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Social Stratification and Sociology in the Soviet Union*

Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard B. Dobson

THE revival of Soviet sociology in the post-Stalin era is indicative of the changes in that society made possible by destalinization. Academic sociology is not possible in a fully totalitarian society. Such regimes as the Nazi, the Stalinist, and seemingly the Maoist, which demand strict adherence to an official creed and tolerate not the slightest opposition to the party line, dare not permit sociologists to shed light on the distribution of wealth and privileges or to find out "kto kogo?"—"who gets whom?" Although there is always a gap between social reality and the ideological justification of a social order, in a totalitarian system empirical facts may be much more damaging to the ideology, since it is proclaimed as a sacred truth and all-encompassing explanation of man's social life. It is feared that the sheer opportunity to analyse social reality empirically will supply ammunition to the critics of the existing order, to those who point to the discrepancy between what is and what should be.

In the United States and other Western countries, sociology has been a "critical discipline." In the heartland of modern sociology, the US, its practitioners have documented almost *ad nauseam* the extent to which American reality and the American creed of an egalitarian society are at odds. Sociologists have emphasized the failings of the school system in reducing the differences in ability and motivation among children from families of varying income and cultural levels. They have shown the limits of the efforts to curtail wealth or income differentials through progressive tax policy. They have documented the punitive consequences of low status on personality and health. With few exceptions, such writings have been cast in the context of criticism of the society and various of its institutions for repressing opportunity and inhibiting equality. American and other Western sociologists as a group have been more supportive of "liberal" or "left" egalitarian politics than those in any other field in academe.¹

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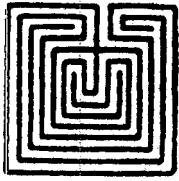
¹ S. M. Lipset and E. C. Ladd, Jr., "The Politics of American Sociologists," *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1972), pp. 67-104.

Although only slightly more than a decade old in its revived empirical form, sociology in the communist world bears clear resemblance to the field in other countries both in its value orientations and in findings, particularly in the area of social stratification.² Thus, as a perusal of the work of Eastern scholars makes evident, almost all their writings, like those of American students of stratification, evince a positive concern for a more egalitarian society. Accepting the communist goal of equality, they document the existence of considerable inequality in terms of power, income, status, and opportunity within their country and show its relation to family socio-economic background, sex, community of origin (metropolitan to rural), and less frequently to national or ethnic background.

The Soviet sociologists differ from their American and other western counterparts in assuming (at least publicly) that their society and governmental regime is in a transitional stage which will lead increasingly and inevitably to the achievable goal of real equality, i.e. communism, a system without differentiated strata or variations in reward. Unlike most western students of stratification they do not attribute the persistence of inequality in their country to the desire of the privileged to maintain a superior position for themselves and their kin. Their data are rarely presented as an explicit critique of some major aspect of the society. And although quantitative comparisons with the results of comparable research in non-Soviet societies are rarely made, there are frequent comments in Soviet academic journals that the research findings

² Lipset has compared earlier Soviet research in stratification with Western work in S. M. Lipset, "Social Mobility and Equal Opportunity," *The Public Interest*, No. 29 (Fall, 1972), pp. 90-108, and S. M. Lipset, "La mobilité sociale et les objectifs socialistes," *Sociologie et sociétés*, 4 (November 1972), pp. 193-224. Questions of social mobility were examined comparatively in S. M. Lipset and Reinhardt Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). Pioneering work in the area of Soviet social stratification has been done by Alex Inkeles and Robert Feldmesser. See, in particular, Alex Inkeles, "Social Stratification and Mobility in the Soviet Union," in R. Bendix and S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 516-26, and Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959). More recent contributions include Zev Katz, *Hereditary Elements in Education and Social Structure in the USSR* (Glasgow: Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, University of Glasgow, 1969); David Lane, *The End of Inequality? Stratification Under State Socialism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); Frank Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order: Social Stratification in Capitalist and Communist Societies* (New York: Praeger, 1972); Zev Katz, *Patterns of Social Stratification in the USSR* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Studies, M.I.T., 1972); Zev Katz, *Patterns of Social Mobility in the USSR* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Studies, M.I.T., 1972); and Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (New York: Walker & Co., 1972). The authors wish to express their thanks to Dr Katz for his assistance in locating materials. A valuable collection of recent Soviet writing in this area is the volume *Social Stratification and Mobility in the USSR*, edited and translated by Murray Yanowitch and Wesley Fisher, with an introduction by S. M. Lipset (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1973) (now in press). In the present article, the authors have sought to refer the reader to pertinent translations from the Russian, when such materials exist. Also noteworthy is the comparative study by Janina Markiewicz-Lagneau, *Education, égalité et socialisme: théorie et pratique de la différenciation sociale en pays socialistes* (Paris: Anthropos, 1969).

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12. Social Status and Inequality of Access to Higher Education in the USSR

RICHARD B. DOBSON

Since its inception, the Soviet government has committed itself to the democratization of higher education. After coming to power, the Bolshevik Party set out to use education as a tool to reshape the social order—to provide the necessary ideological tempering, transmit the technical skills required for the building of a modern industrial economy, and obliterate distinctions between social groups and classes. Policies ensuring workers and peasants access to the higher schools, in particular, were designed to bring talent to the top, to break the "ruling classes'" monopoly of education, "culture," and privilege, and to create a new "socialist intelligentsia" devoted to the Soviet regime.¹

The drive to industrialize in the thirties

coupled with a rapid expansion of the specialized secondary and higher educational institutions, made possible an extraordinary degree of upward mobility. Access to higher education was by no means afforded by merit alone—social and political considerations were no less important. Preparatory programs called "workers' faculties" (*rab-fakty*) fed thousands of recruits from the working class into the higher schools. The graduates of the "proletarianized" *vuzy* (higher educational institutions*) in turn swelled the ranks of the intelligentsia.²

**Vuz* is an often used acronym for the Russian *vysshee uchebnoe zavedeniye*, meaning "higher educational institution." *Vuzy* is the plural of *vuz*.

In the latter half of the thirties, pressure to enroll great numbers of workers and peasants was relaxed. Restrictions on access to higher education for "alien social elements" were removed, and academic standards were raised. By 1936, achievement tests were instituted in order to allow the selection of the best qualified. The proportion of students classified as "workers" or "peasants" declined from 72 percent in 1932 to 56 percent in 1938. From that year until recently, figures on the social composition of students in higher education were not published. It is very likely that working-class and peasantry representation declined further in subsequent years as a result of other changes. Not only were the workers' faculties phased out, but modest tuition fees were introduced in 1940 (and continued until 1956) for students in the upper grades of the secondary school and in *vuzy*.³

In the course of the thirties, while crushing real and imagined opposition within the society, the Stalinist dictatorship was concentrating in its hands information on political and social matters. In 1936, "pedology"—the social-psychological study of the learning process—was authoritatively denounced as a "bourgeois" pseudo-science and was suppressed.⁴ Independent research by social scientists was ruled out; valuable studies of the factors affecting educational performance which had begun in the twenties ceased. The question of the extent to which differences in status affected educational opportunity, occupational attainment, and the distribution of rewards in society became shrouded in official secrecy. Certainly no Soviet sociological research explored this problem.⁵

The issue of how privilege may be transmitted through the educational system was revived in the late fifties. Expressing both practical and ideological concerns, Premier Khrushchev spoke bluntly about the shortcomings of the educational system which was to serve the building of communism. As more and more young people went on not only to complete the mandatory seven years

of schooling, but to graduate from secondary school, not every graduate could count on getting a higher education. The secondary school, which traditionally served as a springboard to higher education, was said to foster a disdainful attitude toward manual work. It was "divorced from life"—at variance both with the economy's needs for skilled workers and with the values of the new communist man.

Access to higher education had become restricted for those of lower status. Khrushchev disclosed that only 30 to 40 percent of the students in Moscow's higher educational institutions came from working-class or collective-farm families, although the latter comprised the great bulk of the population.⁶ Sometimes, he asserted, admittance to *vuzy* was the result less of the student's motivation and ability than of "a competition of parents" who would not only push their children along the path toward a high-status position, but who, by influencing or even bribing admissions officials, would pave their way.⁷

The anecdote for these social ills, in Khrushchev's view, was a solid dose of labor training in secondary school, followed by practical work "in production." Regulations governing admission to *vuzy* were to be changed, as well. Recommendations of Party, Komsomol, and union organizations were to weigh more heavily, and "production candidates" (those with a secondary education who had worked for at least two years) were to comprise up to four-fifths of the entering classes. In this way, youth would be taught to respect labor, and the work period would weed out the less motivated and less able and thus equalize to some degree working-class and intelligentsia youth's chances for higher education.⁸

The sweeping reforms carried out at the end of the fifties gave rise to additional problems. Although pupils learned trades in secondary school, and most *vuz* students acquired work experience, they regarded work in a factory, shop, or farm as an unfortunate detour from their main objec-

MOBILITY AND STRATIFICATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

Richard B. Dobson

Department of Sociology, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80907;
and Russian Research Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

INTRODUCTION

Since 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in the name of the working people, the nature of social inequality in the USSR has been the subject of intense debate. That the Bolsheviks carried out a social revolution of unprecedented dimensions has been recognized on all sides; but whether the means used to achieve it were justified, and whether the new social order embodies the ideals of liberty and equality have inspired seemingly endless polemics. To be sure, the political coloring of the debate has stemmed largely from the Soviet Communists' own sense of mission and avowedly revolutionary goals, perceived by many either as a threat or as a cause demanding their devotion. A dearth of information on many aspects of the problem has also played a role, resulting in a disjunction between ideological claims on one side or the other and the empirical data that might substantiate them. And in part responsible for the lack of information was the fate of Soviet sociology itself: a lively discipline in the 1920s, it had been denounced as a "bourgeois pseudoscience" and effectively suppressed in the 1930s. For some time, most research on social stratification was carried out by a handful of Western scholars who relied heavily upon the reports of emigrés and the scattered published data (e.g. Inkeles 1950, 1960; Moore 1950, 1954; Feldmesser 1955, 1956, 1966, 1968; Inkeles & Bauer 1959). Only since de-Stalinization in the late 1950s, when Soviet sociology was rehabilitated, has social inequality begun to be investigated once again within the Soviet Union. This article provides a brief overview of some of the recent stratification research and then a more detailed review of studies on social mobility.

During the past several decades, basically four general interpretations of structured social inequality have been advanced. According to one view, enunciated by Stalin in 1936 and consistently promulgated by official spokesmen of the Communist Party since then, state and cooperative ownership of the means of production is the main feature distinguishing Soviet society from capitalist societies. On this basis, two