

SOVIET BUREAUCRACY: AN ATTEMPT TO FIT INTO THE WEBERIAN FRAME OF ANALYSIS

Leonid Khaimovich

The paper pursues two interrelated purposes: to find out which features of the modern (1965-85) Soviet bureaucracy can be properly analyzed within the existing social scientific framework (Beetham 1987) stemming from the Weberian tradition, and to make one more step elaborating and refining this framework. To achieve these goals a notion of the treaty between incompetent labor and incompetent management is introduced. The resulting conceptual model of modern Soviet bureaucracy allows to see a logical pattern in the development of states formed from the Soviet Union.

The changes that started to happen in the Soviet Union in 1985 were as a bolt from the blue for everyone. At the eve of these events the dominating image of the Soviet Union in the West was of a stable totalitarian state permeating the whole society and directing through its powerful and perfectly functioning bureaucracy the movement of every grain of sand in this huge country. Totalitarianism is understood here as a regime based on and seeking support of masses in contrast with authoritarianism which strives to exclude masses from political arena (Linz 1975). Both totalitarianism and authoritarianism are inherently terrorist regimes (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1954).

This now obviously wrong image was caused in a large degree by misunderstanding the role of Soviet bureaucracy. A picture of antihuman but technically efficient and stable apparatus came from the investigation of Stalin period. Yet even some classic works which were written in the 50th and analyzed Soviet regime of that time are skeptical about the shining mechanism of its power system. M. Djilas in his influential book The New Class, An Analysis of the Communist System wrote:

Everything happened differently in the U.S.S.R. and other Communist countries from what the leaders - even such prominent ones as Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, and Bukharin - anticipated. (1957:37)

In the already classic work How Russia Is Ruled by M. Fainsod first published in 1953, one can read:

The Soviet bureaucratic structure is commonly visualized as a tightly centralized administrative hierarchy in which all initiative and decision-making power are concentrated in the top leadership and in which the lower officials serve as mere automatons to execute the will of the ruling group. While this stereotype performs the useful function of emphasizing the high degree of centralization which characterizes the Soviet system, it also distorts reality by ignoring the fluid play of bureaucratic politics that underlies the monolithic totalitarian facade.(1963:417)

A picture of a perfectly efficient monocratic power can be found in influential theoretical works by Parsons (1977:216-226) and Huntington (1968:81 and 137), which are not devoted specifically to investigation of the Soviet Union.

The "monolithic totalitarian facade" and massive strategic misinformation carried out by Soviet propaganda, and originating in part from the wishful thinking of top Communist party officials, certainly played an important role in formation of the false image of political and administrative processes in the Soviet Union. Even information coming from multiple dissident sources and numerous Jewish refugees fleeing European Communist countries was not able to change this image. Dissidents, who were subjected to severe persecutions on the edge of physical extermination, looked too eccentric and neurotic for Western experts to believe their words about the state, which they obviously hated. For similar reasons refugees were looked upon with doubt as a source of undistorted knowledge.

Yet probably strong influence of military power on the perception of its bearer was the most important obstacle to learning about the decay of Soviet state. The country that had won a battle with fascist Germany, that possessed nuclear weaponry, that was a rival of the United

States in international affairs, was demonized in the West. The diabolic image was so convenient for mass media, that not only common people but also many social scientists, who were not directly involved in research of Soviet Union, were convinced in the supernatural health of the gravely sick social system.

One more origin of confusion of social scientists may be traced to difficulty of interpreting Soviet bureaucracy within the existing theoretical framework. It is widely accepted that after death of Stalin Soviet Union was ruled by bureaucracy, whose role was permanently increasing (Brzezinski 1969). At this point the Western analysts of the Soviet Union would agree with their Soviet colleagues. But if the former see this phenomenon only as detrimental consequences of excessive central planning, the latter would see the origin of most social and economic problems in the existence and power of the bureaucracy *per se*. Soviet analysts may assert that to open way for progress it is necessary to eliminate bureaucracy completely, what sounds at least not seriously for their Western counterparts. The problem lies in lack of common language. More precisely, the notion of bureaucracy means something very different for the analysts who were educated in the Soviet Union and for Western researchers who rely on Weberian framework, enriched by modern developments in sociology of organization, public administration and political economy (Beetham 1987). Also the analysts, who grew up in former Communist countries, may underestimate the self-organizing processes of free market. Nevertheless, because of inevitable close contact with their "native" bureaucracy they have more realistic and precise image of it. This image has at least one feature which is hard to fit into the Weberian model. Namely, an absence of even slightest desire on the part of bureaucrats to conduct policies designed by central planing organs and, furthermore, using any gaps and contradictions in this policy for personal enrichment.

A question may arise: why to investigate Soviet bureaucracy, whose power has substantially diminished during the last decade or so? There are at least three reasons. First, the

former Soviet Union governed by bureaucracy provides an interesting example of not equilibrium yet long lasting system. It seems paradoxical and worth of exploration. This phenomenon is a rule rather than exception in social world. A variety of systems that are formed on the grounds of consensus among their members under conditions of weak influence of objective (means not completely controlled by the members) processes of selection of the fittest, provide us with numerous examples: a company monopolizing its market; a collaborative research project, whose merit is hard to evaluate; a friendship among incompatible but lazy people - are cases in point. Tenure of this kind of systems is determined not only by strength of selective processes but also by the amount of resources available to attract members and keep them together. Colossal natural resources of the Soviet Union allowed it to stay intact for seventy years, last twenty of which even were not overtly violent.

Second, besides general theoretical interest, understanding of the bureaucratic rule during the so-called stagnation period (1965 - 1985) is important for comprehending the present complex and unstable situation in the Soviet Union. Both progressive forces that are moving the country toward market economy and conservative forces striving to return it into the previous "God blessed" state, took their shape during stagnation period and bear its seal. N. Shmelev - a talented writer and top Soviet economist - writes together with V. Popov:
on the ground of economic inefficiency and wage-leveling, which were born by administrating, major shifts have occurred in social aspects of [Soviet people's] psychology, human values and priorities have deformed themselves" (1989: 103).

This phenomenon will, in final analysis, determine the direction of further development of countries formed from the former Soviet Union. Its influence will continue in full forth until people whose personalities were formed before 1985 will stay in power¹. The phenomenon is of

¹ Speaking about "Soviet people," it is important to remember that there were exceptions. Stagnation in economic and political life combined with guaranteed provision of basic necessities like food and shelter created conditions for those who wanted to pursue complex professional aspirations and did not need extensive collaboration with others to do so. This allowed many self-driven individuals to preserve their feeling of self-esteem as well as to become highly skillful in their areas of interest. There were and are highly skilled scientists, artists, writers, engineers and representatives of other technical professions in the former Soviet Union. Still they had a negligible impact on the mainstream political and economic life of the country that is examined in this article.

primary importance for explaining resistance to introduction of Western management methods, for designing management education, and for dealing with criminalization of businesses and government in the former Communist states.

Third, trying to fit the Soviet bureaucracy of stagnation period into the modern Weberian social scientific framework we will be able to make one more step toward better understanding and refining it.

In order to do so the first section of the work briefly introduces Weber's conceptual analysis in the form suited for describing Soviet bureaucracy. The third section provides some theoretical and historical material necessary for comprehending the Soviet power system of stagnation period. Sections four and five present a picture of bureaucratic rule on the eve and at the beginning of *perestroika*, as it was drawn by the analysts interested in detecting origins of Soviet inefficiency and combating or utilizing them for gaining military advantage.

Unfortunately, because of the key role of bureaucracy in the Soviet power structures there were no empirical scientific studies done on this subject. For this reason, all available "data" for these section come from works based mostly on personal experience of authors. The only warrant of their quality is the world-wide recognition of authors of cited works--Z. Brzezinski, G. Popov, N. Shmelev and A. Zinoviev—as experts in the political systems of the former Soviet Union. Also, all of them are professional social scientists. The fifth section introduces the notion of the treaty between incompetent labor and incompetent management that is central for this article. In the sixth section the picture of the Soviet state at the eve of *perestroika* is analyzed in the light of Weberian theory. The latest modifications and additions to the theory are introduced. The question of compatibility of secrecy and strive for power on the one hand, and of rationality on the other is investigated. The concluding section summarizes the article and shows which features of the Soviet bureaucracy of stagnation period can be fitted in the existing theoretical framework and which ones cannot.

2. Max Weber's model of bureaucracy

According to Weber there are only three principles legitimizing the continued exercise of any domination: sacredness of tradition, belief in charisma, and rationality. The three corresponding structures of domination are patriarchy, charismatic leadership, and bureaucracy.

The bureaucratic rule as opposed to other two rests not upon personal authority but upon the "system of rational norms, and ... is legitimate insofar as it corresponds with the norm. Obedience is thus given to the norms rather than to the person"(Weber 1978: 954).

The norms, in turn, are considered rational if they promote behavior in compliance with interests of the controlled system as a whole. In the sphere of private economy these interests may be derived, at least theoretically, from the needs of a bureaucratic enterprise to compete on its market. The question about the "objective" interests of public administration is less clear than in the case of market organizations. Although Weber finds that existence of these interests is based on the idea of "reasons of state", he also adds:

Of course, the sure instincts of the bureaucracy for the conditions of maintaining its own power in the home state (and through it, in opposition to other states) are inseparably fused with this canonization of the abstract and "objective" idea of "reasons of state". Most of the time, only the power interests of bureaucracy give a concretely exploitable content to this by no means unambiguous ideal; in dubious cases, it is always these interests which tip the balance (p.979).

This warning reminds us that Weber's bureaucracy is only an idealized "pure" type and that any particular historical reality can be described only as its mix with other two "pure" structures of domination.

The rationality of bureaucracy determines its efficiency, which is superior to any other form of administration. Weber writes:

The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs - these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form. As compared with all collegiate, honorific and

avocational forms of administration, trained bureaucracy is superior on all of these points. And as far as complicated tasks are concerned, paid bureaucratic work is not only more precise but, in the last analysis, it is often cheaper than even formally unremunerated honorific service(pp.973-974).

The impersonality of bureaucracy, which follows from its “objective rationality”, is of special value for capitalism:

"Without regard for persons", however, is also the watchword of the market and, in general, of all pursuits of naked economic interests. Consistent bureaucratic domination means the leveling "of status honor". ... bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanized", the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation." (p.975)

Another change, which enabled bureaucracy to replace patriarchalism and charismatic leadership, Weber sees in creation of money economy, which is a necessary yet not sufficient condition for existence of bureaucracy. The stable economy without sharp fluctuations in purchasing power of money makes possible to pay compensation of officials from their masters treasury in the form of money salary. This helps to prevent officials from gaining any personal profit from their office, whose management must be a duty following only from the intrinsic interests of the system as a whole. In the ideal case the duties are so well defined that occupation of a particular office completely prescribes what its occupant has to do. So, the official's salary has a tendency to depend only on his status not on the quantity or quality of his work. Without a stable money economy salaried positions for officialdom were impossible. Instead there existed a prebendal organization of offices in the sense of "life-long assignment to officials of rent payments deriving from material goods, or of the essentially economic usufruct of land or other sources of rent, in compensation for the fulfillment of real or fictitious duties of office, for the economic support of which the goods in question were permanently allocated by the lord."(pp.966-7)

Another step away from bureaucratic toward the feudal organization of domination occurs when “not only economic but also lordly [political] rights are bestowed [upon the official]

to exercise on his own, and when this is associated with the stipulation of personal services to the lord to be rendered in return.”(p.967)

Emergence of hierarchical bureaucratic structures requires less personal subordination than exists under patriarchy or charismatic leadership. Yet bureaucracy itself furthers the leveling of social differences. In Weber’s words, “bureaucracy inevitably accompanies modern mass democracy”(p.983). Large number of common people--peasants and, especially, industrial workers--come on political arena with the rather uniform background and relative absence of the exclusivity feeling as compared with nobility. Consequently, organizations that reveal needs and aspirations of masses (first of all for the masses themselves) and transform them into political power--mass parties--are bureaucratically structured. Now masses have an instrument to require from the state to implement social welfare policies and to guarantee social order. This leads to creation of state programs securing food and shelter, of police and of judicial system. The policy of state's administration serving rather uniform needs of its numerous subjects becomes more and more bureaucratized and symbolically gains the name " public". The desire for equality before the law and for absence of privileges, which has formed in the struggle of masses against power wielders, prepares soil for impersonal and abstract exercise of authority, which is a distinctive feature of bureaucracy.

Yet, Weber argues, bureaucracy creates a cleavage between officials and the governed. A necessity of specialized training to qualify for an office and a system of appointments characteristic for bureaucracy are incompatible with the rule of universal accessibility of office and with elections based on public opinion, which are inherent to political democracy. For this reason Weber calls an increasing equality of governed in face of the governing bureaucratic group - a passive democratization.

Broad circles of common people come not only on political but also on economic arena. Partly it is an outcome of the increasing political strength of masses, which ensures growth of

their share of surplus value. It goes also hand in hand with the technological development and, especially, with the rise of manufactories. Division of labor and growth of industrial production open doors for bureaucracy to enter economy. Growing number of consumers with rather uniform demands leads to bureaucratization of trade.

The development of modern communication means is intrinsically connected with bureaucratization too. On the one hand, it promotes trade not only through facilitation of goods' delivery to customers, but also through formation of new aspirations among the broadest population which have been unknown earlier and cannot be satisfied by local handicraft production. On the other hand, existence of such large-scale and precise systems of communication as railroad or telegraph and telephone are impossible without a great deal of rationalization and centralization.

The above picture of bureaucracy looks convincing enough to make a conclusion about the bureaucratic perpetuity. Indeed Weber writes:

Under otherwise equal conditions, rationally organized and directed action (Gesellschaftshandeln) is superior to any kind of collective behavior (Massenhandeln) and also social action (Gemeinschaftshandeln) opposing it. Where administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is practically indestructible.(p.987)

Furthermore, from the impersonal and rational character of bureaucracy follows that destruction of its system of domination is not only impossible but virtually pointless because it is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it. A rationally ordered officialdom continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the territory; he merely needs to change the top officials. ... The place of "revolutions" is under this process taken by *coups d'etat*(pp.988-989)

An important addition to the above statement was made by Weber in the chapter on the power position of bureaucracy (pp. 990-994). Here he reveals the existence of struggle for power between bureaucracy and its master, be it under democratic or oligarchic rule, or monarchy. This conflict causes a tendency of bureaucracy toward secrecy, which may be explained only partly through the competition between different bureaucratic bodies--competing business enterprises

or potentially hostile state departments--which are rational internally but whose relations with each another are not necessarily based on reason. Weber himself says that "the pure power interests of bureaucracy exert their effects far beyond these areas of functionally motivated secrecy"(p.992).

Weber's characteristics of modern bureaucracy which, probably, result from his observations rather than are derived from the theoretical "pure" type, also may be explained only at the price of partial rejection of the postulates of rationality and impersonality. If we acknowledge bounded rationality of human beings, two of them—"principle of official jurisdictional areas" and "thorough training in a field of specialization"--can be derived from the third one: "management of the office follows general rules, which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive, and which may be learned." These three are consistent with the statement of rationality of bureaucracy. Yet other three, namely principles of office hierarchy, of office's management based upon written documents, and of full working capacity of official, provide a good starting point for further elaboration of Weber's model. This will be done in the sixth section of the present work in order to fit into the theory the phenomenon of Soviet bureaucracy, to whose investigation we now proceed.

3. Formation of Soviet bureaucracy under the rule of Lenin and Stalin.

Before describing features of the Soviet bureaucracy before the disintegration of Communist state it is useful to make a short digression into the nature of Soviet society and history of its formation. This should add credibility to our description by explicating processes that led to creation of Soviet power structures of the stagnation period and by showing numerous and finely tuned connections between these structures and the embedding societal culture.

According to the brilliant book by A. Zinoviev this type of society is a result of genuine attempt to implement "the aspirations of the classical Marxists and of all the, in the Marxist sense, progressive thinkers of the past" (1984: 16). Zinoviev continues:

Communism is not something invented by evil-thinking men contrary to all common sense and alleged human nature, as some opponents of Communism assert. It is exactly the opposite: it is a natural phenomenon of human history which fully corresponds to human nature and derives from it. It grows from the aspiration of the two-legged creature called man to survive in a habitat with a large number of similar creatures, to make better arrangements for himself in it, to defend himself and so on. It springs from what I call *human communality*. (p.27)

He contrasts communality with civilization, which according to him springs from the resistance to communality and from the effort to limit its (communal) unruliness and to confine it within certain boundaries. Fundamentally, civilization is about all man's self-defence against himself. ... if we imagine communality as a process of falling into the potholes of history and sliding downwards, then civilization can be seen as a clambering up. Civilization is effort; communality is taking the line of least resistance. (p.28)

He also contrasts a "two-legged creature called man" with a "man as we know him and we pronounce his name rather grandiloquently with a capital M", who is a bearer of civilization. Yet what is different between these two "men"?

I think that a strive for security and survival, referred to by Zinoviev as a feature of communality, is equally inherent to both of them. What really matters is a difference in ability to comprehend this world's complexity and development of transcendental moral values. The ability for comprehension, which is based on knowledge of history, and moral values extracted from experience of past generations, lead to sophistication of civilized security aspirations. They stretch from the needs for food, shelter and reproduction on the lower end, through the needs of promoting one's social status, to the upper end of needs of comprehension and transmission of knowledge (Maslow 1954).

Achievement of complex needs often requires a considerable effort and usually is impossible by means of quick actions. Hence, complex needs are accompanied by readiness to defer gratification. Here lurks tremendous danger: when aspiration's achievement is very remote

and requires to compete for scarce resources, the final goal may be forgotten and replaced with an aim of just winning competition. For this reason civilization, as opposed to communality, is remarkable for its ability not to become engaged in competition for the sake of competition.

It is difficult both for a detached observer and for social actors themselves to draw the clear boundary between the struggle aimed on satisfaction of substantive needs and the struggle for power for its own sake. This uncertainty allowed Marx to make a diagnosis that an endless money-goods-money cycle of accumulation of capital alienates producer from results of his work and prevents or, at least, inhibits any pursuit of substantive needs. Consequently, capitalism is an obstacle in the way of civilization's progress.

Not only it is difficult to disentangle struggle for power from pursuit of substantive needs, but also reallocation of resources for achievement of a large-scale complex goal may be easily confused with exploitation. Furthermore, to seek a remote fulfillment of complex aims is possible only if they are perceived as vitally important, cause strong desires, and are surrounded by intensive emotions. Usually, save for saints, formation of complex needs takes place after more basic needs are satisfied (Maslow 1954: 146-54).

So, a typical picture of bearers of civilization would be of people, who are secure enough and do not care about making their living, who are obsessed by their “impractical” ideas, which do not bring any quick profit and sound as a caprice for majority of people, who may take an active part in, or use means accumulated through, competition for scarce resources, which resembles exploitation. There is no surprise that such people were regarded by partisans of Marxist ideas as enemies in the October revolution in 1917 in Russia and were annihilated or isolated from the formation of the “society of a new type.” Many of the best Russian people rejected the revolution and emigrated or became socially passive. Forces of communality had overcome forces of civilization. Yet new leaders expected tremendous progress of the society

consisting of “free conscious producers.” Alas, the country left without civilized government began to degenerate.

Before the revolution Lenin arguing with Kautsky insisted that there would be no bureaucracy right after the destruction of bourgeoisie state apparatus (1932). Working masses organized in *Sovety* (councils) will directly perform legislative, executive and control functions. They will have right to replace instantly any official, whose functions will be reduced to record keeping. So, there will be officials but no bureaucrats under socialism. Lenin spent a good deal of his time investigating and writing about bureaucracy because he was well aware of its power in the tzarist Russia. Despite that he was caught off guard by the lack of “mass consciousness and initiative” in his newly created state, and had to make first steps toward creating Soviet bureaucracy. At the X Congress of RCP he declared all other political parties except the Communist one illegal, and virtually removed it from any popular control. Lenin made a drastic attempt to balance power of the party apparatus by introducing New Economic Policy. Yet communal rules of behavior has already permeated the whole society. They are listed by

Zinoviev:

give less and take more; risk the minimum to gain the maximum; minimize personal responsibility and maximize the possibilities for distinction and social standing; minimize dependence on others while maximizing the dependence of others on oneself. (p.61)

Communality became as invisible as air, which is everywhere in equal degree and, hence, can not be detected. In this situation it was natural for leaders obsessed with Marxist ideology to blame “anachronisms of capitalism” for the failure to organize society. It led to the next wave of thoroughly annihilating of everything what remotely resembled the “old world” that existed before the revolution. The rest of civilized people who were in visible public positions at that time were exterminated during the Purges of 1936-8. Was this tragedy caused by the features of Stalin's personality? The answer, I believe, is given in the insightful film “Repentance” by Tengis Abuladze (1984): Stalin overcame his rivals because he helped to organize and became a

leader of communality forces, which needed a chief commander in their struggle against civilization.

4. Transformation of Soviet bureaucracy during the Brezhnev's period.

Generally speaking communality being free from the feeling of responsibility adjusts to despotism and terror much better than civilization. Yet it does not mean that communality is inherently related to violence. Primitive societies were very peaceful (Lenski 1966). It may be true that under terror communality competed more successfully with civilization. Yet this does not contradict the fact, that after the competition was won, death of Stalin opened new prospects for further flourishing of communality. Personal dictatorship as well as any personality (in a sense of being different from other people) is intrinsically hostile to communality based on mechanical solidarity. This fact determined the direction of fundamental changes in Soviet leadership after death of Stalin, and was captured very precisely by Brzezinski (1989):

Brezhnev and Kosygin mark the coming to power of a new generation of leaders, irrespective of whether they will for long retain their present position. Lenin's, Stalin's, and Khrushchev's formative experience was the unsettled period of conspiratorial activity, revolution, and - in Khrushchev's case - civil war and the early phase of Communism. The new leaders, beneficiaries of the revolution but no longer revolutionaries themselves, have matured in an established political setting in which the truly large issues of policy and leadership have been decided. Aspiring young bureaucrats, initially promoted during the purges, they could observe - but not suffer from - the debilitating consequences of political extremism and unpredictable personal rule. To this new generation of clerks, bureaucratic stability - indeed, bureaucratic dictatorship - must seem to be the only solid foundation for effective government.

Differentiation of functions to these bureaucrats is a norm, while personal charisma is ground for suspicion.(pp.7-8)

In other words, the new leadership bore two interconnected features: fear of personal rule and absence of belief that all problems of the Soviet Union stem from the survival of “anachronisms of the bourgeois past” and from “intrigues of agents of capitalism,” which have to be suppressed by any means. Therefore a new generation of party leaders started to pay more attention to improvement of administration and, especially, its economic methods. The first attempts to make

changes in this direction were made still under Khrushchev in 1962. Division of the Communist Party in two insubordinate hierarchies with separate responsibilities for ideology and economy was an important indicator of this transition.

Although younger party leaders, who were afraid of Khrushchev's more and more personal rule and accomplished the *coup d'etat*, rejected this reform, they recognized that the Communist Party could not direct the whole Soviet economy from Kremlin, and that large scale institutional reforms toward local decision making by specialists in business were inevitable. More rights and responsibility were given to directors of factories, *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, and trade organizations--to, so-called, *khoziaistvenniks*. But without free market and private ownership which remained under the strictest prohibition, and in the atmosphere of flourishing rules of communal behavior, named by A. Zinoviev, the reforms directed on depolitization and decentralization of power resulted in no expected economic improvement. Enormous increase in the number of authorities in the Soviet power system was the only outcome of the reforms. Numerous *khoziaistvenniks* quickly became disappointed in their ability to achieve any stable positive result in organizations they managed. The vast party apparatus was expanded with even broader administrative apparatus and both of them were haunted by a feeling that they were not able to rule. The only desire of Soviet authorities at this point was to avoid accusations by working masses and their requirements of better government.

Who were the working people at this moment? They were sick and tired because of pompous promises, which had never been kept, and because of suffering endless sacrifice in the name of radiant future. Many years of rewards independent of work results had made them apathetic to the directives coming from all levels of power hierarchy in the regard of work organization. Their skills and know-how knowledge had become rusted. They were ready to leave authorities in peace in exchange for existence undisturbed by directives from above. So, approximately in the seventieth in the Soviet Union was "signed" a tacit treaty between

incompetent management and incompetent labor. It marked one more large step in development of communality and brought stability to social relations in this tormented country. The other side of the medal was a deepening stagnation, which was predicted by Brzezinski as long ago as 1968:

History is full of precedents of a political elite being blind to its country's real needs and real interests. It is for these very reason I lean toward the stagnation-degeneration pattern [of development of the Soviet Union].(p.153)

The term “stagnation” was reinvented by Soviets themselves after the beginning of *glasnost'* campaign in 1985. An increasing flow of more and more candid publications (Ginzburg 1986; Shubkin 1986; Volokogonov 1987; Burlacky 1988; Moroz 1988; Naan 1988; Zamkov 1988; Popov G. 1989 a),b); Shmelev and Popov V. 1989) directed its fire against the “bureaucracy”, which was identified as main evil retarding development of the country.

The choice was not accidental. On the one hand, roots of the evil were obviously in the Soviet power system, which was formally highly centralized and hierarchical and was remarkable for amount of its paperwork. On the other hand, bureaucracy was attacked still by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the critical use of this term was safe with respect to possible accusations in an attempt upon the sacred principles of communism. In the course of growing *glasnost'* a number of other terms were introduced to describe the same phenomenon. For example, "*nomenklatura*" as an array of all people occupying positions with officially ascribed non-monetary privileges: receiving apartments without waiting for years in a queue, permission to buy food and other consumer goods in special shops, attached car (or cars) and driver etc. This provided an easy way to detect who are the “enemies of progress” on the basis of official lists of positions with ascribed privileges. Yet this term was not very useful because the majority of leaders of *perestroika* were high party functionaries ranking high on this list. Also, members of *nomenklatura* used lots of informal privileges and informal privileges of non-members of *nomenklatura* were, as in the salient case of people working in trade, indistinguishable and sometimes even exceeded those of members.

A better comprehension of Soviet bureaucracy can be achieved elaborating the term

“bureaucracy” in the way suggested by Zinoviev, who wrote:

People and organizations who compose bureaucracy are divided in two groups: those who deal immediately with people, and those who deal with paper: that is laws, decrees, instructions, certificates, reports, directives. The director of a factory or an institute, the head of section in a factory, a divisional commander, the secretary of a regional committee of the Party are not bureaucrats, although they are officials of the power and government apparatus. The bureaucratic apparatus in the proper sense of the word is formed by people and organizations connected with the second of the groups I have just mentioned. ... The important role in the power and government system is played by the people and organs of the first group. ... Thus one should not regard the Communist system as a bureaucratic one, although its bureaucratic apparatus is enormous. Red-tape and formalism (*bureaucratism*) are greatly developed in Communist society; they do not derive from the bureaucratic apparatus but from the general system of power and organization of the government of society.(pp.211-212)

The above statement, in my opinion, is slightly overgeneralized. Well-known universal disfunctions of “paper” bureaucracy did exist in the Soviet Union. But Zinoviev is correct that taken separately they cannot explain the country’s decay. Very similar idea is expressed by G.

Popov:

I think it is absolutely correct to see in the administrative system's *bureaucratism* the *bureaucratism* of particular historical type. It can not be analyzed in the framework of merely authority relations, but it is necessary to reckon with ownership relations, which made possible its [*bureaucratism's*] appearance: formal in many aspects character of communal property, its belonging to anybody and simultaneously to nobody, working person's position as a formal owner and his real alienation from the role of the master.

In the administrative system all kinds of *bureaucratism* have grown together: *bureaucratism* of party apparatus, *bureaucratism* of state apparatus, *bureaucratism* of the apparatus of civil organizations. As an outcome the solid mechanism has emerged. All its parts are interwoven. They interact and support each other. There are disagreements among them, but they are not essential. The most important is that, what unites all of them.(pp.52-53)

And a treaty between incompetent labor and incompetent management is this integrating force which is, in turn, cemented by *bureaucratism* of very particular kind to whose analysis we proceed now.

5. A treaty of incompetent labor and incompetent management.

At first sight the treaty between incompetent labor and incompetent management is incompatible with the existence of stratification in the Soviet Union. If both parties are incompetent and do not perform their functions, what does create the basis for stratification? It is not a question of methods of maintaining stratification, which by the way are: brainwashing, powerful apparatus of oppression, and borders of the country closed for information, goods and travelers. The question is: what are the attributes, differences in which allows some social mechanism to recognize proper candidates for particular levels in stratification? In my opinion, they are parentage and aggressiveness in satisfaction of one's desires. Yet, whether these attributes are not among the major criteria for social promotion in any human society? Yes, they are. But in civilized modern societies, selection goes also along the rules of free market and is colored by belief in existence of "reasons of state." Even more important is that in the civilized modern world aggressiveness may be and often is directed on production, when in the Soviet Union it was directed on seizure in full compliance with the rules of communality. If overt violence was not a common rule for the promotion in the Soviet system of stratification, the level reached by somebody usually depended purely on personal relations and ability to suppress any moral scruples if they contradicted career's interests. The criterion for promotion based on successful performance of duties was almost irrelevant, because there were no real duties in Soviet management. Even responsibility to carry out the plan may not be taken on its face value and will be discussed in more detail further.

The top of Soviet stratification was occupied by party leaders, who were the most aggressive members of society since the October revolution in 1917. During the stagnation period their belief in the possibility to build communism has evaporated in a large extent, and they were satisfied now deceiving themselves by illusion of having power in their peaceful country, where the average level of well-being is not much lower than their own. It does not mean that there were no intrigues and competition among the power wielders. Yet this "political"

process was reduced to the level of three year old children game: "You don't love me? Then I don't love you, but I love Vania". To put it in other words:

Power in Communist societies is an element not of political relations but of other social relations, namely communal ones. It is power for its own sake and has no other basis than itself. Here power doesn't exist for society. On the contrary society only exists, is recognized and permitted to a degree necessary and sufficient for the production and functioning of power. Under communism society, biologically speaking, is merely power's "cultural milieu" and an arena for its own circus. (Zinoviev 1984: 143)

So much about the upper crust of the society, on whose bottom were people, who did not want and/or were not able to take risk, to intrigue and struggle for power. If before Stalin's death there had been many true believers in the "directing and organizing role of the Communist party," during the stagnation period their number has dropped to almost zero. Dissidents, whose number was even smaller than of true believers were efficiently isolated. Most of other common people, who constituted an overwhelming majority, were ready to sacrifice any manifestation of their desires, which were not gratified in the "planned" manner, in exchange for absence of real attempt to control fulfillment of production and distribution plan, which was constructed on the top with seriousness of a child playing a civil servant.

Educational and ideological systems made the sacrifice of personal freedom not very painful for majority of people in the Soviet Union due to fundamental work of. They were beginning to toil on destruction of personality when their subject—a 6-year old pupil entered an elementary school, or even when a 3-year old child went to a state day care program. Methods employed there were essentially the same as those that were utilized in fascist concentration camps (Bettelheim 1960: 109). Yet, because of an early start--a person did not need to be re-socialized--and plenty of time for gradually achieving the malicious goal, they were certainly less cruel and violent. Anyway, majority of people leaving high school had internalized without much pain two personality features: first, an ability to keep separate the abstract stuff of Marxism-Leninism and their every-day experiences; second, feeling of permanent guilt,

stemming from the groundless belief that they were given by the state much more than they--who have no value for the state--deserved. Ideology and public opinion continued to form and maintain these two features throughout the whole life of majority of Soviet people. Zinoviev writes:

In Communist society an enormous mass of people are occupied professionally and semi-professionally with the task of bringing man down to the level of a certain small rodent. Their most powerful weapons in this business are their own insignificance, reptility and bestiality.(1984: 132)

But in schools, where teachers tried to save the rest of their self-esteem by destroying it in helpless children, the process was most visible.

Although the process of personality destruction has advanced very far, yet it was never completed. Hence, people had needs and pursued their gratification even if they were not planned--and in the Soviet Union it usually meant forbidden--from the top. Probably, these "criminal" activities, although they reinforced feeling of guilt, helped to save remnants of personality. So, common people continually were breaking the treaty between incompetent labor and incompetent management in some extent.

Situation was even worse with power wielders, who were not coerced by any formal mechanism. Being as unpredictable and as ambitious as only children may be, they periodically came up with programs, which had to bring up the "radiant future for all working people". It became a tradition to formulate every five-year plan as a radical step toward communism, which must involve all Soviet people and improve tremendously their well-being.

This non-observance of the treaty created an niche for middle class, whose function is to weaken tensions between the top and bottom. Certainly there was no clear boundary dividing these three levels. Yet each of them has its typical representatives. Members of Central Committee of CPSU, which necessarily include leaders of Gosplan, Council of Ministers, may be placed on the top. Directors of factories, *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, banks, construction companies, mines - *khoziaistvenniks* and officials from trade and other distribution systems of

consumer goods give us a clue, who the middle-class people are. Workers producing something what they cannot steal and sell and, especially, engineers occupying non-administrative positions are typical for the bottom of the society.

How did the middle-class carry out its function? In a large degree by manipulation of information flowing down in the form of directives and up in the form of reports about implementation of directives. Usually the downward flow passed toward its destination without much resistance or change if it was not harmful for transmitting links. Yet fulfillment of directives was impossible.

So, the report flying back to the top usually did not reflect reality. A middle-class official occupying some level of "bureaucracy" connived at the discrepancy and charged the lower level for this service in the amount large enough to pay the next level for analogous favor and to have some profit. One level is sometimes not enough to "correct" the report in a necessary extent and hide the person who made the "correction". Because of this the distortion grows while the report moves toward the top and some quantitative data about this process and its scale may be found in Shmelev's and V. Popov's book (1989). According to this source, for example, it is possible that the national revenue of the Soviet Union for the period 1928-85 had increased not 85 (according to official data by TsSU) but only 6 - 7 times.

Middle-class began to exercise its function of mediator still during Lenin's and, obviously, during Stalin's rule (Fainsod 1963: 419). Then it was literally a deadly dangerous undertaking. Yet after the treaty had been signed middle-class position became a perfect place for communality's flourishing. Everything what flowed between the top and the bottom became redistributed and substantial profit was extracted from this process sometimes without any perceivable benefit for anybody except "bureaucrats" themselves.

In principle, usefulness of redistribution may lie in mere existence of an alternative to the centrally planned allocation of goods and services. For example, a mother was able to pay some

toll and receive milk for her baby despite the fact, that no milk should come to her town according to central plan. Yet in the atmosphere of secrecy it became possible for "bureaucracy" to create "artificial deficit" claiming that there were no resources allocated from the top for some purpose, when they really were. So, the middle-class was able to wring out some personal profit without even any redistribution effort. This kind of behavior was typical for the Soviet trade system and is described, for example, by G. Popov (1989: 73).

Redistribution of resources moving toward and from the top, which were not suitable for personal consumption, became also widespread. A possibility of gaining profit from their reallocation stems, in final analysis, from the next fact. Given more resources, a director of enterprise was able to fulfill the plan in a larger extent and, consequently, needed to pay less for distortion of report's information. So, "bureaucracy" lived from existence of centralized system of management with its large-scale streams of resources and information. This explains, for example, the otherwise inexplicable case of the Soviet largest producer of trucks, approximately 45% of whose profit were taken away to the top to be "completely returned back"(Shmelev and V.Popov 1989: 353). The same book gives an example of unbelievable scale of artificially created top-bottom flow of information in the Soviet "bureaucratic" system (p.373).

The above picture may be perceived as merely one more case of a corrupted system. Yet the extent and presence of some positive function of corruption in the Soviet Union are noteworthy and pose the question: whether the Soviet management system can be considered a bureaucratic one in Weberian sense without unsuitably stretching the term?

6. Causal analysis of characteristics of Weberian and Soviet bureaucracies

Weber wrote about characteristics of bureaucracy: "the management of the office follows general rules" (1978: 958). Modern social scientific discourse made this statement more concrete (Beetham 1987:24-5).

Political economy added to our understanding by discovering that general rule usually is more salient in the case of companies that live from sales of their production, as compared with organizations whose functioning is supported by tax payers. Taxes are less directly connected with the quality or/and quantity of goods and services, which they are paid for. Consequently, although there may be competition among the tax-funded organizations for their share, the criterion for selecting among competitors is harder to comprehend than another one shaped by market forces. Weber, having state bureaucracy in mind, mentioned himself:

Only the expert knowledge of private economic interest groups in the field of "business" is superior to the expert knowledge of the bureaucracy. (p.994)

In this sense a market organization may be more rational than a tax-funded one. It is revealing that latter not former one usually is more strictly hierarchical and more heavily relying on written documents. Probably because of this fact, only tax-funded organizations are considered bureaucratic by political economy.

Modern theory of public administration sees the main ground for bureaucratic vs. non-bureaucratic distinction in the mode of organization's accountability: public versus private. Although public accountability is considered to be more apt to bureaucratization, it supposedly has a protective mechanism against this trend. Namely, public offices require for their management a well-developed sense of "reason of state". So, there are two possible foundations for the general rule: market interests of business enterprises and "reason of state". Both of them are rational and general in the extent they represent interests of the system as a whole during the more or less extended period of time.

There was, indeed, a great difficulty for creating any competing organization in an atmosphere of communality of the Soviet Union. Soviet administrators utterly disappointed in the possibility of any long-term prediction knew only one general rule: make a quick personal profit. Zinoviev speaking about search of political consensus in the Soviet Union says:

The essence of agreement is not the discovery of the best variant from some objective point of view, but in a resolution of the problem of the relationships among people in power in the situation in question. Of course, the intrinsic

interests connected with the matter in hand do play a role and it would be a mistake to dismiss them entirely. But the issue itself merely provides the context in which people have to solve their social problems: i.e. decide how to preserve or strengthen their social position, avoid danger, harm their colleagues and so on. (p.209-10)

The next feature of bureaucracy in the Weberian framework--existence of jurisdictional areas follows directly from the impossibility to create an universal general rule, which would be useful for any kind of organization in any situation. In the Soviet Union offices were also separated but mostly for a different reason that is similar to one leading to separation of prebends.

Technical preparation of officials is another feature of Weberian bureaucracy derived from the necessity to learn how to apply the general rule to the particular office. Its analogue in the Soviet Union would be an ideological schooling, whose function was to select people who were able to keep apart two general rules: the abstract one, formulated by classics of Marxism-Leninism, and the practical one of pursuing quick personal profit.

One more characteristic of bureaucracy named by Weber is office hierarchy. Functionally it stems from imperfection of bureaucratic rationality and demonstrates the limits of the pure-type constructs. Social reality is too complex for any rationally built organizational structure to eliminate uncertainty completely. For this reason, to run an organization requires from people a range of problem-solving aptitudes--to grasp a new situation, to make predictions, to take risk--that differ from person to person. Those who are highly apt for these tasks constitute a minority in any society (Maslow 1970). Fortunately, provision of large amount of rather uniform services requires making many routine decisions and only a few of unusual ones. Matching decreasing number of increasingly complex decisions with a decreasing number of individuals who are able to make them well leads, according to Weber's thought, to hierarchical structure of bureaucratic rule. When a bureaucratic machine runs into a highly unusual case, a cumbersome appeal system is activated or even an intervention of substantial justice is needed to provide the proper service.

The hierarchy of the Soviet bureaucracy was formed also as an attempt to rule the country by a few “proper” people still in Lenin's time. The structure was operating till 1985 but was carrying out a different function during the last twenty years. It served as a multilevel damper between power-wielders and common people. The judicial system with its own bureaucracy was living in a large extent from fees it collected for not interfering in this situation.

According to Weberian theory, the role of bureaucratic hierarchy is to transfer information about the organization's environment gathered by front-line workers toward the top for decision-making, and directives from the top toward the front-line workers for implementation. In the Soviet Union, indeed, bureaucratic hierarchy performed the role of multilevel system that distorted the upward flow of information and detained commands moving from the top downwards. In this way it created conditions for peaceful coexistence of power-wielders and common people in the decaying country.

It is not surprising that written documents, which were as typical for the Soviet bureaucracy as they are for the Weberian "pure" type, performed a completely different role. They served as bookkeeping tools which, on the one hand, prevented several payments for the same illegal service and, on the other hand, they closed ways to solving problems without “official” mediation. Yet the necessity to distort information and illegal status of bribing, that did not allow to record a “price” paid for “bureaucratic” services, precluded direct reading of written documents. The currently widespread practice of “double accounting” that drives Western financial specialists working in former communist countries into insanity, is absolutely natural for their colleagues trained in Soviet bureaucratic structures.

Modern Weberian theory of bureaucracy also reckons with the lack of trust as a ground for existence of files. Insistence on written communication also may be explained as stemming from the unconscious belief in concordance of written and rational expression. Finally, files allow to track commands or information and analyze mistakes in order to refine rational

management. Such analysis, certainly, would meet enormous resistance from “bureaucrats” in the Soviet Union.

The last characteristic of bureaucracy listed by Weber is full working capacity of an official. It may be explained functionally by making an assumption that complete absorption of an official by his or her duties would facilitate his personality's formation according to his office's requirements. If we accept that there is lack of people able to perform adequately at the upper levels of bureaucracy, we have another rationale for full day working capacity. Lack of trust in relations among bureaucrats may lead to an attempt to have less people on the top (Kanter 1977). That would lead, in turn, to their maximum workload. File and rank of bureaucracy work a full day because their duties are so simple that almost everyone can carry them out. This causes competition leading to low salaries, which make full time work a necessity.

In the case of Soviet bureaucracy competition was also an important reason for full working day of lower level officials. Profit, which take form of a bribe, of those of them who are in direct contact with clients, depended on number of people they served. Salary of a bureaucrat who was still at the bottom of hierarchy and did not meet clients--the so-called "paper" bureaucrat--was usually so miserable that he or she had to work full day too. Soviet power-wielders of Brezhnev's period were different. A tradition of staying in office until death, often despite many months spent in hospitals and rehabilitation houses, indicates that it is hardly possible to explain functionally the full day work in this case. Furthermore, it is difficult to apply the word "work" to self-centered and self-perpetuating activities of Soviet leaders, who were removed from any control by their subjects.

7. Conclusions

The above analysis shows that, though all characteristics of bureaucracy outlined by Weber (1978) may be formally found in the Soviet bureaucracy, they reflect in principle distinct

functions. Probably the most fundamental difference is in the nature of general rule. Weberian tradition provides us with two of them. One governs a business enterprise under market conditions. Another one stems from the “reason of state.” Both of them are rational in the sense of promoting behavior according to interests of managed organization as a whole. Weberian “pure-type” bureaucracy functions as a conductor of policies toward front-line workers and enables information's flow in the opposite direction. It is assumed that policies are formulated on the basis of the general rule by strategic planners at the top.

The general rule of Soviet bureaucracy was not imposed by leaders of the country and did not serve their government. It was rather generated by the logic of communality, which permeated the whole Soviet society from top to bottom. Indeed, the general rule reflected inability of Soviet leadership to manage the country. Its motto was: try to support peaceful coexistence of Soviet elite and common people through protecting the latter from necessity to behave according the impracticable directives of the former, and preventing information about the grave situation in the country from reaching its leaders. The administration based on this rule made the Soviet system inefficient beyond any extent the dysfunction of “paper” bureaucracy (Beetham 1987: 16) could be responsible for. Actually, the country was left for the last twenty years without government. In contradiction to Huntington (1968), this was perceived by majority of its population as happy time comparing with the period of Stalin's violent rule. Unfortunately, the happiness of return to communality has endured only as long as a habit to work lasted, and heedlessly exploited natural resources were able to maintain some minimal level of well-being (Popov G. 1989b: 12).

Disappearance of illusions was accelerated by growing perception of economic misery when compared with the rest of the world. The “iron curtain” reliably isolated common people from outside information, but the Communist Party leaders had their eyes open. For this reason some of them launched *perestroika*. Yet due to “excellent” work of Soviet “bureaucracy” they

had underestimated the level of decay of their country and overestimated their own ability to rebuild Soviet economy. Starting the changes in 1985 they believed that inefficiency of "bureaucratic" apparatus is responsible for the country's stagnation, and its destruction would open the way to radiant communist future. A desire of national and regional independence, magnitude of statistical distortions, extent of destruction of personality of Soviet people, unwillingness of majority of common people to leave the heaven of communality for participating in cooperative movement and in any other reforms directed toward the market economy were as a bolt from the blue for the Soviet leaders.

Now political leaders of the former Soviet Union are on the eve of one more discovery. Namely, the necessity to build an inevitably bureaucratic structure of the state again. How it will be done will depend, in a large extent, on the imprint left on the former Soviet states by bureaucracy that existed until 1985. It does not mean that emerging bureaucratic structures will be similar to those of stagnation time. Critical approach and learning from mistakes are possible. Yet a chance of returning to "good old" times is increasing, at least for some time, when democratic structures give more say to masses which are sick and tired of the turmoil caused by introduction of market forces and are only able to compare their living conditions now and before the 1985.

8. Bibliography and references

- Beetham, D. 1987. Bureaucracy England, Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Bettelheim, B. 1960. The Informed Heart; Autonomy in a Mass Age Glencoe, IL: Free Press
- Brzezinski, Z. (ed. by) 1969. Dilemmas of Change in Soviet Politics New York: Columbia University Press
- Brzezinski, Z. 1989. The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century New York: Scribner

- Burlacky, F. 1988. "Khrushchev. *Shtrikhi k politicheskomu portretu.*" Literaturnaia gazeta, **8**, February 24
- Djilas, M. 1957. The New Class, An Analysis of the Communist System New York: Praeger.
Cited from Dalby, M. and Werthman M.(ed. by) 1971. Bureaucracy in Historical Perspective Glenview,IL: Scott, Foresman & Co.
- Fainsod, M. 1953. How Russia Is Ruled Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press. Cited from Dalby, M. and Werthman M.(ed. by) 1971. Bureaucracy in Historical Perspective Glenview,IL: Scott, Foresman & Co.
- Friedrich, C. and Brzezinski, Z. 1956. Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Ginzburg, V. 1986. "Koe-cto o 'krainostiakh biurokratizma'" Literaturnaia gazeta, **12**, March 19
- Huntington, S. 1968. Political Order in Changing Societies New Haven: Yale University Press
- Kanter, R. 1977. Men and Women of the Corporation New York: Basic Books
- Lenin, V. 1932. State and Revolution New York: International Publishers
- Lenski, G. 1966. Power and Privilege New York: McGraw-Hill
- Linz, J. 1975. "Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes." In ed. by Greenstein, F. and Polsby, N. Macropolitical Theory Reading, MA: Addison-Welsley
- Maslow, A. 1954. Motivation and Personality New York: Harper
- Maslow, A. 1970. "The superior person." In American Bureaucracy ed. by Bennis, W. Chicago: Aldine Publishing
- Moroz, O. 1988. "Duraki, duraki, duraki bez chisla ..." Literaturnaia gazeta, **22**, June 1
- Naan, G. 1988. "Vlast' i razum. Biurokratia i intelligencia v kapitalisticheskom obschestve." EKO, **163**, January
- Parsons, T. 1977. The evolution of Societies Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall

- Paul, E. (ed. by) 1990. Totalitarianism at the Crossroads New Brunswick: Transaction Books
- Popov, G. 1989a. Puti perestroiki Moscow: *Ekonomika*
- Popov, G. 1989b. Koren' problem Moscow: *Politizdat*
- Shlapentokh, V. 1989. Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia New York: Oxford University Press
- Shmelev, N. and Popov, V. 1989. Na perelome Moscow: *Izdatel'stvo APN*
- Shubkin, V. 1986. "Ten'" Literaturnaia gazeta, **49**, December 3
- Sik, O. 1980. The Communist Power System New York: Praeger
- Volokogonov, D. 1987. "Fenomen Stalina." Literaturnaia gazeta, **50**, December 9
- Weber, M. 1978. Economy and Society Berkeley: University of California Press
- Zamkov, O. 1988. "Ot kogo i zachem skryvaetsia statistika?" EKO, **173**, November
- Zinoviev, A. 1984. The Reality of Communism New York: Schocken Books