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CONTRACTOR: University of Pennsylvania

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Moshe Lewin

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SUMMARY

A Bureaucracy With A Difference

Although the central theme here is the Stalinist period, the paper sketches out stages and main trends in the Soviet bureaucracy’s (and the system’s) enduring as well as changing features over the whole period of its existence.

The report draws on a sample of ideas of a few Western scholars to show that bureaucratic phenomena they observed in the West were, sometimes in reality, sometimes in potentia, astonishingly similar to what we observe in the Soviet case.

But there were key features specific to the Soviet experience, among them such obvious factors as the weight of the country’s political history and cultural traditions, and the historically and ideologically motivated principle of the state’s monopolistic ownership of the country’s wealth. The latter is one of particular interest. Though it looked like an excellent power base allowing the state to plan and launch enormously ambitious developmental projects - it also prepared the foundation for the takeover of the system by an ubiquitous bureaucracy. This became, in fact, the system’s essential feature with a self-sustaining mechanism built into it: the more the system grew and lasted the deeper became the roots of this feature.

Also, well before the downfall of the regime, the party was losing its political character in the sense of becoming unable to formulate, and make its administrations execute, meaningful policies relevant to the country’s accumulating difficulties. The USSR was not really a one-party system anymore but an administrative, “non-party” system.

The report underscores that, first there were stages and important changes in the regime’s development, many of them unwanted, and that second, its bureaucratic core harbored powerful inbuilt mechanisms that shadowed the system’s development and carried the seeds of its future demise.

Spontaneity in Administrative Behavior

It transpires that the bureaucratic system was driven to a large extent by spontaneous forces although, on the face of it, all looked guided by an all-powerful regime. In fact many of the bureaucracy’s internal trends - its growth, cost, administrative complexity, capacity to fight for its interests, and hide what it wanted to hide from the Center. were irrepressible - purges

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1 This report contains provisional conclusions from an ongoing study of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is historical in approach but reveals deep-seated characteristics, and dynamics pertinent to the present. (NCSEER Note)
and terror notwithstanding. Whatever the agencies designed in order to control the tendency of administrative staffs to swell, to raise the pay of their higher ranks, and to incur ever more overhead costs - whether in 1939, or 1953, or in 1963, there was no real success.

Materials in super-secret memos issued by these agencies for the use of top leaders documented amply the incredible inventiveness - one would say virtuosity - employed by Commissariats (Stalin's times) or Ministries in thwarting the Center's efforts to cut their personnel or costs. They skillfully used the slightest discordance between different regulatory agencies, between procedures concerning budgeting, accounting, hiring and reporting, to always weather the successive stormy campaigns to “downsize” them. The methods consisted of cutting jobs that were actually not filled at all, or redefining job descriptions and cheating on their holders' actual professional profile, or creating many small administrative sectors including perfectly useless ones, or using financial reserves earmarked for other purposes.

The list of subterfuges is long - all in order to promote people to higher positions so that their salaries would go up, presumably legally, despite a general interdiction of any salary hikes. The aim of the operation was to be able to offer promotions to many people, create a personnel corps, especially at upper levels, personally loyal to the top bosses and ready to perform or cover up for poor performance. Moreover, administrations of factories and of government agencies massively employed different ways to create a pool of labor that received salaries and wages without the Center knowing of these or other types of reserves, which allowed the bosses to manipulate performance indicators but also acquire considerable power over people and over communities as dispensers of jobs at their own discretion.

Among other results of these tendencies was the fact that the administrations were always top heavy, i.e., there was an obvious plethora of well paid, high-ranking officials, as against understaffing in vital operative sectors in ministerial central bodies that required high quality professionals.

These were manifestations of “spontaneity “ with a vengeance - because it concerned a field of activity which immensely preoccupied the Center - both the Central Committee of the party and the Council of Ministers.

Stalinism and Bureaucracy

The Soviet regime was sometimes extremely dynamic, at other times less so, sluggish, often quite impotent, and its inability to handle its bureaucratic phenomenon is the best illustration of the latter. Relations and interactions between the growing and ever more complex administrative networks, and the leading central bodies was always a vexing problem, but never so complex and dramatic as in “the age of Stalin”.

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This report maintains that bureaucracy, in substance, tends to curtail despotism (without necessarily claiming to do so or being disloyal). Hence the sense of threat perceived by the despotic ruler who responded by a severe bashing of the party-and-governmental bodies.

Stalinism contained in its modus operandi more than one model. One expressed the tendency of “normal” bureaucratic agencies to evolve certain predictable ways of acting - “routines” for the sake of brevity. Another, the reaction of despotic and capricious power, not satisfied, or frustrated by these administrative practices, preferring recourse to “extraordinary measures - a whole system of them - that I call “shock methods”. Those included the improvisation of a string of “extraordinary”, “special” or “political” institutions or measures.

I trace the coexistence and clashes of the two submodels - “routine” versus “shock” - and show how and why “routine” prevailed - but only in the longer run. In other words, the bureaucratic principle was potentially a replacement model in gestation inside the Stalinist dictatorship - and did, in fact, replace the previous capricious despotism with a different dictatorial model.

Once the bureaucratic “routine” prevailed, notably after the dismissal of Khrushchev, a new look at the role and history of the party becomes possible. This power-house that actually was powerless under Stalin, was revived under Khrushchev, but as, in essence, an apparatus, not really a political party - its massive membership had no political rights and no direct say in conducting the affairs of the party or the country. Moreover, having taken upon itself the task of economic construction and development, the party itself was inevitably transformed into an economic agency. In this capacity it actually lost the ability to run effectively the economic agencies proper - because all it did was only duplicating them. This led to the extinction of the party as an independent political agency. Independent, that is, from the ministerial machineries it was supposed to be lording over. One of the points in this study - and more will come in later writings - is to show how the party becomes coopted by the agencies of the system it created.

*The Taming of The Controllers*

The report points to the multiplicity of controlling agencies, and to the fact that such multiplicity showed that they did not work. The bureaucratic maze was extremely complicated and crafty, and the more powerful were the special bodies created to control their growth, salaries and overhead, the more powerful (and successful) the intrigues to have such controlling agencies disbanded. This happened to the Workers Inspection in 1934, to the State Commission for Personnel in 1953, and to both the Ministry of State Control and the Party
Control Commission, though not by disbanding them but by consecutive curtailing of the scope of their jurisdictions.

The nomenklatura system - understood by the party and by many external observers as an ironclad controlling device over all the upper and lower leaderships - was not really that potent. There were many more hands involved in the nomination and dismissal of officials, including at the very top, than the formal claims would have us believe. The proposals of candidates for appointment came mostly from the ministries themselves - certainly not just from the Central Committee. The ministries often were able to manoeuver, or disregard the central nomenklatura altogether, to nominate and dismiss at will - and ask the Central Committee apparatus for confirmation later. There was no uniformity in the nomination process from above. Over the years ministers became more important figures than Central Committee departmental heads - not to mention smaller fry like “instructors”.

Thus, the ground was prepared for the “nomenklatura” system to work in both directions. Conceived as tool to control the state bureaucracy, it also had the potential to work in an opposite direction. Once everyone was a “nomenklaturshchik”, the process of “co-opting” the party apparatus by big ministerial machinery, and transforming it into an agency of the ministerial bureaucracy’s top layers was well on course.

Thus, the only agency capable of monitoring the bureaucratic machine and imposing valid national policies on it became neutralized. Without any serious control from below or from above, the bureaucracy was left alone and allowed to follow or succumb to its inner tendencies. Being the sole stratum actually executing all functions of government, their importance made them into the actual carriers of the state’s ownership principle. But this also meant that they were allowed to run the system to the ground. Fighting tooth and nail for their prerogatives and privileges, running up their cost and complicating the labyrinths of their internal structures, they turned into formidable fiefdoms. That splintered the unity of the governmental apparatus as a policy executing body, and rendered the mighty center quite impotent although for some time everything seemed all right on the surface and the Center looked firmly in control. A good analysis should have been able to discern many of these trends and their potentials, but nobody could really predict with any certainty the actual downfall of this regime, let alone its timing.
SOVIET BUREAUCRACY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Moshe Lewin

In A Nutshell

Bureaucracy, as a problem or historical factor, did not play much of a role in Bolshevik thinking. The analysis of the Bolsheviks was conducted mostly in terms of social classes whereas bureaucracy was not considered a class - or was not supposed to be one. The appearance of bureaucracy as a problem (at first as "bureaucratism" rather than bureaucracy) came with accession to power - and muddled the concepts as well as the realities.

An interplay of perceptions in ideological terms with changing political realities (facts of life) is our story, as well as that of the Soviet system at large.

We need to consider two key stages. The first involved the discovery of the apparatus - and its crucial force - when ex-tsarist government officials went on strike in 1918 against the new regime.

In stage two the state apparatus became a must - and the cooperation of specialists (experts), obviously from the previous regime, was a painful need and precondition for making the state machinery work.

Class composition seemed to be the biggest worry - notably because officials of the old regime, "alien" both ideologically and in terms of class origin, were known to epitomize bureaucratism.

This was why acquiring "their own cadres" - with the right class origin and ideology to be formed in the regime's own educational institutions, became for the Bolsheviks a crucial task ahead.

Although such a "class approach" in dealing with the bureaucratic phenomenon continued to be applied, the problem was obviously "bifocal": "proletarization" of the apparatus or not, inefficiency and bureau-pathology were growing and so were the numbers (and costs) of the administrations and their officials. "Bureaucratism" (and "bureaucratization") was becoming over the years a huge problem per se. But the party line attributing bureaucratism to the legacy of the tsarist past and the country's backwardness hindered the emergence of a more potent analysis of bureaucracy as a social and political phenomenon. "Proletarization" of the apparatus as the ideologically correct remedy against "bureaucratism" was proving to be ineffectual. The bureaucratic phenomenon had its own thrust and complexity that could not be expressed by class composition or by just listing its much-deplored malfunctions. Many problems were not just due to inefficiency and backwardness - they stemmed from previously misunderstood
social realities, past and present. A better analysis, and better-thought-out policies were needed, but this was not achieved (nor was it seriously attempted) to the very end of the regime.

Opposing factions battled against bureaucratization, especially inside the party: the party apparatus seemed to be taking over the party and thereby deeply changing its character. This kind of discovery led those who studied Western writings or read historical works on the tsarist government to the awareness of a worrisome political feature inherent in bureaucracy, namely its propensity to become a contender for power. The leadership, willy-nilly, had to yield some ground. This was done, at first, by a slow process of offering to some categories of officials rights previously reserved only for industrial workers. By the late 1920s an average official already earned much more than the average worker and top officials earned much more than the best-paid workers. In the 1930s, a more drastic "status revolution" took place. As the state became the central tenet of Soviet socialism, the orientation of the regime switched from workers to officials. The category of state servants, the natural carriers of the state principle, moved to the foreground in ideological formulae, in pace with their growing power in the state.

Full monopolization of power by the bureaucracy would be the last stage in the process that would take several decades to assume its final shape. But, as just stated, ideology had already begun to follow reality in the 1920s, by trying to put a veil on the real processes at work. This required many manipulations; "loans" from other ideologies and an eventual dumping of the founding fathers' creed: concepts such as socialism, marxism-leninism and communism tended to become simply, and especially in the 1930s, coextensive with whatever the system was doing at any given time. Many of the system's chief practitioners already used other, more convenient languages and rationales, and not just in private. Finally, class explanations were, in substance, pushed aside almost entirely. The enemy was now sought (and found) "within", serving foreign "intelligence services" from inside the party and its strongholds. Class origin stopped being reassuring: doubting, let alone opposing, defending somebody whom "the organs"1 accused, or just formulating things differently, became heretical activities. As class concepts died, they were replaced by the "demonization principle". Hence the prevailing strategies stopped claiming, let alone using, social analysis of any kind, and turned instead to exorcism, to promoting a "cult" and to uprooting undesirables by terror. We are, of course, talking about Stalinism.

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1"The organs" referred to the Russian term "organ bezopasnosti" - i.e. security services. The public called them simply organ - with an unmistakable ironic connotation, to say the least.
Was Stalinism an emanation of bureaucracy, as was often claimed, notably by Trotsky? There was in Stalinism a considerable ambiguity in this respect: it was undergirded by bureaucracy, yet it considered bureaucracy both indispensable (hence the pampering of their upper layers) and unreliable (hence the repressions).

Research and studies conducted worldwide recognized bureaucracy as an immensely complicated phenomenon. It is known that bureaucratic layers possess their own autonomous aspirations (despite the role of essentially impartial servants of the state they tend to ascribe to themselves), that manifest themselves in their ability to mind and fight for their interests and their proven capacity to head off measures undertaken against them. This is why, despite their growing numbers, cost and often glaring inefficiencies, they seemed to defy policies and measures of control, however severe. Moreover, on an even grander scale, state bureaucracies often succeeded in "taming" the absolutism and despotism of rulers by making them follow bureaucratic procedures and routines. Making top bureaucrats out of capricious autocrats would be the aspiration of a bureaucracy behind which was also lurking its potential to become contenders to a share, if not the fullness of political power in the state.

Stalin must have been aware of such problems. As attested by the scribbles he made in books he read Stalin studied the experience of the tsars and the tendency of bureaucracies to "regulate" absolutism could not have escaped his attention. He was certainly determined not to allow this to happen to him - and was, to some extent, successful on this score. In fact, Stalinism, made it impossible for the upper layers of bureaucracy to become a full fledged ruling class. The essence of Stalin’s policy consisted in insuring his own and his system's security, by transforming his aims into the corner stone of a specifically Stalinist mythology. Security agencies were called upon to uproot, en masse, presumed or potential enemies - notably, from amidst the regime's main levers, namely the state and party administrations. This was the quintessential Stalinist strategy which actually deprived the ruling party of its power and treated the state bureaucracy as a main suspect of unending web of sabotage activities against the regime, even if they actually were, or were becoming, the regime.

The Stalinist method of bloody purges looked like the ultimate weapon against the unstoppable growth, power, greed and malfunctions of the bureaucracy. But we will be able to demonstrate the futility of "the ultimate weapon". Purges, however bloody, were entirely useless as a method for changing bureaucracy’s way of being. Weber maintained that, once created, bureaucracy was very difficult to destroy, or even - one can add - just to make change some of its ways. This was especially true in Soviet conditions of bureaucratic monopoly over the implementation of policies all over the system. Stalin realized, maybe before others, that
bureaucracy only looked like some transparent pyramid, awaiting assignments and easy to control from the top. In fact, they tended to split into powerful, difficult-to-coordinate bureaucratic fiefdoms, each aiming at full control over its respective domain and tending, if unopposed, to tear apart the state system, rendering central planning and controls both indispensable and actually not feasible. In sum though, it was a monopoly over the whole Soviet system that they harbored, not so much, initially, by design but by a spontaneous thrust. When Soviet bureaucracy, after Stalin’s death, finally achieved its goals, it became apparent that it was not capable of planning. At best, it was just “administering”, in fact rather “overadministering” the domains under the tutelage of its numerous agencies. The moment it succeeded in becoming the system its thrust for a "total" bureaucratization turned actually out to have been an utopia, at least as far as the Soviet model went.

In any case, a full takeover of the system by the bureaucracy (even if they kept breeding plenty of little Stalins) was not possible, as long as Stalinism under Stalin himself still existed. Stalin’s image - and shadow - were so powerful, both within and outside the USSR that most observers abroad did not imagine this system being able to function without some Stalin replica at the helm. In fact, Stalin and Stalinism were replaced by a profoundly bureaucratic model, leading to a possible confirmation of the idea that Stalin himself must have been, in final analysis, “a creature of bureaucracy”, however unwilling.

Trends and Stages
The society that Lenin inherited and was burdened with after the Civil War was more primitive than the tsarist one has been at the end of the tsarist rule. In the desperate situation, compounded by the failure of revolutions in the West, the ground was ready, whatever “ism” the central government embraced, to reproduce another version of an "agrarian despotism". that the previous regime tried unsuccessfully to shed.

The idea of "socialization", central to any concept of the socialist ideology, took on the form of "nationalization", without reservations and nuances. Once this happened, one could observe - some even predicted - that the elites at the head of backward countries were condemned to becoming bureaucracies. In a Russia devastated by the combined effects of WW1 and the Civil War, concentrating scarce material and intellectual resources at the center and next (hopefully) spreading the experience and competence lower down looked like the obvious strategy to follow. But it was also a prescription for the scarce intellectual and administrative of the country to get sucked into the governmental process and to become part of a hierarchy that had a propensity toward metastatic growth. Something quite contrary to both democratization and socialization did occur, and persisted at later stages. despite the
development of industry and of large scale schooling efforts - but, by now, maybe even thanks to them.

Lenin must have realized this potential of his system quite early in the regime's history. He tried to escape the trap first by launching, in early 1918, his idea of "state capitalism" which might, by implication, have turned around the danger of an "asiatic" or "agrarian" variety of despotism. The Civil War interrupted this line of thought, to be replaced by the NEP experiment which Lenin initially saw as another version of state capitalism. In any case, Lenin now began to formulate a new strategy best expressed by the slogan: "no third revolution!".

He was, in particular, extremely worried by phenomena of bureaucratization in the new state. It was, probably, one of the factors that made him tell the Eleventh Party Congress that "the car does not drive at all in the direction the driver steers it" - this already in 1922! The Bolsheviks were still newcomers to the power game but unlike many of his collaborators, Lenin had enough prestige to be able to tell the truth - to admit that the state and its apparats were poorly understood and had a potential of dragging the new regime into uncharted and unwanted territory. Notably, they threatened to carry the regime back to the features of the past which seemed to penetrate the new system through many visible or barely visible capillaries, despite the resolve to destroy the old governmental machinery and build a new one. In fact, under Lenin and after him, the trends in the administrative machineries continued to move "elsewhere", either spontaneously or through deliberate choices made from "above", by the ever more powerful new "driver".

The making of the Soviet bureaucratic self, as presided over by the party, was full of painful rifts. The experts of the previous regime (the "bourgeois specialists") were indispensable, especially in the highest and most sensitive administrations - but could not be trusted. The trustworthy rulers with good party credentials were not competent enough. They could suppress but they were dependent on the expertise of their "bourgeois" subordinates and advisors in coping with their job requirements. Both sides, mostly, hated this situation. This kind of "dual power" should have subsided in due course through the creation and promotion of Soviet-made cadres, but this outcome, as we shall see, failed to materialize. The suspicion of "antiparty" tendencies inside the administrations continued unabated despite the fact that the "bourgeois specialists" were replaced, especially during the 1930s, by small and big bosses of a more reliable class origin. The previous (now diminishing) internal rift was compounded or replaced by a new one: in the key administrative apparats, where higher
specialization and education were crucial, the new bosses would still tend to be "non-
proletarian", especially from intellectual or white collar origin. On the face of it, this vexing
problem should have been solved by a full "rehabilitation" of these non-proletarian but still
"soviet made" officials. An ideological promotion of such a course of action actually did begin.
quite aggressively, in the 1920s, initially in relation to the party's own apparatus, notably in
the form of defending party bureaucrats against the attacks by the intra-party oppositions. The
ruling majority conferred on its apparatchiki the status of the party's, mainstay and an attack
against the apparatus was presented as an attack on the party, whatever the social background
of its officials.

This, of course, was not a problem of just defending them from the "calumnies" of the
critics (which had a valid point when railing against the bureaucratization of the party). It
reflected - as was already argued - a growing trend, early on in the soviet experience, toward
the making of an administrative class ever more the real carrier, inside and outside the party
of, first, the "nationalization" principle as socialism par excellence and, second, of the state as
the sole guarantor of the socialist system. The redefinition of the role of the party apparatus
would be followed, in due course, by a similar "rehabilitation" of the state apparatus at large,
thus "catching up" with a powerful objective trend inside the functioning and self image of the
state's mainstays,

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In the meantime, already in the 1920s and more impetuously during the 1930s,
governmental agencies and their bureaucracies were growing in complexity, evolving elaborate
and numerous ranks and categories and an intricate maze of hierarchies. An equally intricate
scaffolding of institutions was erected to control the spontaneous trends in the apparats and try
to boost the very low level of their performance.

When RKI, a government inspectorate³, was instructed in the 1920s to study the lower
apparat and help improve their performance in the provinces, they realized that they knew next
to nothing about these administrations and how to go about doing this job. How were they
going to "reorganize" it? Ia. A. Iakovlev, the new head of RKI, admitted to being
inexperienced: for example, he did not know that edicts from the center were not implemented
by the lower bodies, as long as they had not received a clear order from their direct supervisor
to act accordingly. His pal Mikoyan, the savvy head of Narkomtorg, already practiced this art

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³RKI stands for Raboche-Krest'ianskaia Inspeksia (workers' and Peasants' Inspection), a state agency for
controlling and studying the state administrations.
very skillfully and confided in Iakovlev how this was done. Still, Iakovlev already knew enough to complain that the apparat resembled an "organized barbarity".

Particularly critical was the level of the lower agencies, Krinitsky, from the party’s organizational department told a conference of the Union of State Employees that these agencies - including their planning departments - had no professional preparation whatsoever. And they were the ones that fed their superiors with their ignorant reporting. There are, incidentally, plenty of hair-raising stories about such reporting that can be found in the files of the central governmental agencies. Narkomfin, for example, deplored the fact that "the state of reporting from the lower local echelons [was] catastrophic".

Despite such "catastrophic" reporting, the pressure from above to report was equally bewildering. The matters that the wretched nizovka (local bureaucrats) were asked to report about were ridiculous and the task was virtually impossible. Consequently, the requests from above were mostly disregarded, pointing to the obvious conclusion that the top was not capable of getting its act together in coordinating the proliferating summits (golovki) of Moscow’s offices. The development of a whole system of uchraspemy (personnel department) in the state agencies aimed at training and controlling their personnel, was one answer to the predicament. A description by Commissar of Labor, Tsikhon, of his own "personnel sector" cadres and its "nomenklatura" (list of offices and officials under his Commissariat’s autonomous jurisdiction), discovered in RGAE (National Economy Archive), shows how intricate the organization of such a sector was. The system of nomenklatura - with its complexities, routines and absurdities was an other maze. The task of defining, classifying the staffs (the so-called shtatnoe raspisanie) for the whole administration looks like a Sisyphean one. Frequent shake-ups, reorganizations and dismissals of officials (chistki or purges), and countless measures to curtail, make leaner, cheaper, prohibit proliferation, and simplify, amounted to an agitated history that has not yet been written. A short outline may offer enough of a glimpse: through the twenties and early thirties different bodies were established to watch over staffing - finally (in 1935) the task was handed over to a "special sector" in Narkomfin, in tandem with the STO (Council of Labor

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4RGAE, f. 374, e. khr. 320. pp. 91-92. This was a protocol of an inter-departmental consultation concerning the lower rungs of the state apparatus.
5Partiia v bor’be s biurokratizmom, p.44, Moscow 1928.
6RGAE, f. 7709, 1, 2, pp. 305-307, April 1931.
7RGAE, f. 374, 6, 316, p.23 -on a meeting of Narkomfin with RKI officials, February 2, 1931.
8RGAE, f. 5515, 36, 6, pp. 71-73.
We should, at this juncture, say a few words about other controlling agencies. Soon after the war a new powerful agency, called Gos. Komitet po Shtatam (State Committee for Personnel) was created with the status of “attached to the Council of Ministers”, clearly one echelon above the personnel sector of the Ministry of Finance. It was presided over by L. Mekhlis and lasted till 1953. Another government body, the Committee for State Control (that kept changing its names as well as the list of institutions it was supposed to control) was also presided over by the same Mekhlis - obviously Stalin’s trusted or preferred “tsar” for overseeing the functioning of the state administrations. He badly needed this support because intrigues against him and his agencies never ceased, fueled by powerful ministries, with their allies in the party apparatus. It goes without saying that the latter also maintained controlling-supervising agencies that had also a checkered history and kept changing names and prerogatives. Initially different versions of the uchraspred were reorganized into several versions of departments of cadres, notably the Otdel or Upravlenie Kadrov that split in 1948 into a sector dealing only with party, komsomol and trade union bodies, whereas a powerful OrgOtdel took over the supervision, mainly, of the security agencies and key political agencies. Special Central Committee departments were created to control groups of industrial ministries. We are, of course, aware of the fact that the secret police was also controlling and reporting, and so did, from its angle, the Procuracy. More usual functions of financial and administrative inspectorate existed, of course, in every ministry. The story is actually even more convoluted.

The controls, surveys, commissions and task forces were particularly preoccupied with the leading personnel (otvet-rabotniki), especially at the very top (rukovodiaschhi sostav) of, first, the state’s political administrations and, next, of the economic institutions. The policy of simultaneously pestering and pampering these higher echelons - which finally degenerated into both a massive destruction and an equally massive promotion of replacements. was an exercise in forcible, at times desperate, administering that contributed to the flux that pervaded the

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9RGAE, f. 7733, 14, 1043, p.62 and sq.

10During recent searches in the Archives - in RGAE, GARF, RTsKHIDNI - I studied the files of all these agencies and the findings will soon be incorporated into forthcoming studies. It is worth signalling to the interested reader that the Kratkij Putevoditel’, edited by the ex-party archive now called RtsKHIDNI, Moscow 1993 (published in cooperation with the Center for Russian Studies of the University of Pittsburgh) has a first ever, short but precise historical sketch of all the departments and sectors of the central party apparatus.
bureaucracies more intensely than the social structure at large - itself in the throes of a set of upheavals - a key feature of the social landscape of the 1930s.

The other key feature - which was an important feature of the still new regime - was the policy of promoting into the administration, through the party or otherwise, of many people of popular extraction. This certainly increased support for the regime among the population, but also caused increased fluidity in the ranks, as well as further lowering of the already very low educational standards, especially in the politico-administrative agencies. This made all the more painful the dependence on experts "of alien ideology", in particular in the most crucial sectors of state activity where a high level of professionalism was needed but did not exist in the party ranks.

Dispatching an incessant stream of instructors, plenipotentiaries and special envoys, mostly in the framework of what critics dubbed "the campaign style" (kampanejshchina), were all part of the usual way of conducting national affairs in those years. Special task forces, under powerful trouble shooters from the Central Committee or the Politburo who wanted to see things done "whatever the cost" were presented as the epitome of the party's administrative prowess. The same applied to "extraordinary organs" (politotdely) used in "emergencies" - a strictly military conception, paralleling "shock units" (udarnye gruppy) that were constituted in order to apply "shock methods" and became the prevailing method of handling urgent tasks. This explains why so many things were, in fact, done "on the double" - pointing, indirectly, to the leaders' dissatisfaction with the performance, or rather indolence, of the routine-oriented regular administrative agencies.

The handling of recruitment policies into the (swelling) administrative machinery is in itself a good example of the tensions and contradictions that permeated policies during "the big drive". The government was constantly preaching that "a Bolshevik order" should be imposed in the sphere of personnel (shtaty), their salaries and overhead costs. Rationalization, simplification, curtailment of paperwork, mechanization and introduction of piecework in many offices were prodded to make the "machinery" work systematically and smoothly.

What the Central government was dreaming of transpires from a draft of a decree by the Council of Commissars (September 1929)11, that requires from office workers to achieve the following: "a firm configuration of jobs, firm composition of staffs, firm salaries for each confirmed post". The predominant term is "firm" (tverdyj) - an aspiration obviously reacting to the flux and the spontaneity in the work of administrations that proved so difficult to handle. But it was an impossible dream. Routine work was inefficient and slothful, whereas political

11RGAE, 5515, 26, 31, - a file of the Commissariat of Labor (Narkomtrud).
campaigns and shake-ups, although wasteful, seemed to achieve something. This points to the following feature of the 1930s: two strategies were operating simultaneously in the political arsenal, denoting the inherent "split personality" of a state system, whose "choleric" part tried to jolt its opposite that strived for predictability and settling down. More "realistic" for the longer run was the "pampering" side of the policies, as opposed to the repressive measures. The "status revolution" in favor of officials, reversing the preferential treatment accorded the workers earlier in the regime's history, continued through the thirties.

Officially, the policy was presented as an "innocently" sounding "equalization" of the living standards of Soviet officials with workers, notably in offering equal access to lodging, social benefits and schools and finally, in conditions of acceptance to party membership. In reality, and eventually in ideology, the trend was quite obviously not about "equalizing" but about producing a privileged layer and adapting ideology to the reality of the power that the strata of top and medium-ranking officials actually exercised. Making the state the centerpiece of the ideology opened the door to putting into the center of things the main state (and party) servants - the leading cadres of higher state bodies. It became officially admitted already in the later twenties that the top crust of the apparats - by now "proletarian" and socially reliable (Soviet produced) - were to be called "the leading cadres" and hostility toward them was to be treated as a challenge to the state. The policy reached its predictable threshold, when it was at least semi-formally declared in the mid-1930s that there was no reason anymore for the trade unions to engage in wage bargaining with management. Wage policies were firmly and, supposedly, safely lodged in the reliable hands of the economic management itself. Wages, an important tool of productivity, became in fact an almost exclusive and legitimate preserve of management. Nor were the unions to fuss anymore about distortions of proletarian policies by administrators, as had often been ascertained by the trade unions and officially acknowledged by the party in the 1920s. Such distortions, the new official line ordered, were now successfully overcome, and the trade union should not defend workers but deal with social benefits cultural activity and so on - as Stalin enjoined them to do.\[12\]

The less visible part of the policy was also pursued aggressively, often in secret, and consisted in offering privileges to the same "leading cadres", in the form of high salaries, sizeable premiums, thirteen month’s salary, hidden perks and supplies - and enormous power over their subordinates. These layers were all very strictly controlled, but they also had their own ways of amassing additional power and incomes, through a skillful manipulation of loopholes and structural features of the system. They suffered from the controls - but they also

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\[12\] E. Evreinov, O svoeobraznom krizise profsoiuzov i ob ikh novykh zadachakh, Moscow 1936, pp.27-28.
learned how to outmaneuver many of those, including the famous system of nomenklatura\textsuperscript{13} that was supposed to be the ultimate controlling device. Nevertheless, the worst in arbitrary despotism made them, in particular their very top layer, into those uniquely powerful slaves, always on the brink of catastrophe. Their power and privileges were shadowed by a constant memento mori, Until they got rid of the nightmare that hung over their heads.


The following figures showing the growth of officialdom during the years 1928-1939s provide only a tentative computation of a few selected indicators - but the growth factor is quite obvious. More systematic data became available quite recently, but were not yet ready for presentation here. One source estimated a 15% annual growth for the 1930s, but it was not clear from this source what categories were included. The numbers used in the tables come from population censuses for 1926 and 1959 (the latter contains data from the unpublished 1939 census) and from articles in Statisticheskoe Obozrenie\textsuperscript{14}. The figures should be used only as indicators of trends, not as statistically warranted givens.

I have tried to single out the category of "administrative personnel" from the broader category of "officials" or - better - blue-collar employees (sluzhashchie) that also included teachers, scientists, and medical personnel who certainly do not qualify as "bureaucrats" or "administrators". Sluzhashchie include all white collar employees drawing a salary. "Bosses" (rukovodziashchie rabotniki) include the higher or leading ranks of the bureaucratic or administrative offices.

The following table shows the number of those employed in "administrative offices" (uchrezhdeniiia), the number of bosses among them, and the total number of white collar workers in the labor force.

\textsuperscript{13}Nomenklatura relates to a system of nominations where each layer of leadership - from the Central Committee, through the ministries and to heads of departments - is assigned responsibility for either direct nomination or just the right to confirm candidates presented by the lower echelons. The party's control of the top layer of officials cannot be overestimated, but many observers overlooked the complexity of the whole system, its numerous countervailing trends that often frustrated the wishes of the controllers, in this as in many other spheres of the bureaucratic realm.

\textsuperscript{14}Statisticheskoe Obozrenie, especially No.5, 1928, pp.92-94.
In the table, the figures for "admin, personnel", do not include medical, pedagogic, and scientific personnel whom Soviet statisticians included in the sluzhashchie category. Neither do the figures include engineers and technicians employed in the economy who qualify for the category of "white-collar" but not of "bureaucrats" or "administrators", although many of them certainly worked in "offices" and held administrative (managerial) jobs. Hence, we are focusing on administrative jobs in the governmental machinery, meaning mostly the administrators (and their staffs) of central and local state agencies, who do not directly produce goods (like factories) or dispense services (like schools, hospitals and stores). The administrators of the latter institutions, though state employees in the Soviet conditions, did not belong to the state apparatus that we are trying to pinpoint. Calculations can also be made of the number of employees in central ministries and other top agencies, as well as in regional ones. Further classifications of the personnel into leading-administrative echelons and personnel who assisted the latter - those being subdivided into "operative" (middle-level) managers and "auxiliary clerical personnel" - are also possible, because there are figures for each of these categories. But they are rarely comparable. Most of the previously available data were not stating clearly what categories of officials were included at different points in time. And the newer data now at our disposal still reserve plenty of ambiguities.

Whatever the statistical reliability of the data\textsuperscript{15} for the later 1930s (1937-1939) they were particularly alarming for the party leadership: general employment in the economy rose by 10.3 percent (mainly in commerce, education, and health), the overall salary fund rose 41 percent. But the number of officials in administrative-managerial positions in the different government offices rose (between March 1937 and September 1939) by 26.6\%. The central

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{lll}
\hline
Admin, Personnel & Leading Officers & Total white collar Employees \\
\hline
1928 & 1,451,564 & 600,000 & 3,974,836 (4.8\%)* \\
1939 & 7,505,010 & 1,557,983 & 13,821,452 (15.5\%)*
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{*}the percentages in parentheses show the share of all white-collar workers in the total labor force.
offices of the USSR, of the republics and lower down to the districts, showed a particularly alarming growth of more than 50 percent in numbers of officials. Their salary fund grew by 66.5 percent.

Even more pronounced was the increase in the number of officials in the personnel of trusts, procurement-and supply bureaus, numerous so-called cost-accounting agencies (khozraschetnye - servicing the economic enterprises). They grew by 35.6 percent. General employment in industry reached only 2.1 percent, whereas numbers of employees in those khozraschet organizations serving industry increased by 26.3 percent. In construction enterprises the overall number of personnel actually declined but their service bureaus grew by 29.8 percent. The numbers of establishments of direct trade grew by 16.1 percent but their employees expanded by 39.3 percent. The general cost of such khozraschet organizations grew 50 percent. All in just about two years.

The continuing growth of the economy during the 1930s necessitated the breaking up of large ministries into smaller ones and of the older vast administrative units of the state into new smaller districts, to allow for more flexible management. But all these indispensable measures resulted, again, in more growth of staffs and overhead costs, rather than in outputs and efficiency. A disquieting inflation of staffs (razduvanie shtatov) occurred because the new smaller agencies (narkomaty) or smaller districts (rajony, oblasti) replicated automatically, the old top-heavy, complicated multi-tier structures. This in turn entailed an enormous splintering (drobimost') of supply and marketing offices (the notorious snaby i sbyty), and the appearance of all kinds of superfluous segments of apparats and a plethora of far-fetched jobs, with an ensuing growth of their salaries. The "swelling" was smaller in management offices of production units than in the rest of the officialdom, but even in those managerial offices - as well as in designer and project organizations, in the transportation sector, in urban development and so on - overemployment and imbalances among different sectors took on menacing proportions. In 1940 another effort was undertaken to reduce the number of officials, notably by increasing the working hours in offices. This was decreed by the Government on June 26, 1940 and was seen as a chance to curtail the staffs and make them more flexible. The war, quite naturally, reduced numbers of officials but after the war, and even after the "departure" of the dictator, centralization remained and with it the heavy weight of bureaucracy. By then, even the serious improvements in standards of education - low standards having been an important factor in the earlier formative stages - did not arrest the ailments that kept wrecking the state agencies. Among them was "institutional inflexibility", comparable to
the hardening of arteries in human beings\textsuperscript{16}, or the proverbial \textit{vedomstvennost}' - the fierce departmental "patriotism" of the agencies.

The efforts to contain, make cheaper and curtail the officialdom through different control methods and mass purges, proved to be of no avail and the pertinent sources paint a pathetic state of affairs: beginning with the early pronouncements of Lenin, through those of Ordzonikidze in 1932, Bukharin in 1934, and a wealth of publications, appearing notably just before the war - all expressing bewilderment and helplessness.

The enormous and unjustified growth, cost, proliferation, inefficiency, nepotism, narrow-mindedness, false reporting, inflexibility and arbitrariness defied all party and other controls.

One is tempted to derive "the big purges" - Stalin's recourse to the ultimate method of camps and killings - from this impotence in overcoming the bureaucratic maze and their skillful dodging of most government controls and injunctions. But physical elimination of officials did not eliminate the sociology of this layer: no purges could have done this. The material quoted earlier from \textit{Planovoe Khoziaistvo} illustrates this point convincingly. The purges were a policy that had nothing to do with any serious analysis or relation to reality. The inner tendencies of higher and lower layers of the apparats continued, although the quality of their performance dropped sharply as did their morale. Their ethical world and their psychological equilibrium were certainly impaired, at least in the circles of the upper bureaucratic layers, because so many of them were demoted, exiled, arrested or executed. Still their numbers kept growing and this is why I could present my figures without bothering about the complex problem of the scale of the "turnover" inside bureaucracy that the purges inflicted on them.

These features of the bureaucracy, whatever its resemblance, in many ways, to the tsarist one, could not be ascribed anymore to "the past". They grew from the conditions inherent in the Soviet system's: wholesale nationalization, elimination of markets and of diversified sectors in the economy and society and from the predominantly administrative methods in planning.

\textbf{Older Thinkers and Soviet Realities}

A few ideas, borrowed from Western students of bureaucracy, can enrich the reflection on the trends we describe. Max Weber\textsuperscript{17} maintained that domination is inherent in any

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organization, especially in the big ones. Smaller and simpler organizations allow democratic forms, but once they grow and get complex a fight for power begins and direct democratic forms would lose out. Political parties, an expression of pluralism, are also about domination. by definition; and this trend too tends to subvert democracy. A special structure of professional administrators appears "which of necessity means the exercise of domination" and may become "monocratic", so that all the functionaries are integrated into a hierarchy culminating in one single head."18 Reflections like these make us realize that such phenomena are more universal than the soviet experience we are studying.

Similar lessons can be learned from "the iron law of oligarchy" which was formulated by Robert Michels (1915), later documented nicely in the early 1930 by Max Adler19 who examined trends in the social-democratic parties and confirmed Michel's findings. Not just the more vague function of leadership but also the more concrete "administration" Leadership (administration) is needed, because the growth and complexity of big organizations. Moreover, in due course enough wealth and power gets amassed to be worth preserving. This weighty fact discourages policy makers from risking damaging losses. Next comes the stage when20 the tool gets transformed into an ideal, or aim per se - thus actually leading to a dumping of the ideal, although lip service may still be paid by using some quite radical formulae.

Returning to Weber again, we borrow from Wolfgang Mommsen quotes from Weber's Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in which he stated that "a bureaucracy, once it is fully implanted, belongs to the range of social formations that are most difficult to destroy"21. A British student of bureaucracy elaborated and emphasized that bureaucracy was a work environment for millions of people. Work being formative of the very identity of individuals, the bureaucratic world is a powerful social milieu that shapes human beings as a mass. Other authors contended that giant bureaucracies are on the level of governments: they are not really part of the national competition but more of the domain of national economic planning22.

These are only a few examples from Western thinkers that are based on observing the Western experience in the West, actually anticipating are resembling manifestations of bureaucratic behavior observed in the Soviet case.

18Ibid. p.334.
22Kenneth Galbraith, quoted by Elliot ibid., p.329.
But in the Soviet conditions, some of the same processes went much farther: unlike in the West, bureaucracy did become the polity. Hence, the bureaucratic mentality became even more powerful a factor in shaping all or most human relations. Also relevant to the Soviet experience in its stalinist phase is Weber's observation that the absolute dictator "is often completely in the power of his bureaucracy since . . . he has no means of discovering whether his policies are being enforced". This does not contradict the argument about Stalin's anti-bureaucratic urges. Instead, it actually anticipates much of the essence of Stalinism, leading to my idea of "institutional paranoia" writ large - a sense of powerlessness, developing in the narrow leadership apex, and later in the one-man apex, that increases or persists as more power is amassed and centralized precisely and supposedly to combat its tendency to surreptitiously sneak away. Moreover, taking another clue from Weber again, soviet bureaucracy was not "modern" as some were elsewhere. A real bureaucracy, in this view, was normally paid in cash. In the Soviet case, the hidden privileges and supplies were actually payments in natura - like in ancient subsistence economies - making them into some kind of an in-between formation, i.e. an amalgam of rather ancient with some highly modern administrative practices.

It is also worth reflecting on soviet bureaucracy's "retardation" from another angle: the bureaucrats were the guarantor and main tool in the lifting of a devastated country from poverty. They also helped build a state system and its services - all run by bureaucracies. This monopoly over implementation of policies was a key problem, only temporarily camouflaged by the supposed control by the party, the presumed sovereign, hence "employer", of these bureaucracies. The ideological claim of a workers supervision in the "workers' state" lost any credibility quite early in the regime's history. The monopolistic manager of all of the state's resources was following its inner thrust to develop the country. But by denying freedoms and the requisite autonomies to social agents like factories organizations, movements, institutions - this "manager" was saddled with the direct control over the whole economy-polity-society complex. This was bound to lead well beyond its capacity to effectively cope with a job like that. In a system where everything is done by government agencies, as direct managers-supervisors, not much or nothing, except in the making of "malfunctions" comes from below. Operating on such a scale without an appropriate societal input was a mighty source of backwardness in itself. It is symptomatic that in the industrial sphere, at an earlier stage of its history, even when machines, such as excavators, were available and could have alleviated the

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24Cf. Gerth and Wright, ibid, pp. 204 sq.
burden of primitive toil, it was reported that workers did not want to use them and managers preferred to resort to a crude labor force. The fact was noted, for example, by Central Committee member Ian Rudzutak in his speech to the Seventeenth Party Congress. He spoke of construction works but a similar and widespread "anti-mechanization" trend could be observed in industry, culminating in a powerful thrust inside industry, from below and from above, against innovation and modernization of equipment and administrative practices. Similar tendencies could be observed, in many ways, all over the bureaucracy and in the later stages of its existence.

In this context, it could be illuminating to realize the enormous weight and numbers of praktiki, or cadres promoted on the job to run administrations or take up engineering positions on railroads, in factories, and in administrations, without adequate professional training. They composed, for example, 40 percent of the whole leading apparatus of the railroads by the end of 1938, at a time when well over three-fourths of those apparats were just freshly promoted to replace the thousands of purged functionaries and specialists. For such cadres, except for the most gifted among them, assimilating only the most superficial routines in practice at that time was a major challenge of a lifetime.

Such trends (of dilettantism) had a boomerang effect also on the party apparatus. The crucial party apparatus that was also growing larger and more complicated during the 1930s, exhibited the same, seemingly incongruous development of "the power lines". On one hand was the growing personal power of Stalin who decided on everything he wanted, in all the meetings of all the bodies. On the other was the swelling (razbukhanie) of the party apparatus which became unwieldy and inefficient, in its efforts to shadow and thereby duplicate the government machinery. The apparatus of the Central Committee was endowed in 1939 with large-scale administrative departments, such as the one for "Propaganda and Agitation" or "the Department for Cadres" which, under Malenkov, had forty five subunits.

Also in the same 1939, the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Ukraine alone employed 222 "responsible functionaries" and 90 technical workers. Unfortunately, the source of these data did not provide global figures for the party apparatus of the USSR. This was, as we know, a period when the number of ministries and so-called higher Agencies in the government was growing, from 10 in 1924, to 18 in 1936, with a leap to 41 in 1940, (plus state committees with a Commissariat status like Gosplan, Grain Procurements, Higher

25Semnadsatyi s'ezd VKP(b), Moscow 1934, pp.284-5.
Education. Artistic Affairs - again, with proliferating staffs. To match its controlling ability, the party organizations below the central level also created in their own apparat numerous branch departments with growing numbers of heads, instructors and technical services. Only quite recently data on the party apparat became available and it turned out that in 1938 the party apparat - quite shaky because of the ongoing purges, employed about 61,000 full time functionaries, 13702 of them in so called “technical capacities”. But for 1939 91727 are being predicted and their funding approved - thus an effort to rebuild the shaky organization, especially the layers of the so-called “otvetrobotniki (endowed with politico-administrative functions and responsibilities)were about to grow by circa 50%. Its own resources would not suffice to cover the salaries and overheads - in 1938 the state had to give a subsidy of 423 million rubles, and the subsidy requested (from the Government reserve fund) amounted to 618,030 thousand - a 46.1% growth. It is not clear from the source whether the apparatus from the Moscow Central Committee is included in the number - in any case - all these figures were destined to grow.

The parts of the sprawling administrative machinery (even inside the party apparatus) were not enjoying delegation of powers to do the things they were created for. The opposite was true. In internal affairs everything was not just centralized but even concentrated in a tight-fisted way (zatsentralizovano). Politburo meetings would deal with hundreds of items - obviously, not in any depth - which included details that did not belong to such a high level of decision making and sometimes not to the next lower ones.

We see therefore a phenomenon with a Catch-22 quality to it: the growing Stalinist centralization has as its counterpart, unavoidably, the growth (overgrowth) of party and state apparats, all proverbially inefficient. But it also worked, as we just hinted, the other way around: the growth of large, inefficient bureaucracies seemed to have called for more centralization.

These data and trends underscore again the essential feature specific to the Soviet system. Because of the state’s involvement in running the economy, the bulk of its officials in state and party administrations, the overwhelming majority of whom were party members, were engaged in the economy. We can find here the seeds of future trouble. Since the elimination of the NEP, collectivization of agriculture and the big industrialization drive, the takeover of the economy by ministerial machineries became complete. This allowed the system to achieve, initially, important targets. But this was management without responsibility for results (except

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Numbers of ministries (narkomaty) are from an unpublished paper by the Russian historian V. P. Naumov that he allowed me to use.
before the party). And it caused the administrations to be forever glutted by functions that these kinds of agencies were not designed for.

As long as there was a Stalin at the top, he could use fear to force people to work - but not to work efficiently. His terror was arbitrary, not really a retribution for anything particular or predictable, and even the best performance was no shield against repressions.

The monopoly and supposed cohesion that the popular “totalitarian model” implied was, in many ways, a fiction in these conditions: the specialized, functional administrations, became a basis for the crystallization of powerful departmental vested interests and the overall system turned out extremely refractory to effective coordination. The perennial bargaining and infighting actually blocked the system’s capacity to act - despite the illusion that a strong top leadership in a dictatorship can always have things its way. Except for some areas considered to be of top priority, in the realm of security in the first place.

At this junction a much older authority comes to mind. The French historian of Russia Leroi-Beaulieu already knew how important independent courts could be for the taming of bureaucracy and, maybe, for containing some of its worst features. The checking of apparats by other apparats could be counterproductive. There is enough evidence to maintain that the key agency for such controls in the early 1930s - the RKI was itself afflicted by bureaucratization. The idea of having independent courts, in addition to internal administrative inspectors was a plausible one during the NEP. The reliance though on the party as controller of the apparat, with the hoped-for help from the masses, was nearer to the hearts of a number of Bolshevik leaders.

But Bolshevism, the offspring of Russian social-democracy, was not there anymore, once the relations of power transformed the party itself into an agency itself badly in need of being supervised by somebody.

Stalin and Bureaucracy

I doubt that Stalin was "the creature of bureaucracy", as Trotsky claimed, though he built bureaucratic structures and used them as best he could. But he might have been their creature by "negation", in the same sense that he was, to a large extent, dominated psychologically by the image of Trotsky and thus was Trotsky’s creature. Stalin can be seen as

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29. Anatole Leroi-Beaulieu, *L'empire des tsars et les Russes*, I-III, Paris 1881-1889, still an astonishingly valid work. Volume II deals with the institutions of the state, the judicial reforms of 1884 being described in book 4, chapter 1. The bureaucracy hated these reforms because they gave the courts an independence which could effectively block or thrust back bureaucratic arbitrariness and power.
the anti-Christ of bureaucratic structures - and, in this sense, their product. They were "dedicated" to him, no doubt, but this does not change the underlying momentum of their development which went against his system.

It would be nearer to reality to state that Stalin was rather the creature of his party which he himself helped shape, as its general secretary and a master of its apparat. Although he was not the party's founder, he overwhelmed the small group erstwhile top leaders, many of whom initially supported him, to become a despot dominating the party and his associates. In this situation the potential observable in bureaucracies of "taming the despot" and "taking over" was blocked. The same conditions that made society fluid induced fluidity and shakiness into the administrations and constrained their ability to solidify and defend their interests. The enormous structural shifts and a cascade of crises in the early 1930s worked in the opposite direction: the prevailing conditions favored the establishment of the new autocracy rather than a bureaucratic countermodel.

Another factor that deepened further the oppressive-despotic features of the political system can now be brought in. The soviet state "owned and ran" the industry and the rest of the economy (and much more beside this). The efforts in the economic field were permeated by a prevalence of state power and the spread of networks of its officials. Markets and civil society of the short-lived NEP have been pushed out, and subsequently followed by two further models that seem to have exhausted the potential in system creating of Soviet history. First was Stalin's version of an "agrarian despotism" (as I call it) in the shorter run, followed by "a state-bureaucratic monopoly", after the two had coexisted unhappily for quite some time.

Stalinism itself - as we saw - exhibited a kind of "dualism" in its mode of functioning - the consisting of the bureaucratic propensity for a routine and the predictability that goes with it, that was countered by a propensity to act in fits and leaps of "extraordinary" and shock methods - the prerogative of despotism. Such "storming" grew from the enormous tasks and the prevalence of the mobilizational methods they seemed to have required but they could not have been to the bureaucracy's taste. Brought to a paroxysm under Stalin much of its fury was in fact directed against party and state administrations.

Bureaucracy as a stratum and a powerhouse weathered the ordeals inflicted upon it (even if it itself served as conduit for equal ordeals inflicted on other layers in society) and it came out victorious, in the longer run, although it still managed to obtain smaller victories under Stalin. when it clipped the wings, e.g., of some shock campaigns, such as Stalin's preferred stakhanovism. This campaign actually aimed at shaking up the bureaucrats by unleashing - so Stalin hoped - the initiative and pride of workers. But in conditions of Soviet state ownership, bureaucracy was not replaceable. If a problem emerged and was acknowledged, the method
was generally the same: send powerful troubleshooters to solve problems. But they too would
end up creating yet another office with officials, carriers of the routine-oriented model. This
combination of contradictory pulls in the monopolistic state was at the root of not only Stalinist
supercentralization but also of its nemesis, namely the reproduction of the center's arbitrariness
(Stalinism was this by definition), by the multiplication from below of Stalin replicas at all
levels of the administration ("the little Stalins"). This process reveals the paradoxical,
"impossible" side in Stalinism: the capricious supercentralizer was giving away power by
default. Each "little Stalin" could be destroyed but was immediately replaced.

The reflection on the "impossible Stalinism" should point to a broader and peculiar set of
paradoxes at work: the despot could not operate without shock methods (udarnost').
Bureaucracy could not work with them. Despotism develops hierarchy but hierarchy cannot
support despotism which denies the very importance of hierarchy. Despotism works arbitrarily
and spreads its effects over the system, corrupting the apparats and destroying their self-
importance and their capacity to act as bodies and as powerholders. Despotism depends on
bureaucracy but cannot trust it.

Thus, Stalinism's numerous "paradoxes" were actually an expression of this model's
"impossibility": it finally stopped solving vital tasks of state. Instead, it found itself at odds with
the better results of its own developmental drive, but also incapable of tackling the negative
ones.

Borrowing A Leaf From Hans Rosenberg

We have already made the point that much of what was going on in the Soviet apparats
was universal. But producing Stalinism was another matter. When reading Hans Rosenberg's
Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy, one is tempted to apply to the Stalinist phase a
variation on this theme, namely: "Bureaucracy, Partocracy and Despotism".

But as we study the processes at work under this heading, and the subsequent transition
into the second, past-stalinist stage, we can borrow another of Rosenberg's terms -
"bureaucratic absolutism" - that expresses well the model that was to replace Stalinism and was
already emerging earlier, despite the powerful muzzle put on it by the "mobilizational"
methods. Although interwoven, the two were nevertheless distinctive and, finally,
contradictory processes and models of a polity. After Stalin's death the key features of
personal despotism were dismantled.

In the course of over half-a-century, preceding and following Stalinism, and maturing
under Brezhnev, bureaucracy went from a suspect and barely tolerated layer, through a partly
rehabilitated, to a highly privileged but again suspect and terrorized congeries of "powerful serfs".

In fact, they could not yet become a solid and stable layer capable of an open and efficient defense of their rights against the party leadership. Surreptitious, though less directly challenging ways, were available but more meaningful changes had to await Stalin's death.

His despotism brought back an old trait of the erstwhile Muscovite princes as owners of all the state's lands (which are given to servants, making them into a gentry or nobility). Stalin's rule did make him into a de facto owner of all land and of the other resources. Including the labor force. Once he disappeared the collective ownership of the hierarchy's summit appeared quite clearly - but without an individual or group appropriation by key players at the top (except as manifestations of corruption, mostly as misappropriation of consumer goods). The power over the labor force also changed its character considerably and "the agrarian despotism" - i.e. the despotic features resembling older, pre-classical" kingdoms was over. Bureaucracy now blossomed into a full-fledged ruling class. An elite is only part of it - mostly composed of the top layers of the bureaucracy. A class is a larger and more complex social construct, where the elite's power is backed by numerous lower ranks or layers inside the framework and by different social groups in the population outside it. At the same time, in the Soviet case, there was no doubt about who ran and actually owned the national economy: few other ruling classes in modern times have had this kind of monopoly.

The takeover of real power in the system by the bureaucracy went hand-in-glove with its de facto emancipation from the party, including the "neutralization" and co-optation by the bureaucracy of the nomenklatura system that was devised to control it. This happened thanks to the fact that the tool of control was also a two-way street: the controlled, once an insider, can take over the tool from the inside.30

30Soviet bureaucracy, although a mainstay and key feature of the system, did not attract enough attention of scholars, and there are very few monographs to help produce a broader synthetic picture. This is why the pioneering works that appeared rather recently (and some of the older ones) should be greeted. In William G. Rosenberg and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1993, the reader will find five chapters by R. W. Davies, Don K. Rowny, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Lewis Siegelbaum and David Shearer, on different echelons of the industrial administration. Prof. Don K. Rowny, a pioneer in this sphere, deals here with the new industrial commissariats. In his earlier book Transition to technocracy: The Structural Origins of The Soviet Administrative State, Ithaca, New York 1989, he studied Soviet bureaucracy until 1928. Important pioneering works were offered much earlier by R. Armstrong and by T. H. Rigby. The latter used the concept of "mono-organizational Society" and applied it to the Soviet system. See his paper in Robert C. Tucker, ed., Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation, New York 1977. Rigby also produced a study of the Sovnarkom under Lenin.
The new stage that began with the elevation of Khrushchev started by reinvigorating the system and engendering a new dynamism in society and the polity and still larger intra-systemic changes seemed imminent. But the ruling bureaucratic power grid, on its way to its own pinnacle, stalled reforms. It replaced "the cult of Stalin" by the "cult of the state" and further consequences of this change unfolded inexorably. Soviet bureaucracy successfully eliminated the most unpalatable elements of Stalinism - notably all those that were damaging hurting it - but it also succeeded in disarming the party, by making it into its own "ruling servant." Once this was achieved a super-monopoly ensued - a system of "bureaucratic absolutism" Soviet style, quite unprecedented in the twentieth century. Yet, this moment of supreme power also revealed that this class was not able anymore to handle any business except protecting its privileges. It had no serious leaders - according to some theories bureaucracy rarely produces political leaders - and it was ideologically vacuous, demoralized and often corrupt. The era of Perestroika was a logical outcome of this situation.