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Social policy in the USSR and the nature of Soviet society*

NICK MANNING

Abstract

This paper considers the place of social policy in Soviet society, both as an empirical guide to the pattern of consumption, and as a theoretical guide to the relations of production and reproduction now developing. Several different models of the Soviet mode of production are examined against the development of social policy, in an attempt to throw some light on current disagreements about the current situation in the USSR.

In recent years there has developed a paradigm crisis about the essential nature of Soviet society, as a result of anomalies being accumulated within older models.[(1)] Newer models are appearing and some older ones are being recycled, but there is still no clear leader in the field. Moreover, recent increased concern about the nuclear arms race has focussed attention on foreign relations evidence about Soviet society at the expense of domestic developments. However social policies can provide a helpful test with which we can begin to sift some of the alternative models available. Indeed social policy can be a better guide to the distribution of power within Soviet society, where foreign reactions and pressures are less contaminating.

The argument pursued here is developed from an earlier version contained in a book on Soviet social policy.[(2)] The position reached there was that the Soviet Union was not capitalist, since there was no capitalist ruling class. Moreover the evidence pointed to a socialist social policy, judged in three ways. First, social policy fitted structurally with the economy through the use of commensurable mechanisms of planning, management and distribution. Second, the dominant ideology was relatively sympathetic to the notion that the meeting of needs through social consumption was the ultimate aim of social and economic development. Third, the actual distribution of goods and services through social policy was relatively expanding, and relatively egalitarian (in comparison for example with Western Europe).

Nevertheless, it was clear from the evidence collected for that book that constraints still existed in Soviet society which limited and qualified the full development of social policy as a mechanism for meeting needs: in times of crisis economic goals took precedence; inequalities still existed; and there

* I would like to acknowledge the opportunities I have had to develop the ideas in this paper with Bob Deacon, Vic George, Norman Ginsburg, Peter Taylor-Gooby and Chris Pickvance.

were limited opportunities for ordinary citizens to fully participate in the political process by which needs were identified and prioritised. An attempt was made, therefore, to theorise the nature of the Soviet state as the dominant influence over these social policies and their limits. Unfortunately, it became clear that available models were of limited use. Those that focussed on the Soviet Union directly clustered around a 'post-totalitarian' view which sought to identify bureaucratic cleavages in the Soviet state in terms of competing interest groups.[3] However, such models do not attempt to integrate political and economic relations, and have little to say about the Soviet public. An alternative approach was examined therefore in terms of applying theories of the capitalist state to the Soviet Union.[4] Following Gough[5], the administrative form, constituency of interests, and the surrounding constraints of the state were examined, but found to be very different in the Soviet Union. Again, the functional activities outlined by O'Connor[6] by which the state ensures production (social investment), reproduction (social consumption) and legitimation (social expenses) were examined and did give some insight into the development of social policy. Yet in the end a far from satisfactory explanation was constructed using this method.

In this paper a further attempt is made to tackle this problem by using social policy developments since the 1917 revolution as an empirical test which can be applied to some of the newer and older models currently competing to dominate the vacuum of explanation left by the collapse of the totalitarian view, and the limited descriptiveness of the interest group model.[7] Since the focus is on the twin issues of the nature of Soviet society, and the determinants of social policy, the essential choice to be made is about different explantions of the mode of production in the Soviet Union.

Previous work in this area has tended to favour either a theoretical or an empirical approach, both of which on their own are inadequate. Purely theoretical debates tend to return to the early post-revolutionary years in order to ascertain a key point at which the revolutionary society did or did not set a course which has determined all subsequent developments. For example Corrigan, et al,[8] have argued that there is a 'bolshevik problematic' which characterised the political view of the revolutionary elite whereby it was assumed that the elite could take political control of a capitalist economy and use it for socialist ends. This problematic, they argue, is the key to understanding the modern Soviet political economy. Yet such an approach is essentialist and historicist, for it tries to trace all empirical developments back to a key set of assumptions made during the 1920s. This would seem, for example, an idiosyncratic approach to modern British and British social policy!

By contrast, empirical studies have tended in the opposite direction. Frequently undertaken by students of Russian they have given us valuable detail about the micro-politics of Soviet policy administration, but have set it within a theoretically eclectic and therefore categorically inconsistent framework. For example, the recent debate about the significance of the rising Soviety infant mortality rate in the 1970s[9], has been used to definitely prove that the Soviet Union is on the one hand capitalist:

> 'On theoretical grounds it could be argued that capitalism produces a unique pattern of mass disease, and inferred on that basis that the social formation in the USSR is state capitalist,'[10]

and on the other hand socialist:

> 'The infant mortality problem in Soviet society is apparently primarily a negative consequence of the rapid progress made in industrialization, employment of women in industry, and socialization of childcare... The new values that incorporate a scientific attitude toward child-care, as well as the stabilization of the growth of new institutions and practices, will undoubtedly contribute to the rapid resolution of this problem of socialist development.[11]

We can attempt to steer a course between theoretical essentialism and theoretical eclecticism by examining six alternative approaches to the Soviet mode of production, and by comparing their explanations of different periods of twentieth century Soviet history with the periodisation of Soviet social policy suggested by the detailed examination of social security, education, health and housing developments undertaken in George and Manning.[12] This is summarised in table 1.

SOCIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The key periods of social policy development are identified using three criteria. First the aims of policies and the resources potentially available to meet them. Second, the actual extent to which policies are put into practice. Third the effect of the policies on political and economic relations. These criteria suggest four distinct social policy periods since 1917.

Utopian

Between 1917 and 1921 social policies were promulgated which could not possibly be implemented given the resources available. For example, Lenin's detailed plan for a socialist social security (i.e. income maintenance) system which he offered as an incentive to revolutionary workers in 1912, was enacted in stages during late 1917 and 1918. Yet the near collapse of the economy made the scheme inoperable, and hence in its own terms it offered very little social security. However, its enactment was designed to secure the political allegiance of urban workers, at a time when the outcome of the revolution was by no means certain, and this secondary effect may have been important.

Urban

During the 1920s social policy was overhauled and brought into a more realistic alignment with the resources available. For example social security was restricted to skilled workers, rents were reintroduced (having been abolished in 1921) to stimulate investment in housing, and limited practical tasks were undertaken such as the reduction of illiteracy, and the elimination of epidemics which had killed millions between 1919 and 1922.

TABLE 1: Periods in Soviet history, and social policy

View		Period	Break	Period	Break	Period	Break	Period
Official Soviet View		DICTATORSHIP	1936	SOCIALIST	1967-70	DEVELOPED (EXISTING) SOCIALIST		
State Capitalist	IS/SWP	DICT-ATOR	1921	CAPITALIST				
	CPC	DICTATORSHIP	1936	SOCIALIST	1953-7	CAPITALIST		
Transitional	TROTSKY	DICTATORSHIP	1929	DEGENERATION (THERMIDOR): TRANSITIONAL				
	SZYMANSKI	DICTATORSHIP	1929	CHARISMATIC SOCIALIST	1957	TECHNCRATICAL.SOCIALIST		
Bureaucratic Collectivism	BIG FLAME	DICTATORSHIP	1929	BUREAUCRATIC COLLECTIVIST (PROGRESSIVE)	1962	BUREAUCRATIC COLLECTIVIST (CRISIS)		
	ARNOT			EXTENSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH	1960	INTENSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH		
Asiatic Mode of Production	BAHRO	EMANCIPATION	1929	(PROGRESSIVE) NON-CAPITALIST INDUSTRIALIZATION	1957	SUBALTERNITY + SURPLUS CONSCIOUSNESS		
Centralised State Redistribution	HUNGARIAN SCHOOL	DICTATORSHIP	1929	BUREAUCRACY DOMINANT	1970	INTELLECTUALS DOMINANT		
Social Policy View		UTOPIAN	1921	URBAN	1929	INDUSTRIAL	1957	WELFARE/PRODUCTIVITY

Timeline scale: 1917, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990

These policies were confined to the urban areas, containing only about 20 per cent of the population, which made their practical realisation a great deal more successful than the immediate post-revolutionary plans. However, this concentration was also undertaken to retain the commitment of urban workers, still the power base of the party, and to extend the control of state administration. For example, the organisation and control of health care was split between trade unions, local soviets, factory workers' committees, and the central Commissariat of Health until the early 1920s, when the Commissariat began to take a decisively dominant role.

Industrial

From 1928, when Stalin solved the problem of acquiring resources for industrial development by force, the whole tenor of social policy changed sharply. In the next two years social policy was once again trimmed, but this time to meet the requirements for a flexible and disciplined labour supply rather than urban political loyalty. Unemployment benefit was abolished in 1930, maternity benefits cut, and a strict labour code adopted. Doctors were increasingly assigned to factories to help maintain healthy workers, but found that their task was to discourage absenteeism except for serious illness. And schools which had frequently experimented with polytechnical, project based, free-discipline education were discouraged in favour of more traditional discipline, the three Rs, science subjects, and a clear system for grading pupils. This approach to social policy was continued right through the industrialisation of the 1930s, and the post-war reconstruction of the 1940s and 1950s. With a massively increased state apparatus, policies were successfully implemented, and spectacularly effective in terms of moulding labour supply; although needs which were less related to production work such as for comfortable housing and disability/retirement pensions were greatly neglected.

Welfare/Productivity

In the late 1950s the resolution of the power struggle to fill the political vacuum left by Stalin's death heralded a distinct change of direction in social policy, both in terms of expressed aims and in terms of the administrative means of achieving them. Khrushchev's passion for reorganisation, most noted in his attempt to regionalise economic planning, affected education and housing in particular. He reasserted almost forgotten Soviet commitments to equality, to the interests of ordinary workers, and to political participation. In education special arrangements to encourage more workers into higher education, and more polytechnical integration of mental and manual work, were planned. In housing, a massive expansion of prefabricated units under the control of local soviets and cooperatives, rather than industrial concerns or private individuals, was organised. And while social security was not reorganised, it was massively expanded in terms of coverage and benefit levels (old age pensions were doubled). While these changes were clearly an attempt to propel the Soviet Union towards Communism (in

competition with China, Gilison has argued[13]), Khrushchev lacked the administrative control to see them implemented. Many of his plans were either watered down (eg education) or simply ignored (eg housing) in practice, particularly in terms of the *way* in which they were to be developed; in terms of crude volume, consumption was considerably increased. In other words Khrushchev wanted to both expand the consumption of social services to meet people's needs, and to create more participative, egalitarian social relations prefigurative of communist ideals. But, significantly, the distribution of Soviet power and domestic interests thwarted the latter aim and indeed contributed to his eventual ousting.

Since the mid 1960s there has been not so much a new era of social policy as a careful trimming and shaping, so that the higher level of social services consumption which Khrushchev initiated has been maintained, but in the service of repeated attempts to bolster flagging labour productivity. In particular, access to comfortable housing and higher education have become important elements of the structure of work incentives.

SOVIET MODES OF PRODUCTION

The differences in these periods of Soviet policy, distinguished in terms of their aims, implementation and effects, are substantial. They reveal not only the changing fortunes of the Soviet population's living and working conditions, but more significantly they indicate major shifts in the Soviet political economy. We can therefore use them as a test to help identify which of the current alternative models of the Soviet mode of production makes the best sense in social policy terms. Here, the six set out in table 1 will be reviewed.

Each of these has different implications for key periods in Soviet history since 1917, particularly the nature of social policy in each period. The notion of a period used here embraces a fundamental organising aspect of Soviet society in each period – the mode of production itself, or a significant change in production forces or relations within a given mode of production. For example some approaches emphasise changes in the mode of production at each end of the Stalin era, and we do find key changes in social policy also at these points. There is also considerable agreement in many of these approaches about what the key periods are in terms of time. For example the late 1970s and early 1980s are seen as a key point of change in Soviet society by many.

It is important to note that the apparent change of periods at points of leadership succession does not imply a 'great man theory of history'; rather the reverse – such succession is often the final indication of prior social changes. Thus in retrospect it may well be Breshnev's death which will be used to mark the end of the recent period; but in reality it probably ended in the 1970s.

A first impression suggests that 'something happened' around the late 1920s, and the late 1950s/early 1960s. This is confirmed across the spectrum of social policies. However it is possible to go further than that and ask to what extent the social policies implied in each approach actually fit the

evidence collected in the book. Furthermore those approaches which don't fit this evidence can be rejected.

1. Developed Socialism

This term is used by the current Soviet leadership.[14] However, it has to be understood against the background of a changing periodisation of Soviet development. This began with Marx's distinction of the first and higher phases of Communist society,[15] after the brief transitional dictatorship of the proletariat.[16] Lenin interpreted this in the light of Russia's low level of economic development as necessitating a longer periold of transition (dictatorship)[17] and first Communist phase (socialism)[18] while economic development was accomplished. Officially socialism was achieved by the time of the 1936 constitution. Theoretically this meant the end of class conflict but the continuance of non-antagonistic classes (workers and peasants) and strata (intelligentsia), based on secure economic foundations. The continued existence of the state was justified by the need to organise further economic growth for communism, and the failure of world revolution – hence the threat of hostile capitalist nations. The success of economic growth and military defence up to 1960, combined with a continuing commitment to eventual socialist self-administration and communism, resulted in Khrushchev's celebration of the achievement of the 'State of the whole people' – a major milestone, he thought, on the *Road to Communism*.[19] Communism was to be achieved through material abundance and self-administration by 1980. The failure of this prediction, particularly after the economic reforms of 1965[20] resulted in a further drive for economic growth (the scientific-technological revolution) and a new official developmental phase which acknowledged the great economic growth achieved since 1936, yet the continued dominance of the state. This new phase, 'developed socialism', was announced by Brezhnev in the twenty-fourth Congress of the CPSU in 1971.

Under this definition, the Soviet mode of production is socialist. This means that the level of economic development (conceived very much in comparison with the West) is not considered sufficient for full and direct appropriation of the means of production by workers, who are thus subject to control through 'one-man management' (along Taylorist lines). The ultimate manager is the state which has national control of the production process on behalf of workers. Their interests are represented through 'democratic centralism'. State policy is thus guided both by the requirements of the economy in respect of economic growth, the requirements of the military in respect of defence, and the requirements of workers as expressed through the party and elections to soviets. In the absence of antagonistic classes, change is evolutionary. Under the official Soviet position, we would expect social policy to be closely linked to changing economic and military concerns in the early decades, during which the revolution was defended and consolidated. Latterly, we would expect workers and peasants to exercise a growing influence in the 'state of the whole people'. Mishra[21] has argued just such an interpretation of Soviet social policy. Given the steady growth in Soviet

economic production, we would, in particular, expect the increasingly clear distribution of social services according to need from the point of Khrushchev's 1961 declaration onwards.[22] However, it seems to us that there are severe anomalies between these predictions and our evidence in the case of the official Soviet model. Although there is quite a good fit up to the 1950s, social policies since then have reflected quite closely the inequality and statification in Soviet society. They have not become the kind of 'vanguard of communism' for which Khrushchev had hoped.

2. State Capitalism

This term originates from the Menshevik argument that socialism could not develop until capitalism had progressively created both the political and economic means for its own supersession. There are various approaches within this position which pinpoint different aspects of soviet history as crucial, and which lean towards different theories of the state under capitalism. The first approach, associated with the International Socialist/Socialist Workers' Party (IS/SWP) places the October 1917 Revolution very much in the context of an expected world revolution. In that respect, it breaks with the Menshevik position, and argues that Soviet capitalism developed only with the failure of world revolution. This resulted in the debilitating Civil War and Kronstadt rebellion which mark the end of the road for Soviet socialism. Between 1924 and 1927, the party became overwhelmingly bourgeois in membership[23] and finally achieved class power on the road to accumulation through the Five Year Plan (1928).[24] Since then, the state bourgeoisie have directed capitalism in the USSR and the attendant phenomena of wage-labour, markets, pursuit of profit (and its tendency to decline),[25] integration in the world capitalist system,[26] and so on. From this rather economistic point of view, class opposition has been weak and the position of the state is similar to the 'executive committee' model of the capitalist state: a high level of integration between state and capitalist personnel.

The second approach is associated most notably with the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), although other writers have developed similar arguments. The crucial point of departure here is the date at which the Soviet Union became capitalist: the mid-1950s. While not agreeing with the official Soviet view, socialism is accepted as having developed by the 1930s. The disagreement concerns the existence of classes and class struggle. The CPC position accepts classes as existing under socialism and hence class struggle may result in the 'capitalist or socialist road'.[27] This position has been discussed in detail by Bettleheim.[28] He shows the very complex interaction of class forces between 1917 and 1930, particularly within the industrial sector. State policy, he shows, is not merely the reflection of the balance of class forces but in addition a positive reaction to contradictions within and between industrial and rural developments. This view constitutes a more complete *political* economy than the one above and thus, while necessarily including notions of production for profit and so on already mentioned, suggests that the state is constrained from being an 'executive committee' by working class power: it is relatively autonomous from capitalist personnel.

While suggesting very significant differences in the periodisation of the USSR (particularly for social policy), these two approaches share an analysis which is relatively distinct in its implication that revolutionary transformation will be necessary for the achievement of socialism/communism in the USSR, which has merely experienced the historic and progressive role of the bourgeoisie to date.

From the state capitalist position we would expect that social policy would reflect the changing balance of class forces. Relative state autonomy, and any welfarist social policy, would be a result of the growing strength of the working class. The development of social policies designed to increase or reproduce labour power, and to defuse political conflict, we would expect to be a result of the weakening of working class power. The IS/SWP analysis would suggest a steady sharpening of class struggle within the 'USSR Ltd.' and hence growth in social policies of a welfarist kind. However, there would also be periods of change, retrenchment and so on in response to uneven development. The CPC position would suggest a pattern rather similar to the official Soviet version up to the early 1950s, with a subsequent sharp reversal in social policy as a result of the defeat of socialism. Subsequent developments should then reflect class conflict as in the IS/SWP analysis.

How have these predictions worked out? The state capitalist predictions are clearly wrong in the CPC version, since there has been no noticeable reversal since the 1950s. Although the IS/SWP model might be compatible with the 1930s and 1940s, the steady growth since the 1950s to levels of social policy provision well in advance of the West in many areas, with no sign of reversal, would not be expected without a steady growth of working class power, for which (Poland notwithstanding) there is no evidence in the Soviet Union.

3. Transitional

This idea was developed by Trotsky. It begins from the same position as the IS/SWP group: that the October revolution could have succeeded in the context of a world revolution, indeed that it was an essential precursor of the latter in its role of breaking the 'weakest link' in the chain of capitalism. However the failure of wold revolution combined with the economic backwardness of the USSR, Trotsky argued, led to a 'degeneration' in the new workers' state. Trotsky shared the Bolshevik view that political voluntarism could in principle overcome such degeneration by using the nascent capitalist economic base to build socialism. Thus Stalin's achievement of political dominance, particularly over economic policy in the 1920s, was seen as the *political* degeneration of the workers' state, a situation which could therefore logically be reversed through a political revolution.

Degeneration, then, left the Soviet Union stuck in a transitional position between capitalist and socialist roads, exhibiting a mixture of socialist and bourgeois features. More recent writers have suggested that this degeneration appears most clearly in the bureaucratic and undemocratic nature of Soviet life. Thus Mandel and Ticktin[29] have stressed the USSR's position as transitional between capitalism and socialism, with 'non-capitalist relations of

production and bourgeois forms of distribution.'[30] More specifically, Mandel argues that since the bureaucracy is only interested in privileges in the sphere of consumption, it cannot be theorised as a class with interests in production and hence accumulation. This mixed mode of production is echoed elsewhere. Lane[31] follows Mandel to suggest that the USSR is a 'single calss society', and Corrigan, Ramsey and Sayer reiterate Trotsky's view of 'capitalist productive forces and various socialist forms of political control.'[32] What these different views suggest is that within this notion of transition, various contradictory features and different modes of production are identifiable. Such contradictions are manifest in the state and its policies and administration, much in the way Bettleheim has described. However, in contrast to him, writers in this position see socialism as the dominant mode either as a result of property relations (Ticktin; Mandel; Lane) or political control (Trotsky; Corrigan, et al). This is reflected, it is argued, in state policy being broadly favourable to workers; indeed Corrigan et al, suggest that social policy is a good example.[33]

The trouble with Trotsky and more recent writers such as Szymanski[34] in this respect is that they are difficult to use specifically. While Trotsky shared the 'Bolshevik problematic' (as Corrigan et al describe it) of capitalist production and socialist political control, Mandel sometimes talks of socialist production, but capitalistic control (i.e. a self-serving bureaucracy). These differences are excused as 'transitional', and by their very imprecision can be made to fit any social policy evidence. Thus bureaucratic privileges such as bigger flats or special polyclinics can be explained both by bureaucratic dominance distorting the distribution of basically 'socialist' products, and by suggesting that such inequalities originate within a 'capitalist' production system. Consequently we cannot derive sufficiently specific propositions to test this approach against the periodisation of social policy.

BEYOND CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM

We have then rejected the first three models, and turn to a group of new models which have in common the attempt to transcend the older debate of whether capitalism or socialism (or something in between) characterises the Soviet Union. They grasp the nettle of considering whether the Soviet Union represents a new and original mode of production. As a group they look promising in that their major periodisation fits that of social policy (late 1920s and late 1950s); in addition they have specific and positive things to say about the last 20 years – the period for which the other models are least tenable.

They also have much in common. There is class exploitation in which production surplus is appropriated, and the exploiting class is highly integrated with the state apparatus. But this new mode of production has its own laws of motion, or political economy. In particular aspects of the USSR are seen as progressive, both in that it is an alternative route to socialism and communism, and in that it has worked in the interest of working and exploited people both at home and internationally. However there are significant differences between these approaches.

4. Bureaucratic Collectivism

This notion has surfaced in various places recently, initially in the early 1970s amongst Italian writers such as Melotti[35] and in England currently within the Big Flame collective.[36]

In essence this approach suggests that the 1917 revolution was bound to be defeated given the low level of economic development, and that by the late 1920s a new bureaucratic class gained power through the party. This class then set about industrialising the Soviet Union within a collectivist ideology, and was hence a progressive force up to the early 1960s. Since that point however the productive forces in the USSR have begun to strain their political shell, particularly centralised state planning, and struggles in various parts of Eastern Europe testify to the regressive phase that now exists, which can only be overcome through further revolutionary change.

This approach does fit our social policy evidence quite well, in that the dramatic expansion of social services in the late 1950s came at the end of the progressive industrial phase; while since then there has been no concomitant transformation of social relations within social services, but rather they have been tied more tightly to traditional social relations at work, and in the home. Social policy has been used to try and extend or maintain productivity, rather than transcend production relations. This is particularly noticeable, Arnot argues,[37] in an era of intensive growth where increased labour productivity, rather than an aggregate increase in labour supply typical of the earlier era of extensive growth, is essential.

5. Asiatic mode of production (AMP)

This model has had a chequered history arising from various sources. Marx identified it as characterised by communal property, and state controlled public works. He suggested that in principle evolution could be multilinear such that the AMP might be part of an alternative route to socialism and communism; and that as an example the nineteenth century Russian commune had an asiatic character which might become the basis for a direct transition to socialism.[38] However Engels and Lenin disagreed, focussing on the hoped-for revolution in the West. In the early 1920s the AMP was resurrected in the USSR and applied to China, but rapidly rejected in the early 1930s when it was realised that it might imply that the USSR itself could be similarly characterised.[39] More recently the AMP has been decisively rejected by Hindess and Hirst[40] and Anderson,[41] but favoured as a key foundation by Bahro in his monumental critique of Soviet societies.[42]

Most writers reject Wittfogel's concentration on public/state control of water resources (the so-called hydraulic principle) in defining asiatic or 'oriental despotic' societies.[43] Rather than using a physical resource as the key indicator, the social relation which controlled economic surplus is seen as crucial: the 'tax/rent couple'. Essentially, the surplus is extracted through a 'state rent' (i.e. a tax) in the AMP societies, there being no other class independent of the state such as one finds in Feudalism and Capitalism.

While some writers such as Melotti[44] merely see the AMP as a 19th century forerunner of modern USSR, Bahro argues that indeed in the USSR the

surplus is still extracted by such a mechanism (the turnover tax). He suggests that industrial asiatic production, as with capitalism, has contradictory effects, some of which are clearly progressive. He periodises USSR history as emancipatory in the 1920s, progressive industrialism up to the late 1950s, but subsequently developing a growing tension between subalternity (the dependency of individuals on an oppressive social totality) and surplus (or 'emancipatory') consciousness.

Again this approach fits social policy developments quite well, differing from bureaucratic collectivism not so much in its diagnosis of a progressive and then a crisis period, but because Bahro suggests that the working class is not longer the site for revolution. Rather, individuals in all classes will come to desire emancipation within a new political group. This is clearly an inspired anticipation of Solidarity. However his approach suggests that all classes have in interest in change, and hence it is difficult to understand where resisence is situated. The evidence from social policy throws doubt on this kind of universalism when we see the activities of doctors, or planners or teachers constraining social policies in their own interests. Indeed this point is underlined by commentators on Bahro, such as Rudi Dutschke[45] who emphasises the theoretical reasons for stagnation in the AMP – it does not have a transcendent dynamic comparable with capitalism. Thus it is more useful for explaining the USSR's stability than it's potential change.

6. Centralised State Redistribution

This concept is drawn from Szelenyi[46] explicitly, but it is implicit in other Hungarian writers such as Ferge[47] and Vajda.[48] In an alternative vocabulary, Szelenyi is suggesting something very like the AMP, in that he sees the state as taking all economic production under its control (i.e. not merely the surplus), which is then centrally redistributed through either wages (which it controls) or services. On this point Ferge suggests it is therefore inappropriate to expect (as in the liberal West) that state social services might compensate for wage inequalities, since everything is distributed through the state; there is no autonomous market. All relations are thus explicitly political relations, Vajda argues.

In addition to this unique integration of the surplus with the total economic product, Szelenyi goes on to suggest[49] that while 1930-1970 witnessed a period of bureaucratic control (in common with the Bahro and Big Flame positions), there is now evidence that the intellectuals are becoming – but not yet become – a separate exploiting class: a class in itself, but not yet of itself. This helps to explain, again, why the current era is different. And, unique amongst the approaches we have considered so far, it further exposes the differences of interest and actions between the bureaucracy and the intellectuals, which we have certainly found in some social policy areas such as health care planning and housing allocation.

CONCLUSION

This situation is something of a Kuhnian paradigm crisis. Anomalies have been accumulating about Soviet society which throw doubt on more traditional explanations – particularly in dealing with the last 20 years. The official Soviet, state capitalist, and transitional society views, which have dominated discussion in this area, all seem unsatisfactory, both theoretically and empirically. Newer ideas are appearing which, while drawing on a variety of old positions, are trying to come to terms both theoretically and empircally with these anomalies.

Our experience in the area of social policy mirrors very much the difficulties of the older views, and the potential of new ideas. Indeed the Hungarian work has been developed precisely through the use of social policy issues. Can social policy evidence and theory offer anything to further resolve or extend this debate?

In a recent book, Littlejohn[50] suggests that Soviet politics can be thought of as consisting of 'arenas of struggle' (p.159) which may or may not amount to class antagonism. In order to resolve the question of the presence or absence of classes he suggests that, amongst other areas,

> 'the operation of social policies can be considered as part of the process of struggle, since the implementation of policy can itself be thought of as a 'strategy of power', a means of affecting the balance of forces within the social formation. Thus social policies on welfare and consumption illuminate the political process and, since they form an important component of relations of distribution, they are also vital to any understanding of relations of production and hence the nature of class relations in the Soviet Union.' (p.181)

His conclusion is that 'class relations do not seem to operate within the state sector of the economy, but do operate between the state and collective farm sector.' (p.225)

However, if we are to accept that the better fit between the last three 'new mode of production' models presented here and recent social policy developments signifies anything, it is that there is evidence of a class-in-formation which has yet to consolidate its position. The divisions of interests, for example between Ministries and Soviets, widely observed in work on the Soviet Union does not indicate a kind of non-class pluralism. The presence of social policy priveleges (indeed education is a key mechanism for their intergenerational reproduction), the increasingly close integration of welfare concerns with labour productivity, and the relative absence of public participation in the political regulation of legitimate needs, suggests the possibility of class crystallisation.

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