been extended to the party-controlled trade unions, which have been urged to shake off their submissiveness to factory executives and to offer vigorous opposition when necessary.⁶ Instances of rambunctious local trade-union committees have been held up for

³ See especially the editorial in *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, No. 3 (May), 1956, pp. 3-14; *Izvestia*, May 22 and 23, Oct. 12, and Nov. 24, 1957; Aug. 1, 1958; and May 24, 1959.

⁴ *Pravda*, June 8, 1959, and many earlier sources. This matter as well as the treatment of readers' letters were the subjects of Central Committee resolutions: *Pravda*, Aug. 26, 1958, and *Izvestia*, Oct. 11, 1958.

⁵ *Partiinaiia Zhizn*, No. 14 (July), 1959, p. 55.

⁶ Report to the 20th Congress, *Pravda*, Feb. 15, 1956.

emulation, and workers enjoined to criticize "without being afraid that it will upset some director or other," and without having their remarks "prepared" or "cleared" by higher authorities.⁷

Another indication of the new spirit, antedating the 20th Congress, has been the abolishment of the uniforms, insignia or rank, and titles which had been authorized for many civilian occupations during and after the war.⁸ There has been an appeal for more informal relations and less social distance between those of high rank and those of low, and for an end to such practices in the armed forces as separate dining rooms for the several ranks.⁹

In general, the party seems to have been going out of its way to assert its respect for "ordinary" workers and peasants, a development reminiscent, as are many aspects of this campaign, of the attitude prevailing during the first decade after the October Revolution. Reversing a trend of more than 20 years' duration, the party has made a deliberate attempt to recruit more workers and peasants into its ranks: so much so, that Khrushchev was able to report at the 21st Congress that two-thirds of current admissions were in those categories, a figure which he accurately called a "considerable increase."¹⁰ In addition, the Soviet press has published numerous editorials, articles, and letters passionately proclaiming the honor and worth of manual labor in a socialist society, filled with glowing words about citizens who are not afraid of soiling their hands, who are "creating material values for the people," rather than "sitting in offices and filing papers." While this line of propaganda is not new, it has never been pursued so intensely. Indeed, it almost appears that the traditional trinity of "workers, collective farmers, and intelligentsia" has been replaced by a duad of the first two classes, so great has been the new stress on the "Soviet toilers."

The rights and privileges mentioned thus far may seem to be only honorific. To be sure, they do not signify any real diffusion of the locus of power in Soviet society. Nevertheless, their importance should not be underrated: they do, after all, attempt to raise the ordinary worker's self-respect, and to imbue him with the consciousness—denied to him under Stalin—of his own contribution to the country's industrial progress.

⁷ *Pravda*, July 11, 1959; see also *Izvestia*, June 25, 1957.

⁸ Decree of July 12, 1954, in *Sbornik Zakonov SSSR i Ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnovo Soveta SSSR*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 411-13.

⁹ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, Aug. 21, 1957.

¹⁰ *Pravda*, Jan. 28, 1959. See also T. H. Rigby, "Social Orientation of Recruitment and Distribution of Membership in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *American Slavic and East European Review*, No. 3 (October), 1957.

A "NEGATIVE" TYPE



Production Gymnastics

—Stretch your arms forward . . . then quickly bend down. Since you have to straighten out anyway, get hold of this girder. . . . Carry it to the other shop, and don't forget to breathe out.

—From *Krokodil* (Moscow), Sept. 30, 1959.

Having for years been exposed to harassment, incessant exhortations, and an attitude on the part of the authorities bordering on contempt, he is not likely to scorn even this—however mild—token of recognition and respect.

Adjustments in the Income Structure

In any event, more tangible rewards have also resulted from the new policy. Although we need not take too literally all of the promises made by Khrushchev—and by Malenkov before him—to increase the output of consumers' goods, there is every indication that the lowest-paid Soviet workers and peasants have been placed in a better competitive position to buy whatever is available.

On the one hand, minimum wages were raised in 1956, and two more increases scheduled in the current plan will bring the wage floor up to 500-600 rubles a month by 1965—hardly a level of luxury, but approximately twice what it is now; raises have also been promised to "medium-paid workers, and employees."¹¹ Old-age and disability pensions have been increased, too. Income taxes have been revised in favor of the lowest income brackets.¹²

On the other hand, there has been a good deal of talk, and some action, aimed at reducing the incomes of managerial and scientific personnel. In particular, the awarding of lavish bonuses to administrative, party, and other officials has been repeatedly attacked, and it is almost certain that the worst abuses are being corrected, "voluntarily" if not otherwise. A decree of the Council of Ministers has warned against excessive expense accounts on *komandirovki* (business trips)—another common source of added income for economic staffs.¹³ Sputniks notwithstanding, the scientists have come in for their share of criticism, too, for holding multiple jobs and for receiving high incomes "merely" because they have higher degrees.¹⁴

The range of differentiation is being contracted not only between manual and nonmanual workers, but within the manual group as well. Wages in a number of industries have been sporadically revised over the past five years, the guiding principle being "a rise in the proportion of basic wage rates in workers' earnings." Although the primary motives seemed to be economic and book-keeping concerns—to restrain inflationary forces and restore simplicity to the wage structure—it was implied

that many of the premiums and increments which had permitted the rise of an inner aristocracy among the workers would be curtailed or eliminated. It has now been authoritatively stated that greater equality of wages is a deliberate intention. A. Volkov, who succeeded Kaganovich as head of the Committee on Labor and Wages, has declared that, "with the aim of decreasing the gap between maximum and minimum wage rates," such measures as these are to be undertaken: a reduction in the number of skill categories and in the ratio between the highest and lowest rates to "no more than" two to one; a "sharp" decrease in the use of progressive piece-work rates; and a replacement of individual bonuses by collective bonuses, spreading the benefits of a single worker's accomplishment to his whole work team.¹⁵

Rural Remedies

Even more striking have been the changes in the agricultural sector. Adjustments in crop-purchase prices and agricultural taxes and other steps taken since 1953 have raised the income of collective farmers in general while diminishing the range of earnings among and within the collectives.¹⁶ On several occasions, Khrushchev has referred to the "excessively high incomes" of some collective farms (as he has to the "unjustifiably high incomes" of some workers). One remedy, analogous to the industrial wage reform, has been the establishment of a uniform pricing system for agricultural purchases, without bonuses for exceeding the purchase plan, with the result, according to Khrushchev, that "many collective farms will undoubtedly get more, while the leading collective farms will receive . . . somewhat less than now. And this," he added, "will be entirely fair."¹⁷ Especially interesting is his implicit denial of the principle laid down by Stalin in 1931: that wide income differentials were needed as incentives to raise production. Khrushchev, on the contrary, has asserted that the farms with low income due to poor production are discouraged from increasing their output:

. . . collective farms that did not achieve the planned harvest . . . were penalized, as it were. . . This, of course, did not spur them on. . . The goal here must be a more correct determination of pay . . . in order to provide

¹¹ *Pravda*, Sept. 9, 1956, and Nov. 14, 1958.

¹² *Sbornik zakonov* . . . , pp. 505-506.

¹³ *Izvestia*, April 4 and June 6, 1959.

¹⁴ *Kosmolskaia Pravda*, March 20 and April 6, 1956; *Pravda*, July 2, 1959.

¹⁵ *Pravda*, Nov. 25, 1958. At the 21st Congress, Khrushchev remarked that it was also time to eliminate the differential paid for work in remote places: *Pravda*, Feb. 1, 1959. Premiums evidently will be preserved for hot or underground jobs and hard physical labor.

¹⁶ Lazar Volin, "Reform in Agriculture," *Problems of Communism*, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb), 1959.

¹⁷ *Pravda*, June 21, 1958.

incentive not only to the leading but to all collective farms.¹⁸

In connection with the shift, now apparently underway, from payment by workdays to guaranteed cash payments, the whole problem of income differentiation in agriculture was recently discussed in three articles in the Soviet Union's leading economic journal. Among situations they cited as "unjustifiable" are: income differentials among collective farms due to varying locations, soil fertility, or crops; those between peasants and farm executives, due to the closer linking of peasant earnings to the volume of output; and those among the peasants themselves, due to too many pay-rate categories with too steep increases, and to inequitable discrepancies in output norms. The remedies are fairly obvious, and cases are cited in which they are already being applied.¹⁹

Reform in Education

The school system initiated in the 1930's was one of the major props of social differentiation. Its salient features, for present purposes, were these: Seven years of education were nominally compulsory, although it has been revealed that as late as 1958 only 80 percent of the young people were completing the course.²⁰ After the seven-year school, a youngster might: (1) go to work in a job requiring little or no skill; (2) be drafted into a labor-reserves school, providing training of up to two years for occupations of moderate skill; (3) enter a *tekhnikum*, a three- or four-year school for highly-skilled manual and some nonmanual occupations; or (4) proceed to the upper grades of a ten-year school for essentially "academic" training, preparatory in almost all cases to matriculation at a higher educational institution (*vuz*). Tuition fees were charged in the *vuzes*, ten-year schools and *tekhnikums*. Scholarships were available at *tekhnikums*, while room, board, and uniforms were free in the labor-reserves schools, but no such aids were offered to pupils of the ten-year school. For both material and "cultural" reasons, therefore, the tendency was for children from lower-status families to attend the vocational schools and enter the same sort of occupations already held by their parents, while children of the "elite" were more likely to take the academic sequence

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Voprosy Ekonomiki*, No. 2 (Feb.), 1959, pp. 80-88, 113-22, 143-49. In addition, see *Izvestia*, Nov. 30, 1958, in which a collective farm chairman reports that his own earnings now vary according to the volume of output, but are not to exceed 1500 rubles a month.

²⁰ *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, July 3, 1958. Khrushchev has used this figure on several occasions.

preparing them for professional and administrative positions. The greater informal influence which highly-placed parents could exercise on those responsible for *vuz* admission strengthened this tendency. The schools thus contributed to the cleavage between manual and non-manual groups.

The decision, adopted at the 19th Congress and reaffirmed at the 20th, to implement universal ten-year education wreaked havoc with this arrangement. Since ten-year schooling was to be compulsory, tuition fees made little sense, and they were accordingly abolished.²¹ On the other hand *vuz* enrollments were not expanded; most of the ten-year graduates were expected to go directly to work, or into *tekhnikums* or other vocational schools.²² This meant, in turn, a revision of the ten-year-school curriculum: physical education, music, art, mechanical drawing and other "practical studies," were increased at the expense of academic courses, and the latter were simplified in content, with fewer examinations and less homework. The effect of these changes—again in part intended—was to make school more accessible and more comfortable for the children of workers and peasants, improving their chances for scholastic success; and to blur the distinction between education for the manual worker and education for his occupational and social superior.

New Problems and a New Program

But the reform proved unsatisfactory in important respects. In particular, graduates of the ten-year schools clung to the idea that they were entitled to a higher education. Many of them resented going either to work or to a vocational school, preferring to wait until they could gain admission to a *vuz*—and this in the face of an imminent labor shortage caused by the birth deficiencies of the war years. One attempt at solving this problem was the campaign, referred to above, stressing anew the dignity of manual labor; but it proved futile. Khrushchev then struck boldly: rejecting the ten-year principle, he declared that eight years of education were all that was necessary, and that such training should be "close to life"—*i.e.*, primarily vocational. He proclaimed a "sacred slogan": "All students must prepare for useful work" and take a full-time job upon completion of the eighth grade.

This . . . will be democratic since more equal conditions will be created for all citizens: neither the position nor the

²¹ *Izvestia*, June 10, 1956.

²² Nicholas DeWitt, "Upheaval in Education," *Problems of Communism*, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb.), 1959.

pleas of parents will exempt anyone, whoever he may be, from productive labor. . . .²³

This program met two related goals: a labor force would be trained, in a minimum amount of time, for the kind of work that would be the lot of most;²⁴ and the notion of an automatic transition from secondary school to higher education would be dispelled. The purpose and atmosphere of the new type of school are suggested by the fact that pupils will combine their studies with productive work and with such chores as cleaning classrooms, tending shrubbery, and preparing and serving lunches. After the educational overhaul is completed, in three to five years, all students who wish to receive full secondary schooling (now to be of eleven years' duration)²⁵ will do so by correspondence or in evening or off-season schools, without taking time away from their jobs. Although there was much discussion of schools for the "gifted," which would not require students to work while studying, it is significant that no provision was made for them (except in the areas of music and dance) in the reform as it was finally enacted. The labor-reserves system as such now seems to be a dead letter, though it might be more accurate to say that in effect it has been extended to embrace all schools and all young people.

Regulation of *Vuz* Admissions

At the same time, changes have been effected to improve the chances of workers' and peasants' children competing for entrance to higher educational institutions. Khrushchev and others had repeatedly deplored the handicaps faced by children of lower-status families, scoring in particular the fact that the "competition of parents" with influence was as important in determining *vuz* admissions as was the competition in entrance examinations.²⁶ In Moscow's higher schools, said Khrushchev, children of workers and collective farmers made up only 30 to 40 percent of the enrollment. The abolition of tuition fees in the *vuzes*, along with those in the secondary schools, was one move calculated to alter this

²³ Memorandum to the Central Committee, *Pravda*, Sept. 21, 1958.

²⁴ Khrushchev estimated an annual increment of 2 to 3.5 million youths in the labor force two years earlier than under the old program (*ibid.*); this gain is exclusive of the part-time work to be performed by pupils in most grades.

²⁵ It should be pointed out that the eight-year school is not a condensation of the ten-year curriculum but an expansion of the seven-year school—again indicative of the relaxation of academic rigor.

²⁶ See especially Khrushchev's speech to the 13th Congress of the Komsomol, *Pravda*, April 19, 1958, and his memorandum to the Central Committee, *ibid.* Sept. 21, 1958.

situation. It is particularly revealing that this step was taken at a time when pressure for admission to higher education from the growing ranks of ten-year graduates was reaching its peak—that is, when selectivity in admissions was becoming most necessary. If there were truth in the hypothesis of growing class stratification under pressure from a powerful "state bourgeoisie," just the opposite might have been expected—*i.e.*, a rise in the tuition fees as a convenient way of shutting out low-income applicants.

Very different rules of competition were instead set up. A rising proportion (currently, 80 percent) of *vuz* admissions was reserved for applicants with at least two years of work experience or military service;²⁷ presumably, this will become a universal requirement when the secondary-school reform is complete. Meanwhile, honor graduates of the ten-year schools and the *tekhnikums* are now obliged to compete in entrance examinations along with everybody else—and, for the sake of "objectivity," the written part of the examinations is turned in under a pseudonym.²⁸ In most fields, the first two or three years of higher education are to be combined with full-time work, in order both to weed out the less serious students and to impress the future *vuz* graduates with the "glorious traditions of our working class and collective-farm peasantry"—*i.e.*, to blunt the forces making for social separateness.²⁹ The method of awarding scholarships has been revised to take more account of the material needs of the student, and somewhat less of his grades; special courses are being organized to help *vuz* applicants who have not completed secondary education, or who have been out of school for a while; and all applicants must present recommendations from places of work and also from party, Komsomol, or trade-union organizations, whose representatives in addition sit on admissions boards³⁰—all of which recall the days when the official aim was to "proletarianize" the higher schools. Given the recent Soviet willingness to publish more figures (so long as they "look good"), it may be predicted that we shall soon have, for the first time since 1938,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, June 4, 1958.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, June 4 and Nov. 12, 1958; *Izvestia*, April 4, 1959. Since honor graduates formerly were admitted without entrance examinations, high-status parents (according to Khrushchev) often put pressure on secondary-school teachers to give their children good grades (*Pravda*, Sept. 21, 1958).

²⁹ See Khrushchev's memorandum, *Pravda*, Sept. 21, 1958, and the Central Committee resolution on school reform, *ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1958; also Minister of Higher Education Yelyutin's discussions of the problem, *ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1958, and *Izvestia*, Dec. 24, 1958.

³⁰ See *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, Aug. 16, 1956; *Vestnik Vysshei Shkoly*, No. 9 (Sept.), 1957, pp. 3-5; *Pravda*, June 4, 1958; and *Izvestia*, Dec. 24, 1958, and April 4, 1959.

comprehensive data on the social origins of students in higher education.³¹

The subject of educational reform cannot be passed over without taking notice of the boarding schools. When Khrushchev first broached the topic at the 20th Congress, observers assumed (as in the case of the secret speech) that his proposal demonstrated the influence of the elite and that the new schools—despite his protestation to the contrary—would be exclusive institutions for the privileged.

The reality of the boarding school has been a far cry from these suppositions. Priority in admission has gone—as, after all, Khrushchev said it should—to children from large or low-income families, and to others from disadvantaged environments. Fees are charged, but they have been waived for those who could not afford them—again in accord with Khrushchev's original suggestion. Moreover, the curriculum has been strictly polytechnical, providing training for such occupations as lathe operators, electricians, farm machine operators, stenographers, typists, *etc.*—hardly pursuits becoming to an aristocratic caste.³²

Is the Classless Society Coming?

The scope and force of the trend away from extreme differentiation are unmistakable. There are many clues other than those which have already been cited: criticism of the practice of assigning chauffeured cars to officials; a pervasive, if still partial, change in the method of awarding medals and orders; a demand that the Soviet fashion journal concern itself less with evening gowns and furs and more with "everyday" clothes. To dismiss all this evidence as mere window-dressing, as ritual obeisance to an ideology, explains nothing: for why is it

³¹ Another prediction which might be ventured is the resurrection of intelligence and aptitude tests, abolished in the 1930's on the grounds that they emphasized inherited rather than acquired traits and discriminated against children of workers and peasants. In effect, the criteria of "ability" became instead school examinations, grades and *vuz* entrance examinations, which actually discriminate more heavily against low-status students in terms of the motivational or "cultural" influences in their lives. Intelligence-test scores are now considered less immutable than was once thought to be the case, and Khrushchev may "discover" that IQ tests are a more "objective" (*i.e.*, less class-biased) measure of ability than achievement tests.

³² On the schools, see *Pravda*, Feb. 15 and July 1, 1956; *Uchitel'skaia Gazeta*, June 27, 1956; *Trud*, July 27, 1956; *Pravda*, Oct. 9, 1958. It might be noted that many, if not most, of the boarding schools have been converted from former seven- or ten-year schools, probably due to insufficient construction funds.

happening *now*? Why should Khrushchev feel compelled to renew rituals that Stalin had long neglected, rituals that offend the sensibilities of the "elite"? What, then, does account for the change? Is one facet of the "transition to communism" to be the end of class distinctions?

Stalin, it seems clear, had felt that a high degree of differentiation was necessary to achieve his overriding goal—a very rapid process of industrialization subject to his absolute control. This meant, in the first place, that a group of loyal and competent administrators and other brain-workers had to be created, and quickly. It also meant that large segments of the population would have to be deprived, at least "temporarily," of material returns from their labor, in order that greater proportions of production could be applied to the expansion of industrial capacity. The consequently depressed condition of the workers and peasants Stalin sought to turn to good purpose, by offering them great rewards for joining the administrative and technical corps—hence the wealth, privilege, and prestige which came to define the upper end of the occupational hierarchy. The need for upward mobility to escape a life of privation would induce people to strive for educational training and vocational achievement, and would encourage obedience to Stalin's dictates, while the chance for upward mobility would serve as a substitute for the more prosaic benefits of a slow and moderate rise in the general standard of living.

The gap thus generated between the higher statuses and the lower ably served Stalin's purposes in some respects. Those in high position came to live a different kind of life, free from the material anxieties of those over whom they stood. They became, in short, "insulated" from the less fortunate: blind or indifferent to the needs and wishes of the masses. For they learned that success was to be had by winning the favor not of those below them but of those above them, which was exactly what Stalin wanted them to learn. Now that the policy has come under fire, the attitude which it engendered has been amply described in the Soviet press, for example in this criticism of the "self-willed" official as a type:

Tell such an official that he has disturbed his subordinate's state of mind, and he will probably be amazed: "His state of mind? Brother, we're having trouble meeting our plan here, and I have no time to look into all sorts of cases of melancholia."³³

The Problems of Stalinist Policy

Nevertheless, extreme social differentiation had its less desirable aspects, too. For one thing, it "over-motivated" the population: anything less than a higher

³³ *Izvestia*, Jan. 18, 1958.

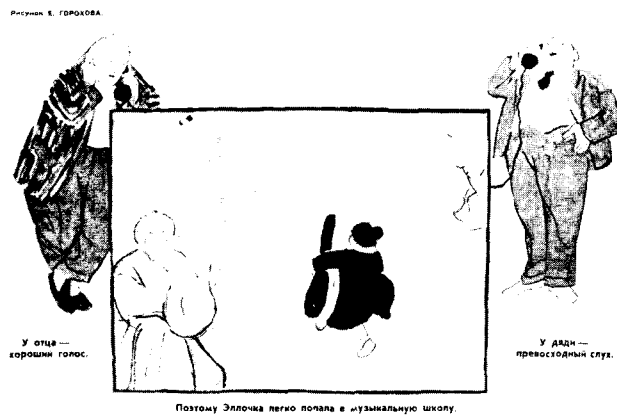
education, and the higher occupation it brought, was regarded as a disgrace for an upper-status child and as a sad fate for a lower-status child—hence, the intense pressure exerted on the educational institutions, the reluctance of youths to commit themselves to factory jobs. For another and more important thing, it interfered with the operation of the impersonal selection system necessary to an efficient economy and to the reward-function of upward mobility. Those in higher and better-paid positions were able to use their influence and their money to assure similar places for their children, at the expense of potentially more capable or more loyal children from less-favored families. Perhaps even worse, some children from well-to-do families neither studied nor worked, but lived off their parents' income—an idle existence which not only meant a loss to the labor force but also, if the Soviet press is to be believed, led in many cases to alcoholism, crime, or even to the acceptance of "bourgeois ideology."³⁴

This excessive measure of status security perverted adults as well as children. Once a man was granted local power, he was able to suppress or punish, if not ignore, criticism from his inferiors, and he cooperated with his colleagues to evade the regime's cross-checks on him. This had been intermittently acknowledged in the Soviet Union under the label of *semeistvennost* ("family-ness"), but the full dimensions of the problem are only now being revealed. Among many instances, one may be cited concerning the chairman of a city soviet executive committee who "forbade his assistants and the heads of the city executive committee departments to appeal to party organs without his consent."³⁵ Thus, higher authorities were precluded from receiving the information they needed to keep tabs on their own subordinates. Or, if the party did manage to find out about and remove some incompetent or dishonest official, he often reappeared in another responsible position—partly, at least, as the result of friendships formed and mutual obligations exacted. Indeed, an integral part of the pattern has been the concern of officials to find places in the *apparatus* for friends and relatives who could reciprocally provide a haven if necessary.

All of this was simply the obverse side of the arbitrary power delegated to local officials, for the sake of allowing them to carry out their instructions from above without interference from below. But it was ironically self-defeating: by being freed of criticism from below, administrators were able to free themselves of supervision

³⁴ Mark G. Field, "Drink and Delinquency in the USSR," *Problems of Communism*, No. 3 (May-June), 1955; Allen Kassof, "Youth vs. the Regime: Conflict in Values," *ibid.*, No. 3 (May-June), 1957.

³⁵ *Izvestia*, Jan. 16, 1958.



Left: The father has a good voice.
Right: The uncle has perfect hearing.
Below: And thus Elochka easily got into music school.

—From *Krokodil* (Moscow), Dec. 20, 1958.

from above. This threatened to contravene the cardinal dogma of the Soviet system, which has come to be known as Stalinism though it could as well be called Leninism or Khrushchevism: that ultimate power belongs exclusively to the party—or more accurately, to the head of the party. Whenever any group jeopardizes that principle, it must be struck down, and that is what Khrushchev is doing. Stalin, in other words, forgot his Stalinism; and Khrushchev is not repudiating Stalinism, he is, if anything, reinstating it.

Khrushchev's Two-sided Task

No doubt, the Soviet press, in characteristic fashion, has exaggerated the threat. Stalin was not a complete fool, and when all is said and done, he does seem to have kept things pretty well under control. If the group whose growth he fostered was an "elite," then surely no elite has ever proved so utterly helpless in preventing actions which, like those at present, so adversely affect it. The danger was a distant cloud—but a good Bolshevik tries not to wait until the storm has swept away his fortifications. Khrushchev's task, then, is to rid the "state bourgeoisie" of its cockiness, to disabuse it of the notion that it is safe whatever it does, to infuse into it fresh blood, personnel more responsive to orders. Just because of the kinds of positions these people occupy, the task will not be easy, and the plan may be "underfulfilled." But given the Soviet political structure, the odds are on Khrushchev's side.

The nature of the targets at which Khrushchev has taken aim makes his crusade sound like an echo of earlier revolutionary periods; but in actuality, the development

does not connote a return to the situation that prevailed in the early 1920's, for Khrushchev has learned something from Soviet history. The extremes of high and low incomes are to be moderated—but "equality-mongering" is still wrong. Mass participation and criticism from below are to be permitted—but not "violations of state discipline" or "slander of the party and its leaders." Executives should be more humble, more attentive to their subordinates—but the principle of "one-man management" is to be preserved. "The struggle against the cult of the individual does not at all mean a belittling of the significance of leadership and leaders. . . . The party does not advocate the denial of authorities."³⁶ Moreover, Khrushchev has expressly defended the nonmanual pursuits—"those who work in offices are not at all bureaucrats, they are the creative people who originate that which is new . . ."—and he has strongly implied that, even under communism, there will still be the bosses and the bossed: communist society will be "highly organized."³⁷ Complete equality is not just around the corner, nor even being contemplated.

"Classlessness" Defined

Nevertheless, Khrushchev *is* seeking a classless society, in the proper sense of the term. If an "upper class," for example, means anything, it means a group of people who share fairly distinctive values and advantages which they are able to hold on to for some length of time, even against the resistance of others. Yet in the totalitarian scheme of things, it is essential to the preservation of party supremacy that no group become so entrenched in positions of strength as to become insulated against further demands from the party. An "upper class," or any other "class," is no more admissible than an autonomous trade union or ethnic group. Hence the party must insist—in the long run—that every man be individually and continuously on trial, that status and rewards remain contingent and ephemeral. The greatest threat to the party is the development of a sense of identification or solidarity within a group—or class—and this is precisely what was happening to the Soviet elite. Khrushchev's war against the bourgeoisie is, in fact, only an extension of the battle with the bureaucrats which has long been a part of Soviet policy, even if it was sometimes muted. In short, "classlessness" is essentially a corollary of Stalinism.

Khrushchev, however, believes himself to be in a better position to attain it than Stalin ever was. The

³⁶ *Partiinaiia Zhizn*, No. 7 (April), 1956, p. 5.

³⁷ *Pravda*, July 2, 1959; also Khrushchev's report to the 21st Congress, *Pravda*, Jan. 28, 1959.

creation of a substantial industrial base has relieved him of the urgency which Stalin so acutely felt. Automation, as he has frequently pointed out, really has diminished the differences between mental workers and manual. The spread of education has freed him from dependence on a relatively small group as the only source of administrative and intellectual personnel; workers and peasants can now be brought into the *vuzy* with less risk of lowering the quality of education (as happened in the 1920's). Finally, he evidently presumes that a long period of enforced political homogeneity has led to the withering away of deviant values among Soviet citizens. Criticism from below would thus be less dangerous, since it is more likely to accord with what the party wants. The only agency left which has enabled Soviet man to maintain and transmit both "hostile" values and favored positions, with even a small degree of success, is the family—whence the significance of the boarding schools (and other attempts to loosen family bonds). For the boarding schools are destined to be not elite institutions, but universal ones: the instrument by which the regime hopes finally to achieve control over the last remaining semi-autonomous activity, the rearing of children.³⁸ This, too, is an objective which will be familiar to students of Soviet history, but unlike the situation earlier, Soviet leaders may well feel that they now have, or can produce, the material facilities with which to realize it.

Yet it is unlikely that the regime has solved, once and for all, the problem of inequality. Power corrupts—even delegated power. Workers and peasants, no less than intelligentsia, will sooner or later try to put their privileges to uses which, so far as the party is concerned, are "selfish." They may, for example, try to develop a monopoly of their own on higher education, or act "prematurely" to increase the production of consumers' goods or raise wages, in a kind of latter-day "workers' opposition." Or, once terror is removed, they may turn out not to have lost all their hostile values, after all. When that happens, they will once more be put back in the inferior position they knew up to Stalin's death. No end is in sight to this ancient practice of playing one off against the other, this alternate granting of status privilege within a basically classless framework, as the Soviet system struggles with its perennial and fundamental problem: the need to control the controllers.

³⁸ "The sooner we provide nurseries, kindergartens and boarding schools for all children, the sooner and the more successfully will the task of the communist upbringing of the growing generation be accomplished": Khrushchev's theses on the Seven-Year Plan, *Pravda*, Nov. 14, 1958. See also the decree on the boarding schools in *Pravda*, May 26, 1959.

“ . . . But Some Are More Equal Than Others ”

By Seweryn Bialer

IT WILL STILL take us a long time, but whatever the circumstances, we must see to it that our specialists—who constitute and will continue to constitute a distinct social stratum until we attain the highest degree of development of Communist society—live better under socialism than under capitalism.¹

In these words of Lenin we find the origin of the privileged caste of technical intelligentsia and executive officialdom which has long been a distinctive feature of Soviet society. Stalin extended Lenin's principle of privilege to political and administrative “specialists” as well as to experts in the art of coercion; at the same time he created a system of social stratification which, in the degree of its rigidity and class differentiation, has had no equal in contemporary industrial societies.

Among the evolutionary shifts which have taken place since Stalin's death, changes affecting this aspect of Soviet society have attracted special attention—not wholly by chance or without reason. On the one hand, the new leadership has spared no effort to publicize the favorable features of such changes both at home and abroad; along with sputniks, they have increasingly become the trump cards of official propaganda. On the other hand, the policy moves and measures involved here have been a natural focus of outside interest since they have important effects both on the Soviet economy and on the relations of the party to the rest of the society. There is a tendency in the non-Communist world—more conscious in some quarters, of course, than in

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Russian ed.), 1952, Vol. 33, p. 169.

As a former member of the Polish Communist Party apparatus, Mr. Bialer, who defected in 1956 and now makes his residence in the United States, is thoroughly familiar with the structures and operations not only of his “native” party, but also of the parties of the Soviet Union and the East European countries, which he frequently visited in the years 1949-1955. His analysis of “The 21st Congress and Soviet Policy” appeared in the March-April 1959 issue of this journal.

others—to search for signs of a democratic evolution in the Soviet system, as the most comfortable and simplest escape from the problems and dangers of perpetuated East-West competition. The policy shifts under discussion offer rich food for such hopes because they constitute, without question, significant departures from the past; it therefore becomes a crucial matter to assess them in broad perspective, to see—in short—whether they have affected the essential totalitarian features of the Soviet system.

Types of Change

These shifts can be divided into two groups. In the first group are those which have brought about a distinct improvement in the general living standard and working conditions of the Soviet population. Borrowing from the Marxist-Leninist lexicon, one could justifiably say that the “law of absolute pauperization”—the concept of the inevitable growing poverty of the laboring masses under capitalism—well describes the conditions which prevailed for the great majority of the Soviet populace during Stalin's rule; if there were occasional intervals which saw some amelioration of these conditions, still the overall living standard hovered continuously on the verge of destitution by any yardstick. By contrast, there is not the slightest doubt that a constant rise in living standards has taken place during the last seven years among a broad segment of the population. A great deal of evidence has been compiled to substantiate this trend (see, *e.g.*, the comprehensive article by Alec Nove in the last issue of this journal²); and while there are still discrepancies between Soviet propaganda claims and actual achievements, it seems pointless to waste debate on them, since—assuming a continuation of present policies—the gap will narrow with time.

² A. Nove, “Social Welfare in the USSR,” No. 1 (Jan.-Feb.), 1960, p. 1.