

MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CHANGES IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE SOVIET UNION (Part II)

By Howard L. Parsons

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3) **From the social toward the individual.** I was describing to a professor the unrelieved mess made in the communal kitchen on the floor of our graduate student dormitory. "We are not diversified, developed, differentiated," he explained, "not concrete and careful about individual tasks and conditions and details." Many believe this lack of initiative -- surely not universal, else the society would not function--must be remedied under a new economic system when the rewards of work of able-bodied adults will be directly tied to their individual performances. "We had no Renaissance or Reformation," repeated another, "no emphasis on the individual. We had a very strong collective feeling throughout our Russian history, and it was intensified during the Stalin period. But the new Soviet person is very one-sided and primitive like the peasants of the past, with a social feeling of *Gemeinschaft* [community of interest] rather than *Gesellschaft* [intimate fellowship]." Still another said, "We were utopian. We did not understand that when Marx said that 'man is the ensemble of his social relations,' he meant not just economic relations but human and personal relations." And a sociologist compared the Soviet Union as a "conglomerate" of nationalities, religions, and other elements to the "community" of the United States.

In reaction against this "homogenization," students are attracted to and take up a variety of systems of thought, ranging from Hari Krishna, Russian Orthodoxy, and monarchy, to anarchism. One of the student leaders in the Confederation of Anarchisto-Syndicalists told me it has about one-thousand members, no bureaucratic structure, and no dues, publishing a journal, *Obshchina* (Community) in 40,000 copies, at one ruble per copy. The highest value for these anarchists is freedom--"not as Marx conceived it but as freedom of choice and policy," which is impeded by centralism and political parties.

To illustrate the growing individualism and chaos in the country let loose by *perestroika*, a sociologist referred to the unending and seemingly unproductive marathon of talk in the parliament. The two primary words there now, he said, are *Doloi!* ("Go away!") and *Dai!* ("Give me!").

Moreover, the emergent individualism is often materialistic. A political scientist who represented the Social-Democratic Platform and participated in the first congress of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, speaking against the majority, said that in a discussion someone had risen to say, "*Perestroika* is bad--before it, we had sausage, and now we don't" The scientist answered: "But look, now we have more freedom and can speak about everything. Freedom is more important than sausages." Yet during this period of shortages, a sizeable portion of the people side with the Sausage Platform.

Students, however, as might be expected, are concerned about the political and personal rights of the individual and the higher needs beyond the economic ones. They agreed that their society should not copy the United States, but they asked me what their society might learn from ours. I redirected the question to them, and they answered: "Initiative in many areas, starting with the economy, civil rights, equality, freedom of speech, political organization and action, freedom of conscience, conviction in politics."

For these university students, many of whom have lost their belief in socialism as theory and as social system, existentialism holds an interest because freedom is central for this philosophy. An undergraduate student said of his fellow students, "Each one of us has his or her own philosophy of the individual. It is not Marxism or religion. Many of my friends believe life is absurd--as for Camus and Heidegger." After some of us attended a performance of Leonid Andreev's play, *Thou Shalt Not Kill!* which dramatized the question of freedom and destiny, a student remarked that it was existential, situating the human problem of faith like Karl Jaspers "at the boundary of life and death."

But the movement from socio-centric attitudes and values toward an egocentric worldview worries many, especially those of the older generations. "We are losing our unique spirit of collectivity, grabbing or seeking immediate material goods," said a graduate student devoted to the Slavophiles. "People are like naive children believing that if we go to the market economy, we will be rich like the West." She noted that in Holland and England, for example, capitalism developed gradually from the 1600s over a long period and that in the beginning people were religious, honest, trusting, and thrifty, not greedy and selfish. "But if we go to the free market, we'll be selfish and competitive and materialistic, and the result will be chaos."

In the nineteenth century the Slavophiles, in opposition to the Westernizers, put forward the central concept

of *sobornost*, which Sergei Bulgakov defined as "the liberty in love which united believers" and which was said to distinguish the Russians and the Orthodox Church from the institutional authoritarianism of the Roman Catholics and the divisive individualism of the Protestants. Some Marxists I talked with believe that this accent on collectivity is basic to the character of the Russian culture, though distorted now by the theory and practice of socialism. "It is necessary to create a modern collectivity," said one, "developing individuality, responsibility, and decision-making. We cannot save the personal self in *sobornost*; salvation must come through a unity out of responsible individual behavior in everyday life and socialist collectivism."

Perhaps the Anarcho-Syndicalists manifest this movement from the social to the individual most sharply. An editor of *Obshchina* has said that his party does not want to eliminate state power but to redistribute it, with power residing at the bottom and not the top. Ministries would be abolished and self-financing economic centers set up in various regions. The state must give up all control over the means of production, turning it over to the individual working people at the grassroots.

In response to new conditions, scholars are now paying attention to the role of the individual in history, a problem about which Marxists have long argued. Assessing the place of Gorbachev in Soviet society, a veteran scholar at the University said, "Eventually we would have had a change in our economy, but Gorbachev's election hastened it. It is this particularity of history, this personal factor, that our laws and predictions can't take account of--and never will. This state of affairs is like the three-body problem that Newton proved can't be solved. We might say Gorbachev was a miracle sent by God. Our leadership said and believed consistently that in the event of a war with the United States, we would win. But Gorbachev was the first among our leaders to say that no one would win and all would lose. So if he had not appeared, we might have had a war. And that would have been the end of everything."

4) **From the objective toward the subjective.** Some traditional philosophy has asserted the reality and value of the human subject and human thinking, regarding the environing world of society and nature as secondary or even illusory. Over against this view, Marxism staked out the claim of objectivism--contending in the spirit of science that the material world is prior to our arrival on the scene and that the objective powers and laws of nature strongly determine our life and consciousness and must be understood if we are to survive and freely create our lives in accordance with our needs.

Today, with the erosion of belief in socialism and Marxism, many people question the objectivism of Marxism and have turned to the subjective and human factor in personal and social life. *Perestroika*, if fact, makes the human factor basic to the creation of a new society; and *glasnost* has sanctioned the right of people to explore and express the feelings, ideas, ideals, and symbols of their subjective worlds. Hence the efflorescence of the arts and a new interest in the questions and values of religion as ways of meeting the demands of our private and personal lives.

So I asked my students why their fellow students at the university turned out in such large audiences to hear evangelists from the United States like John Maizel and Josh MacDowell--Protestant fundamentalists who preached on the campus when I was there. The students, they answered, are curious to see and hear typical Americans, for they seldom have the opportunity; they are attracted by "the exotic" and "the forbidden"; they want a cheap copy of the Bible, which ordinarily costs one-hundred rubles or more here; and some of them are in search of a faith.

Religious faith as traditionally understood and carried out in Russian history is a polar opposite Marxism. It is the cultivation of subjective feelings and images, centered on a state of mind rather than on the outside world. As one Orthodox student said, it is "concerned with salvation of the person and forgiveness of sins." When another declared, "We shouldn't speak about God; God is not an object outside of us," and another interpreted religion to be "a search for a personal God," for a diving being continuous with one's individual personality, my mind flashed back to my classroom at home where I was hearing the sam chorus of religious subjectivism from my students.

In matters philosophical, these young people seem to have been starved for the nutrition of the imagination, for the "adventures of ideas," for the freedom to climb the mountains of various "world hypotheses," for the liberation of spirit that comes with firm comprehensive beliefs about the self, others, society, history, and nature, and one's place, duty, and destiny in the scheme of things--national, international, planetary, and cosmic. Marxism has had positions on such questions. But in this society, for various reasons, the institutions have not developed to nurture these needs. The people of the USSR have borne the unrelenting burdens of the years -- civil war, massive sacrificial labor, totalitarian terror and death, the toll of the Nazi invasion, the deprivations and stresses of the Cold War, the economic crisis of the last twenty years. Through such history Marxists have concentrated on making the command economy work and, in social and political affairs, on austere adherence to the historical doctrines of Marx,

Engels, and Lenin. The result, in intellectual inquiry and institutional life, has been a neglect of the needs and interests of the unique individual personality. (The problem of the lonely and alienated personality amidst large impersonal structures seems to be common to all developed industrial societies.)

Into this equation of change, of retreat from the objective world of social construction to the private world of feeling and meaning, must be figured the factor of fatigue. Many people are tired of struggling with food shortages, long lines, the scarcity and poor quality of consumer goods, cramped housing, crowded buses, worsening public services, limited opportunities for leisure, and the almost impenetrable and parasitic bureaucracy. So they seek relief in the inner world of the soul--in the arts, in religion, in new ideas, in substance abuse and crime (both rapidly increasing), in dreams of emigration and a new start in life. In the past, people dreamed of emigration to the land of paradise in the afterworld; today, the dream is directed to a paradise (imagined) on earth--the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe, Israel.

Yet while people are tired physically and spiritually and there is a malaise of spirit among youth, most carry on, sustained by a toughness that through history has inured them to hard knock and neediness. A professor of philosophy pointed out to me that in spite of the heavy load of incompetent and lazy bureaucrats that the society must bear -- there are eighteen million of them, plus their families -- "many people still work hard and will always work hard according to their natures. They are our saviors -- they work like Sisyphus." He was teaching a voluntary course for students at the Moscow Conservatory. "The students here," he said, "are highly specialized, hard-working, disciplined, and sacrificial. To enter for study, they must survive severe competition. For my class at 2:00 p.m., they come tired, having risen early and worked through the day. The paradox is that to enrich others with their art, they make themselves poor, deprived of a well-rounded life for themselves." I think we can take this as a parable whose point applies generally to the people of the USSR throughout their history. People have sacrificed themselves on the altar of hard work for others.

At the same time the sense of individuality has suffered. The self of sensuous enjoyment and abandonment, of meditation and self-awareness; the self that savors the simple pleasures of food, clothes, and a comfortable dwelling; the self of inner images, subtle feelings, ideals, contemplation, memory, imagination, and reverie--these have not been particularly favored in social arrangements. The independent self of initiative, self-sufficiency, and autonomy in action, for which *perestroika* is calling, is sometimes like a fledgling yet to take wings, confined within the cozy collective nest of the central command economy.

"Our most serious crisis," said one observer, "is the destruction of the ideological or spiritual influence--become we have had no development of personal consciousness." This of course is an exaggeration--for he, like others, speaks out of a developed consciousness. Self-awareness, he meant, is better developed in the West. He had been impressed by an eleven year old American girl who, when I asked her what her self is, had replied, "My body, my mind, and my soul." Such a level of self-awareness, he believed, would be rare in the Soviet Union. But what he and his fellow intellectuals do not recognize is that the stamp that acquisitive, capitalist society puts on the self is one of "possessive individualism," narcissism, and consumerism; in an intensely competitive world, people must awake to themselves and that world and live by their wits if they are to survive and enjoy the amenities of "the good life" promised them by the sexy sirens of advertising.

Today with the country's borders open to all foreigners and the internal barriers to ideas down, educated people are rushing toward ideas and practices that give hope of filling their psychological needs. Members of the Central Committee of the CPSU engage psychologists as consultants. American psychologists conduct seminars. Werner Erhard of EST-fame and wealth has led several classes in Moscow--at his usual high prices. Dale Carnegie's best-seller of the 1930's, How to Win Friends and Influence People, is available; I found a student reading it. The newly printed books in philosophy that are popular are those directed to the very concrete, individual, and personal. And of course the evangelical religion of the Protestant West and the mysticism of the East appeal to persons in need of security, love, and peace.

5) **From the material toward the spiritual.** The society of the USSR is in the throes of a double crisis: the crisis of an economy that does not adequately provide the material and cultural necessities of the populace and a moral and spiritual crisis. It is true that as one scholar said, "Survival is the number one problem. Most people are not interested in socialism. They are concerned about everyday problems like buying enough food to put on the table." But lurking behind the anxious and unending search for food and clothing are the haunting questions about the future of socialism, the hazards of a market economy, the uncertainties of the future for self and family and society, and the meaning of life. Both the grandparents and older parents, who built the industrial and agricultural base of the socialist order, sacrificed everything to defend it against the devastating Nazi invasion, and gave up the

best years of their lives to reconstruct the country after the war, are now moved to ask: "Is this the promised end?" Likewise the youth in the university and the young parents brought up to expect that the material and cultural goals of socialism would be consummated for them in their own time, now find themselves nearly empty-handed, facing a bleak future. A young parent said to me: "For nearly a century we couldn't carry out the most simple tasks, such as providing bread and butter for each person. So the students are right when they tell you, 'Don't tell us about Marxism. Give us bread.' Young people feel deceived. 'You promised us,' they say, 'but you didn't deliver.'" This sense of betrayal cuts deeply into the believing spirit of the youth.

This is a crisis of belief, of conviction, of trust. The irony of the social system is that it is now the victim of its own success. The Brezhnev period of the 1960s was one of relative recovery and prosperity. But in the early 1970s signs of economic stagnation appeared: a widening gap between the world's advanced nations and the Soviet economy--in income growth rate, efficiency of production, quantity and quality of products, scientific and technological development, and advanced technology, all connected with overemphasis on gross output at the expense of capital construction and quality, and excessive expenditures on the production of raw materials and energy and on bureaucracy, fraternal assistance to other countries, and the military.

So there is a common tendency to blame socialism for all the ills of society and to repudiate it out of hand. But people confuse a certain Soviet deviant version of socialism with what the classics of socialist thought actually stated. To explain the fact that for so long many people, sincere believers and faithful followers of the leadership, were idealistic and abstract in their conception of socialism, people frequently used the term 'utopian' to describe Marxism-Leninism. Some claimed that the Russian character for centuries prior to the Bolshevik revolution was religiously idealistic, deeply in need of a belief in an ultimate meaning for history, a salvific vision. "The essential Russian consciousness is eschatological, so that the world will be changed for the people from beyond by a savior." Thus the people looked to the Communist Party, to Stalin, and to Gorbachev. While some of my informants did not accept the proposition of popular messianism (attributing it to intellectuals), it seems clear that for a long time most people believed in socialism and the Party as its standard-bearer, relying on them to bring them a progressively better life. Inherent in this faith was an element of dependency and passivity, which for some analysts was a major cause of stagnation since the 1970's and which lingers on as "the stagnation of perestroika." The passivity has been reinforced by the disillusionment with a very ambitious vision--with some considerable achievement -- of what life might be. Although Marx and Engels wrote against the "utopian socialists," faulting them for not starting from the material world in their theory and practice, they took over their optimism, the belief in unending progress, and the utopianism of the Enlightenment--the dream of "the heavenly city of the 18th century philosophers." But that dream has crashed against the brutal realities of poverty, backwardness, war, Cold War, and a Draconian political system. Yet it has not been destroyed; the framework of the dream remains.

To explain this fall, this fading of hope, people go back in history to 1917 and before. Among some there is now a spontaneous sympathy for the tsar and his family and a condemnation of their cruel treatment by the revolutionaries. There is a lot of Bolshevik-bashing; the Bolsheviks are now re-appraised by some as barbarians, destroyers of culture. A philosopher mentioned a recently published letter of Bukharin, written in 1924, showing him to be "an utter cynic," an intellectual who called Russia "the Big Mud" and who hated the villages and countryside. But in the opinion of some sociologists with whom I talked, the media, especially journals like Moscow News, have carried the process of iconoclasm to an extreme. One of them compared the Soviet press to the press during the Chinese cultural revolution, when it incited the Red Guards to violent attacks on authority and tradition.

Many critics lament the abrupt break with all Russian tradition after the Bolsheviks took power. As they interpret history, all institutions of the past which defined and gave coherence to Russian history and culture were to be superseded sooner or later by the culture and morality of the working class. Family, school, neighborhood, relations at the workplace and on the farm, politics, the arts, religion--all would be created anew by a proletarian culture. But, according to the critical theory, such creation was impossible. For centuries the Russians had found guidance and coherence in living by means of their religious tradition and culture. Shaped by this undeveloped, pre-capitalist culture, they knew nothing of clear class differentiations, specialized labor, personal autonomy, state law for the regulation of interpersonal transactions, political democracy, and moral norms that cut across class lines. So when in 1917-1918 religious hegemony collapsed after the Bolsheviks assumed the reigns of government, people did not know how to behave. Their God became "naked," and "the naked God led to nihilism." Communist morality moved into the vacuum, but it did not take hold because it was abstract and idealistic and not grounded in the everyday habits and customs and traditions of the people. A philosopher summarized the situation in this way:

The root of our trouble is our lack of spirituality (*dukhovnost*). The "new man" in the Soviet Union was superficial, with no roots in tradition and history, lacking in spirit and unconnected with eternal

values, lacking in conscience (*sovest*). After the revolution of 1917 the ground was clear and the working class became the bearer of the new morality. But it had no historical roots, no deep foundation. Morality became stupid and criminal. People believed that we are what our immediate relations make us. The result was vulgar Marxism. As a political theory Marxism became simple and vulgar: first, meet the material needs of the people with food, etc., and then add culture for the soul. But the CPSU was concerned not with meeting the people's needs but with ideological cleanness and the struggle against the doubters of ideology.

Another philosopher gave a similar but somewhat different account of the origins of Soviet socialism. In 1917, he said, socialism started from "the deep inherited psychological set of the Russians, exemplified in the Russian Orthodox Church, the conservatives, and the mentality of the peasants." He believed that Lenin recognized this fact but did not analyze it or weigh it heavily. "He and the other Bolsheviks tended to be too theoretical and not concrete and historical. But the mentality of the people remained backward--authoritarian, obedient, ruthless, subjective."

"So," he continued, "between the high, abstract theory of socialism and the everyday habits of people a state system of administrative command grew up to govern social life." His conclusion was that "socialism as a theoretical system and an ideal came too soon to Russia because the deep and needed psychological state of attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, and customs were not in place to enable it to succeed."

Those who still adhere to Marxism and socialism and want to make them apply to present circumstances argue either (a) that the theory was misconstrued in the USSR or (b) that Marx's work was a critique of Western European capitalism describing the sources of the self-negation of private property within well-developed capitalist society--and that in Russia in 1900, eighty percent of the peasants had no private property (except a poor hut and cow) -- and that therefore the theory even when correctly understood could not be applied.

6) **From a centrally planned society to a distribution of power.** This means: a shift from a central administrative control of economy to local autonomy, from central economic dictation to a free market, whether unregulated or regulated, from the monopoly of one party in politics to a multiparty system, from autocracy to parliamentary democracy, from purely theoretical science and technology to their productive application in industry, commerce, and agriculture, from stagnation in the differentiation of work skills to highly developed professionals, from the absence of firm and enforced laws to the establishment of a strict legal system that protects human rights and adjudicates in accordance with justice the conflicting relations between individuals.

To describe their ideal society, many intellectuals commonly use the term "civic society," particularly those who have been in the West and can compare the standard of living and culture with their own. There is a certain sense of inferiority and envy toward the West, a distress that they have fallen behind, and a resolve to change things. One of them said to me, "We are outsiders, not members of civilization."

While most people support most of the shifts now in process, many are apprehensive about the egoism and chaos that a free market would bring--though at the same time they are fearful of an authoritarian tendency from the right evident in the monarchists, conservative Orthodox believers, neo-Stalinists, militarists, extreme nationalists like members of Pamyat, and others. The Yeltsin team wants an economy that, in the words of a centrist, "would lead to a seventeenth and eighteenth century capitalism of robbery"--privatizing property and legalizing the extensive shadow economy already in place and giving amnesty to the mafia, said to control fifteen to twenty percent of the economy. Some of the extremists on the left consider the Communists to be criminals and want them brought to court for trial.

A proponent of the "mediate, creative way" told me: "We can't copy the West. We must find our own way by the historical creativity of the people themselves. There is no a priori model." Another said, "To follow the model of the West is not for us--never. If we follow it, we will get class war. There are no prospects for capitalism here. The free market will be a disaster. It is necessary to renew the socialist concept, but it must be a universal model for the decisions of all. Yet the working class does not have the education for holding power. The Western way will disintegrate Russia. We will get thirty-three independent small republics fighting for many decades. The present governments of Europe and the USA understand this. They need Russia as a great power. But our democrats don't understand it. Therefore we need now an ideology in the traditional national style. The state needs it. It is our only like between people." He envisages a new form of socialism growing out of Russian customs and values.

Likewise, somewhere between the liberal centrists who favor a regulated free market and the extreme right-wing authoritarians stand the members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, described as the left-wing

of the CPSU. Formed in June 1990 they number two million in a CPSU of almost nineteen million and have held three congresses. They want to transform socialism, eliminating the bureaucratic system and creating a democratic party. They would develop an economy of, by, and for the workers, not for the *nomenklatura*, maintaining the workers' social security and reviving the soviets (councils) as organs of the working people. Elections in the Party and government would be carried out by delegates from the unions, collectives, plants, and farms, the organizations at the lower levels electing delegates to the higher levels.

As for the whole CPSU, its strength and continuance are problematic. One estimate is that 75-80 percent of its members are ready to leave it, and a long-time member of the Party described the present membership as "social-democratic."

7) **From the future toward the concrete and historical.** A commonly voiced criticism of the Communist Party and its leaders for more than seventy years is that it was abstractly oriented to the future, not fully aware of the concrete problems of the present, and arbitrarily cut off from the past. Several of my friends excoriated the Bolsheviks, not excluding Lenin, for a naive, blind, an total rejection of Russian history and the illusory dream that a viable society could be built from scratch. "In 1917 and thereafter we made the mistake of destroying all our past and starting afresh."

Marxism was founded on an unswerving faith in progress--its heritage from the Enlightenment. At the same time, as someone pointed out, the Orthodox Church promised an ideal society in the future. "But," he said, "now we have a crisis in ideology, for we crushed the ideology of Stalin and what ideology can we believe?" The promised future has not arrived. One of the students said to me, "We are opposed to the teaching of a belief in progress. Most of our generation do not believe in it."

In this mood of disappointed hope, many have turned to their past--Russian history before 1917--for stability, guidance, and solace. They have re-examined and re-appraised the Russian Orthodox tradition, the Slavophiles (Kireyevsky, Khomyakov, Samarin, Aksakov), Dostoevsky, Soloviev, Berdyaev, Frank, and, among others, Bakunin and Shestov. For some, this turn backward engenders nostalgia toward a time when things were orderly and secure--the period of Stalin, the period of the tsars, the period of Peter the Great, the period when Orthodoxy was in its power and glory. In philosophical inquiry also, nostalgia has revived questions that transcend particular times and are of permanent concern to people --questions that Marxists often considered meaningless or irrelevant or did not, in the critical view, adequately address--grave personal decisions, anxiety, loss, and grief, the feeling of alienation and meaninglessness, human destiny, the spiritual dimension of history, beyond the economic and political, the person in the ecological order, death, deity.

Many, especially those of the generation who came to maturity at the time of Khrushchev (they are now middle-aged) as well as the young adults in their twenties and thirties, feel that they have awaited too long for "the future". During a seminar on love, a woman professor who had served in the Great Patriotic War told the students, among other things, that one's love should be devoted to future generations. At this point my interpreter, a young woman professor, perhaps thirty years old, could not resist turning to me and commenting, "Too many people here have sacrificed to the future under an illusion, and now they have nothing. Life ought to have its meaning here and now."

There is another reason why people do not want to orient themselves to the future. The future is uncertain, and they are afraid of it. Some believe it will be torn by strife, as society lurches from one extreme to another, unable to find a middle way of stability. Said one person, "All efforts and claims of civilian peace and consensus in order to preserve the wholeness of the state are like cries in the desert."

8) **From enthusiastic idealism toward pragmatic realism.** "The Russian mentality is total; the Western mentality is partial, pragmatic, and concrete." So said a scholar of Russian history.

It was his view that the break in continuity with past Russian history at the time of the 1917 revolution holds an important lesson for understanding the strayed course of socialism and for grasping what needs to be done now to correct that course. His idea was that Marx's theory of historical evolution and the emergence of socialism presupposes an economy of capitalism that is highly developed economically, politically, and culturally. In the early hours of the October revolution, it seems, the Bolsheviks had an opportunity to work with the Mensheviks, but some of them fell to quarrelling with them, and the opportunity was lost. (It is known that throughout his life Lenin harbored a deep distrust for the liberals.) Thus the possibility of a gradual development of socialism out of the foundations of a rapidly growing private economy, political liberalism, and an advancing culture was passed by. Large numbers of intellectuals were exiled and liquidated, and the new socialist system was deprived of their skills

and experience. Still, after the NEP started, the scholar observed, Lenin realized the need to change, and early in 1923 he expressed his views in his last three articles--"On Cooperation," "Our Revolution," and "Better Less, But Better."

According to this assessment, the policy of the Bolsheviks was impossibly idealistic. It was not rooted in the existing economy or in the concrete needs, habits, and values of the great masses. It succeeded only at enormous material and human cost. Fervor for motherland and socialism carried the society through the Five Year Plans, the forced collectivization, the persecution, the Great Patriotic War, and the post-war reconstruction. But in the early 1970's leaders became increasingly aware of a crisis in the economy, and some of the dissidents warned that society had lost its way.

Belief in the future, whether the future is seen as secular or other-worldly, whether to be realized gradually or abruptly, is sustained by an ongoing tide of enthusiasm and optimism. Russian religion and philosophy have been permeated by romanticism and idealism. True, the Westernizers took up the materialist viewpoint, but they too believed in the future, as did the Slavophiles and Marxists. And this meant a comprehensive, unified point of view that in principle solved everything--or most things--without recourse to the indignity of dealing with the conditions of everyday life. This tradition has been sharply different from that of the West, which has been more pluralistic, empirical, and utilitarian--characteristics associated with the long development of science and capitalism. When Marxism merged with this tradition, the result was a mixture that neither Russians nor Marxists would have wished or foreseen.

In a peculiarly rich and not always consistent way, Marx had combined the organicism of the tradition of Rousseau and Hegel with the individualism and mechanism of the British tradition of Bacon and Adam Smith. He brought together the dramatic, historic idealism of Hegel with the practical observation and generalization of empirical science. Like Plato, he was convinced that the world of nature, society, and history is governed by form and law, but he also adopted the Aristotelian view that particular things develop toward their natural ends. Marx believed in what George Catlin has called an "ideal, voluntary community," a Platonic and Hegelian model for political society. But at the same time he shared the eighteenth-century democratic faith in individuals, their cooperation, and their common decision-making whose coercive state would guarantee the liberties of one and all but would not impose its ideal on any. He mixed the communitarian and libertarian models, idealism and realism, voluntarism and consensual state coercion.

In the tradition of Russian idealism, Lenin responded positively to both the idealism of Hegel and the attempt by Marx to transform the idealistic dynamism of Hegel onto a materialist base. He wrote that it is impossible to understand Marx's Capital completely without understanding the whole of Hegel's Logic. But while Lenin grasped the imperative need for the creation of democracy among individual workers in the new state, he did not live long enough to lead in the securing of democratic practices on a firm and wide-spread foundation. The result was that, under conditions of economic and cultural backwardness, the demand for massive and rapid development of industry and agriculture, and later the threat of invasion, a highly abstract and static Hegelianism came to dominate Marxism among many leaders who had inherited a monistic view of history and who, unlike Marx, had little knowledge or appreciation of democracy.

Thus the assertion that "the Russian mentality is total; Western mentality is partial, pragmatic, and concrete," while in need of qualification, points to a significant difference in the two traditions. The forward-looking Russians now want to change that.

But they realize that they cannot easily change long established cultural habits. For example, Moscow State University in the near future will probably become autonomous, cut off from all or much of its subsidies from the state. How will its administrators, faculty, and other staff cope with the problems of drawing up a budget, raising revenues, fixing expenditures, employing faculty and other personnel, establishing working conditions and salaries, and the many other tasks for making this huge institution viable? Realism, good judgement, efficient organization, and creative, flexible managerial skills are needed. But these qualities have not been adequately developed under the old hierarchical, bureaucratic system.

The attraction of Marx's thought was and still is its economic explanation of social inequality, namely, the extraction of surplus value by the capitalists from the workers, and the revolutionary proposition that if the workers seize control of the instruments of production this source of inequality can be abolished and social justice can prevail. A high-ranking Communist, now chastened and critical, explained: "Looking at Marx's theory of surplus value, we Communists proceeded to organize production and distribution without any notion that our plans were not to be found in the works of Marx. We thought that simply by doing away with the capitalist management of

production, we would do away with exploitation. But we didn't succeed. And when at last we looked into Marx's works, it was clear that he had offered no concrete observations on how to run a socialist society. But Marx and Engels did not see the state as a possible exploiter. Why? Because the workers would be the statesmen, and because the administration of the state would be impersonal."

This distance between humanistic theory and all-too-human practice has deformed both the material and psychological sides of economic relations. One faculty member who is a new chair of his department has found it very hard to introduce changes because his colleagues have grown content to do a minimum of work and to draw their salaries. Their jobs are guaranteed by the system. "We have many administrative workers like secretaries, but they don't want to work and don't know how. But why should they? A secretary is paid only 100 rubles a month. The gasoline for my car costs more than that. So we need material incentives, making for competition. It's not a matter of equipment but of bureaucratic mentality which pervades all spheres of our life -- passivity and the expectation that the state will take care of people's security in their jobs. Moreover, because of the absence of objective laws to regulate personal behavior in economic relations, the bureaucratic system fills the vacuum and runs the economy and social relations. The individual person is thus at the mercy of the bureaucratic system. To survive the person must find a place in it. Many people are superbly clever at finding ways of not working. But I think that some people are working and producing foodstuffs and other commodities now as they did before the shortages. Anything can be bought here--it only takes time, chance, and money. For example, one can speed up the granting of a visa to Germany by paying 100 to 200 rubles. The result is that our society is reduced to an exchange economy--but not of the capitalist kind. But even the bureaucrats are not clear on what must be done to change this." People obtain goods by bribes, barter, exchanges with relatives and friends, state-granted privileges (as given by law to war veterans, for example), contacts with the southeastern republics where produce is grown, and foreign currency shops (if they have been able to wangle the currency).

In the present situation it is no longer an academic question of choosing between idealism and practicality. Except for a small though growing privileged class of conspicuously wealthy -- there are said to be now 140,000 millionaires--circumstances are compelling people to scramble to get food and other necessities for life. The average housekeeper spends perhaps two hours a day in lines at shops--unless she has the connections and money to get the goods in expensive shops or through the network of the shadow economy. A housewife in Zagorsk, who works full-time and whose family monthly income is about 800 rubles, told me she does not have the time to stand in line to buy inferior food, so she spends half the family income on food of high quality. At university cafeterias and restaurants, one can buy a full dinner for one to one-and-a-half rubles. But fifty-five million retired persons are said to have fixed incomes of only 60-130 rubles per month. It comes as a surprise to see professors also hustling to earn money--foreign currency especially--in order to supplement a precarious income, to fight inflation, to provide education and housing for their older children, and to make provision for their own and their family's future. Engagement in a joint enterprise with a foreign firm, though risky and hedged about with restrictive laws from the bureaucracy, is one way to do this. One professor, fired for his proposal to introduce new readings (such as Marcuse, Sartre, and feminism) into a curriculum on Marxism, was doing this.

Economic strain stirs emotions of anxiety, anger, hatred, resentment, and a scapegoating. Thus the strife of nationalities with one another is both effect and cause of the general economic and ideological turmoil. Antagonisms between different nations are long-standing. They are rooted in the historic relation of Russian imperialism to the smaller, dominated nationalities and in traditional religious animosities--as the Azerbaijan Muslims against the Russian Orthodox. These antagonisms have been revived in the current economic crisis. An historian told me that the nationalistic revolts today are in reality revolts against the rich by people suffering from economic inequities. He maintained that in national policy the Russian people are not to blame. For the Russian republic, thirty percent of its industrial profit goes to the Union government, while for the other republics only ten percent of their trade income is paid. In the export of fruit to the Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian republics, the southern republics, holding a complete monopoly against foreign competition, are able to charge such high prices that they cost the individual consumer fifty rubles per month. The Union price of potatoes, grown in Russia, is ten *kopeks* per kilo, while in the north the price of oranges grown in the south is two rubles (twenty times the price of potatoes). So people blame the Jews for this problem. Again, Uzbekistan sells melons to Russia at two to three rubles per kilo and buys oil from Russia at twenty-four rubles per ton, about one-tenth the world market price. As a result of the employment of favorable quotas for the admission of non-Russians to Russian universities, the percentage of Russians with a higher education is now in fact very low compared with that of the other nationalities. Old nationalistic prejudices have surfaced in response to these conflicts.

Every informed person I talked with believed that the republics should become sovereign if they so choose,

though people agreed that all are and will be closely interdependent economically. No less significant is the fact that twenty percent of all marriages in the Union are between persons of different nationalities, and sixty million persons (in a population of about 290 million) live outside their own national borders. So to be realistic, any national policy if it is to succeed must take account of the economic and cultural internationalism that is already embedded in and between geographic regions.

Conclusion

Far-reaching changes in the moral and spiritual outlook of the Soviet people have occurred in the last decade. When I was teaching at Moscow State University in the fall of 1980, I found the students to be respectful toward authority, idealistic, optimistic, and, while critical, relatively well satisfied with their society, their personal lot in life, and their future. Few expressed the desire to emigrate. They were fearful of a nuclear holocaust and hopeful about the prospects of peaceful coexistence. Today these qualities have greatly diminished, and some seem to have turned into their opposites. Some students are skeptical toward all authorities, and all are skeptical toward some authorities--political, religious, economic, academic, etc. It is open season on "ruling circles" and the received opinion from Marxism and socialism. Anger and scorn toward Soviet history have exploded. While pessimistic would be too strong a description of all students, I discovered none who would be called optimistic in the 1980 sense of that term--and none who was fully satisfied with his or her conditions and prospects. Many entertained the fantasy of emigration--an unthinkable possibility in 1980. No student mentioned the danger of nuclear holocaust and the need for peaceful coexistence. Students feel either that, given the USA-USSR detente and disarmament policy, the thread of holocaust has disappeared, or--more probable, I think--that the threat is insignificant relative to other issues. Socialism in theory and practice, more or less accepted in 1980, is now a target under passionate attack by many and is openly criticized by most of those still committed to it. Such criticisms, however, especially by the youth, do not always sort out the achievements from the failures; and the "social guarantees" of education, medical care, vocational preparation, employment, accessible culture, and the rest are mutely taken for granted.

Some attitudes, beliefs, and values of the students have not changed. Students are still curious about foreigners and foreign countries, with a special friendliness toward Americans. They are eager to travel abroad and relatively tolerant of bureaucracy (though now much more critical). They are commencing to reflect on the issues of human rights, democracy, sexuality, and gender roles.

What of the future? If the course of history outside the USSR does not suffer any catastrophic changes, the people of the USSR have a chance to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of chaos and repression and to find their own creative way to reconstitute a seriously disturbed and disordered society.

The pre-eminent question is: Can the people make socialism work? Can they mobilize their collective will and create the democratic machinery in political and economic life needed to construct a cooperative commonwealth with liberty and justice for all?

What is being tested now is both the theory of socialism and its application in everyday life. In its most general and human form, the theory is that the altruistic impulses and actions of people can subordinate the selfish ones. Some critics of socialism--who adopt the theory of psychological and ethical egoism--believe that the failures of Soviet socialism are proof once again that socialism is founded on a false view of human nature. They believe people are and ought to be selfish rather than altruistic. The idealistic dream of socialism, they contend, has failed repeatedly in the past and is destined to fail in the future. The conflict now raging in the souls of thoughtful persons in the Soviet Union is this one between the two doctrines: individual impulses versus social ones, privatization of property versus public ownership, egoism versus altruism. At the moment, many are leaning away from public ownership because they have concluded it has failed and is unworkable.

This same conflict has persisted throughout Western history since the first-century Christians "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44) and set themselves apart from the self-centered secularism of the Roman empire. Later, monks like the Benedictines formed communities with shared property and goods. From the eleventh century onward the rise of new cloth industries, commerce, and cities brought a challenge to the agricultural economy of feudalism with the Church as the chief landowner. Caught between these two conflicting systems of exploitation, the unemployed and the working poor in city and countryside turned to ideologies that promised freedom from sufferings--to the Waldenses, Cathari and Albigenses, Beghards, Lollards, and others. The great ideal of these religious revolutionaries was a version of Biblical dream of one single society of equals, united by the principles of justice, fraternity, and freedom, a society free of domination and exploitation by individuals and classes. The economic base for this was to be communal property.

Unable to tolerate the threat of the new industrial and commercial classes and the popular movements allied with them, the Church declared these ideologies to be heresies. In southern France it wiped out the Albigenses in a bloody crusade. But so powerful was the pull of the idea of communal property that even groups within the Church like the Franciscan Spirituals took it up. In 1323 Pope John XXII found it necessary to condemn "the stark ideal of a propertyless perfection" (as R. W. Southern has called it) and to declare "the doctrine of complete poverty of Christ and his disciples heretical." The Church had put its stamp of approval on private ownership, the foundation of the post-feudal system that in time would grow into capitalism and dominate the modern world. Church hierarchy thus rejected the cornerstone of the early Christian community--common property. Yet the struggle for common property continued among the people and expanded throughout the Protestant Reformation -- in the Taborites, Anabaptists, Diggers, Levellers--and down through the utopian communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and into the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century.

According to my Moscow sources, the Bolsheviks held this stark ideal of a propertyless perfection. Perhaps so. But perfection did not materialize. The state property, the fruit of the total appropriation of the old private property--in land, in industry--was not turned over to the people for possession, control, and management. It fell into the hands of a political party and an elaborate bureaucracy that in turn appropriated it for their own private use. Failure then was inexorable. But was it a failure of socialism? By no means. It was a failure of those who did not understand socialism and therefore could not put it into practice. Socialism demands through and vigilant democracy.

The present social situation is fraught with danger and opportunity. A January 1991 letter from a scholar in Moscow, still a socialist, summarizes it in this way:

Morally and physically life in Moscow is getting to be more difficult and uncertain. Leadership is shifting to the right. Privatization of the party and the state looks like a long-range process. Partocrats are going to be capitalists but for them it is harder than for feudalists to be businessmen. Gorbachev's transformation of the party-state apparatus into something capitalist has slowed down. It is really a hard job for him. "Ruling circles" do not feel any need to change their position in policy, economy, and so I am afraid that three major forces--the people (consumers), the hard-line bureaucracy (plus generals and the military-industrial complex), and the mafia (real underground and semilegal business) will not wait. They are trying to undertake steps which will lead to rebellion and finally to the new dictatorship with overwhelming elements of national-Bolshevism and small elements of authoritarianism. But now the general feeling is one of fear, expectation, apathy, uncertainty, and black humor. And in spite of all this I believe that we will overcome this critical situation. I believe in common sense and the market economy. The last is not a solution, but people have to have bread and butter, and they have to learn how to work well.

Today on the stage of Russian-Soviet history the people in their various factions and parts are enacting a Shakespearean drama. Folly and violence have torn society out of its natural and healthy order of life. Day by day disorder deepens. The mass of people are baffled and seek only the security of daily bread.

The forces of individual freedom, in economy and political life, are driving in the direction of chaos and civil strife. The forces of social authority are driving in the other direction toward brutal recrudescence repression. Both, unconsciously or not, are bidding to restore the disrupted social order with fresh blood and violence. The part of wisdom is to find a sane and non-violent course toward order and creative stability. But the actors to play this role of reconciliation and peace have yet to appear on the scene.