

Soviet Politics and Political Culture

By Melvin Croan

PAUL COCKS et al., Eds. *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*. Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1976.

JERRY F. HOUGH. *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory*. Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1977.

A. H. BROWN. *Soviet Politics and Political Science*. New York, NY, St. Martin's Press, 1974.

ARCHIE BROWN and JACK GRAY, Eds. *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States*. New York, NY, Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977.

CHRIS HARMAN. *Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe*. London, Pluto Press, 1974.

MARY McAULEY. *Politics and the Soviet Union*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, Penguin Books Ltd., 1977.

ACCORDING TO the almost classic, characteristically American adage, politics involves "who gets what, when, how."¹ More broadly conceived, politics may be said to entail both process and outcome, conditioned by particular institutional structures in various socio-

1. Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics—Who Gets What, When, How*, New York, NY, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1936; reprinted New York, NY, Peter Smith, 1950, and New York, NY, Meridian Books, 1958.

cultural settings. The broader view is indispensable to the formulation of any halfway plausible approach to the perennial question of what, if anything, is distinctive about Soviet politics.

One such approach, now increasingly in vogue among Western scholars, lays heavy emphasis upon the Soviet system's encrustation in Russian historical tradition. Historians have warmed to the theme of the continuity between tsarist autocracy and the Soviet regime,² and for all their recent fascination with models of development, political scientists may now be falling into line behind them. It remains to be seen whether this is merely another passing interpretive fad. If not, it may constitute a lasting contribution to the study of Soviet politics.

NO SINGLE methodological orthodoxy, new or old, characterizes *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*, edited by Paul Cocks, Robert W. Daniels, and Nancy Whittier Heer. This is a collection of original papers published in memorial tribute to an unassuming master and skillful preceptor of Soviet political studies, the late Merle Fainsod of Harvard University. But the volume's concluding essay, Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Soviet Politics: From the Future to the Past?" gives wide berth to Russian history. As Brzezinski sees it, the

weight of centuries-old traditions serves to inhibit the "adaptability" of the Soviet system, so that it is now undergoing a "process of degeneration"—a degeneration that Brzezinski first postulated in the pages of this journal over a decade ago,³ but which he now suggests has not yet "reached critical proportions" (p. 349).

The interplay between modernization and tradition is touched upon elsewhere in the Fainsod memorial volume as well, notably, in the contributions of Gregory Massell ("Modernization and National Policy in Soviet Central Asia"), Donald Carlisle ("Modernization, Generations, and the Uzbek Soviet Intelligentsia"), and Gail Lapidus ("Education, In-

2. See, for two recent examples, Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York, NY, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974, and Tibor Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition*, New York, NY, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975. Even Isaac Deutscher, who would scarcely have been sympathetic to the studies of Pipes and Szamuely, noted that the Soviet order could only have been built out of old bricks, including "traditional methods of government, vital national aspirations, a style of life, habits of thought, and various accumulated factors of strength and weakness." Isaac Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution: Russia 1917-1967*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 11.

3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Soviet Political System: Transformation or Degeneration," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), January-February 1966, pp. 1-15. Brzezinski's article and the discussion that followed were reproduced in Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ed., *Dilemmas of Change in Soviet Politics*, New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1969.

dustrialization, and Social Change in the USSR").

By contrast, the spirit of an empirical political science, detached from grander historical considerations, informs Jerry F. Hough's essay on "Party 'Saturation' in the Soviet Union." His data indicate that party membership among males over 30 with higher education is remarkably widespread, accounting for a plump 50-plus percent of this entire age-gender-education cohort. Juxtaposing this finding to data concerning political participation in the West, Hough concludes that a fresh new look at the essential character of the Soviet system may be in order.⁴

This is the note that Hough repeatedly sounds throughout *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory*, a collection of many of his previously published articles, augmented by several new pieces. While guarding himself carefully at every turn, he consistently champions the notion of "institutional pluralism" as the proper point of departure toward "the reconceptualization of the Soviet system." If Hough's plea fails to persuade, it is, in the present reviewer's opinion, because he makes much ado about very, very little. His painstaking empirical research into neglected interstices and obscure nooks and crannies of the Soviet political system has proved eminently worthwhile in its own right. But findings at the microbureaucratic level, while neither necessarily inconclusive nor trivial, simply do not lend themselves to the construction of demonstrable hypotheses with regard to the salient features of the Soviet system at

4. The focus of this essay-review precludes discussion of many of the remaining papers, all of which, however, are of very high quality.

the macropolitical level.⁵

Hough's earlier study of local industrial decision-making,⁶ by the same token, represented a fine example of institutional analysis based upon the careful examination of all available Soviet sources. The methodical approach to institutional analysis exemplified by that study receives deserved endorsement in A. H. Brown's critical survey, *Soviet Politics and Political Science*. This concise catalogue of the political science literature constitutes a veritable *vade mecum* of the theories, techniques, fads, and foibles of Western political analyses of the USSR. Brown himself calls, quite sensibly, for "a discriminating eclecticism" in the study of Soviet politics (p. 10). After surveying various approaches to and individual studies of Soviet political institutions, groups, and interests as well as the policy-making process, Brown concludes with a cautionary discussion of the limits and perils involved in studying Soviet political culture.

One wishes that Brown and his colleague Jack Gray had thrown at least some of that caution to the wind as they presided over the collective scholarly enterprise that resulted in the publication of *Political Culture and Polit-*

5. In addition, the "foreign policy implications" that Hough claims for his work strike me as quite wide of the mark. Even if Hough had succeeded in demonstrating the Brezhnev era to be "more liberal and egalitarian than the Khrushchev era" (p. ix)—which I feel he has not—it would not necessarily follow that clashes of interest between the Soviet Union and the United States would be correspondingly diminished. Conversely, even if Hough is wrong about the direction of Soviet internal development, that need not rule out mutual accommodation where Soviet and American interests are congruent.

6. Jerry F. Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-Making*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1969.

ical Change in Communist States. In addition to an introduction by Brown and conclusions by Gray, this volume contains separate chapters on the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, China, and Cuba, by British academic specialists on each country. All the contributors address themselves to a common analytical framework, featuring four large considerations: (1) previous political experience; (2) values and fundamental political beliefs; (3) foci of identification and loyalty; and (4) political knowledge and expectations. They also touch, in varying degrees, upon four sets of relationships: (1) between the process of political socialization and political culture; (2) between political culture and political subcultures; (3) between levels of socioeconomic development and political culture; and (4) between political culture and political change. As Brown readily acknowledges, all this is far too big an order for chapters that average a mere 30 or so pages.

THE REAL VALUE of the volume edited by Brown and Gray lies elsewhere. First, it demonstrates the value of *comparative* communist studies and should go a long way toward answering those comparativists in the political science profession who have held a distinctive field of comparative communism to be both politically artificial and scientifically unsound.⁷ Second, and even more important, the volume raises fundamental questions about the concept of political culture both by itself and in its application to

7. For the most cogent expression of this point of view, see John H. Kautsky, "Comparative Communism Versus Comparative Politics," *Studies in Comparative Communism* (Los Angeles, CA), Spring-Summer 1973, pp. 136-70.

the study of communist systems.

How, for example, ought the study of culture relate to the study of behavior? Brown, Gray, and their contributors agreed to narrow the scope of political culture to "subjective orientation" so as to exclude "observed behaviour" (p. 9). A better case could be made for a more anthropological approach to culture, accommodating both beliefs and behavior.⁸ To be sure, any simultaneous consideration of both areas entails a certain risk of circularity of explanatory argument. That risk may have to be run. It is difficult to see how one can really dispense with perceptive assessments of observed behavior in communist political systems, given the absence of substantial "hard" survey research data with respect to beliefs.

Clearly, any treatment of modernization and tradition in the Soviet political system, or in other communist political systems, that overlooks considerations of political culture does so at its own peril. Yet, while relationships such as that between "official culture" and "dominant (or mass) culture" seem destined to continue to receive their fair share of attention,

8. See Robert C. Tucker, "Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society," *Political Science Quarterly* (New York, NY), June 1973, pp. 173-90. In my view, Tucker also effectively disposes of the charge that political culture may be nothing more than a "residual category," i.e., one that by explaining too much ends up explaining exactly nothing. As Tucker expresses it: "Might not the central importance of a concept like that of political culture be that it assists us to take our bearings in the study of the political life of a society, to focus on what is happening or not happening, to describe and analyze and order many significant data, and to raise fruitful questions for thought and research—without explaining anything?" (p. 179). In other words, the proper function of the study of political culture may be less to postulate any explanatory "theory" than to proffer a variety of "pre-theories."

other, previously neglected aspects may prove even more tantalizing. The latter include the apparent congruence between Leninist political culture and certain traditional cultural elements of prerevolutionary peasant society, as well as the experience of the unintended strengthening of the latter by the former. The investigation of such phenomena will require the best analytical talents of both social scientists and historians.⁹

AT THE SAME TIME, future scholarship will need to continue to focus on the hoary question of the effect of changes in social structure upon the Soviet and other communist political systems. Such changes accounted for much of the hope the late Isaac Deutscher invested in the future of Russia's "unfinished revolution." Like many other Marxists, Deutscher looked to the emergence of a new, well educated Soviet working class as a source of creative ferment and, ultimately, democratic development.¹⁰

With respect to Eastern Europe, no such optimism is expressed by Chris Harman in his spirited treatment of *Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe*. Utilizing a Trotskyist framework of analysis, Harman surveys the revolts that erupted in Eastern Europe from 1953 to 1970. He

9. The uses to which such talent can be applied are exemplified by Kenneth Jowitt, "An Organizational Approach to the Study of Political Culture in Marxist-Leninist Systems," *The American Political Science Review* (Menasha, WI), September 1974, pp. 1171-90, and in Jowitt's seminal study on "Leninism and Neo-Colonialism," University of California, Berkeley, Institute of International Studies, forthcoming. At Harvard, Professor Ned Keenan (History) has done some fascinating exploratory work on the medieval and early modern roots of contemporary Russian political culture.

10. Deutscher, op. cit., p. 59.

concludes with the prediction of an eventual cataclysmic upheaval by East European workers against their communist bureaucratic bosses. Given Harman's orientation, it is scarcely surprising that he should have almost entirely neglected the role of nationalism and other social forces in his analysis. Nonetheless, the emergence which he sees of a self-conscious industrial working class in Eastern Europe and perhaps also to some extent in the Soviet Union is an important new phenomenon and one that has yet to receive the sustained systematic study that it requires.

Social change compounds the challenges that confront communist leaderships everywhere. In the case of the USSR, as Mary McAuley's highly stimulating primer *Politics and the Soviet Union* points out, "the power is there to control the distribution of wealth, to mete out social justice—and the rulers do not know what to do with it" (p. 326). The present situation may be somewhat analogous to that of the mid-1920's, when, in her view, hesitation and infighting paved the way for a supreme dictator prepared to take extreme measures to break out of the "standstill" (p. 115). If Professor McAuley now alludes to "some unprecedented action" (p. 328) looming on the Soviet horizon, could she possibly be conjuring up the shades of a new Stalin?

ALL THE FOREGOING should provide an unequivocal answer to the question broached by the title of Adam Ulam's introductory essay to the Fainsod memorial volume reviewed here: "Do We Know All There Is to Know about the USSR?" As we strike out along fresh lines of research with re-

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spect to considerations of traditionalism, empirical investigations of institutions and processes, approaches to political culture,

speculations about the role of contingencies, or whatever, it is well to bear in mind Merle Fainsod's own sage injunction: Always try

to ask the really difficult questions. Some, it should be added, may even have answers.

Political Traditions of the Poles

By Vincent C. Chrypinski

M.K. DZIEWANOWSKI. *Poland in the 20th Century*. New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1977.

M.K. DZIEWANOWSKI. *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History*, 2nd. Ed. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1976.

JAROSLAW PIEKALKIEWICZ. *Communist Local Government: Poland*. Athens, OH, Ohio University Press, 1975.

OLGA A. NARKIEWICZ. *The Green Flag: Polish Populist Politics, 1867-1970*. Totowa, NJ, Rowman & Littlefield, 1976.

THE SPREAD OF political consciousness and the development of a national political culture is a historical process whose substance changes over time and across space. In Poland, the course of this process seems to have been unique. Initially, and until roughly the end of the 16th century, the growth of political awareness in Poland was closely linked to a concept of political community that encompassed the entire population. Subsequently, however, this idea of *communitas*, embracing all the Polish people, was displaced by a class-based "nation of gentry" as the dominant premise of the Polish state. Efforts to reverse this narrowing of political focus, finally undertaken during

the reign of the last Polish king, Stanislaw August Poniatowski (1764-95), proved too late in coming. As a result of the infamous three partitions (1772, 1793, and 1795), the Polish state was first reduced in size and then eliminated from the map entirely. Sovereign Poland was not to reappear until the end of World War I, while Polish lands and people remained divided for more than a century among Prussian, Russian, and Austrian occupiers. Before all Poles could be imbued with the same basic political values, beliefs, and attitudes, the political and educational institutions that might have shaped Polish political culture in more ordinary circumstances fell into hostile hands.

Thus, while in other European societies the molding of political culture took place in conditions of sovereign existence, the building of Polish political culture became inseparably enmeshed with the struggle to recapture the independence lost toward the end of the 18th century. For regaining this freedom and uniting all Poles within their own nation-state was to prove impossible without also bringing into the strife social groups whose national awareness was lagging. This meant, above all, the intensification of the national consciousness of, first, the peasantry and, then, the emerging urban proletariat.

Although it would be incorrect to say that the serfs were entirely without national consciousness—tens of thousands of peasants' sons fought under the Polish flag between 1793 and 1813—it is probably safe to assume that the level of identification with Poland *qua* nation among the village masses was generally low. The indifferent or even hostile attitudes of a great many peasants, both in the Congress Kingdom and in Galicia,¹ toward the 1831 uprising in the Russian partition demonstrated this in no uncertain terms.

The growth of national allegiance among the Polish peasantry was a long and complex process influenced by a variety of political and socioeconomic factors. Undoubtedly, the most important of these was the emancipation of the peasants, carried out in the Prussian partition by gradual steps ending in 1848, in Galicia after 1848, and in the Congress Kingdom after 1864. Without question, emancipation was due, in large degree, to political concerns of the occupying powers, which wanted the cooperation of the peasant masses—

¹The Congress Kingdom, created after 1815, consisted of part of Russia's acquisitions of former Polish territory, while Galicia was annexed by Austria. Prussia obtained Polish Pomerania, including the cities of Gdansk and Torun, and Poland's western provinces, including the city of Poznan.