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CADRES DECIDE EVERYTHING: THE ENDURING DILEMMAS OF THE PARTY-STATE AND THE SOVIET SERVICE CLASS

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Summary

The defining issue of the Soviet state was found at the persistent shortage of qualified manpower afflicting the Soviet elite. This problem did not originate with the establishment of the USSR - the Russian state had to deal with the problem of governing a society spread over vast distances, connected by poor infrastructure and afflicted by low literacy. Much like the previous incarnations of the Russian state, the Kremlin would be forced to seek a certain accommodation with the emergent professional classes. Framed by the unique features of the ideological state with universalistic aims, this would germinate a factional split within the party. The Experts, in pursuit of pragmatic results, wanted to come to an accommodation with the social stratum capable of supplying the members of the administrative elite. The Reds insisted on ideological purity and literacy as the overriding and paramount marker of belonging to that elite.

Key words: Reds, Experts, Soviet elite, factions, ideology, continuities.

Josef Stalin once compared the Communist Party to a Militant Order of Warrior Priests, an institution acting as the spiritual guide of the state organs.^[1] It was an incredibly apt parallel for a number of reasons, not least among them that it was the perfect encapsulation of the fundamental contradiction at the core of the Soviet party-state. The primary task of the Communist Party, its core mission and primary area of expertise, was the ideological education of the society.

As the party's responsibilities expanded into the specialized areas of industry, agriculture, and military fields, however, the political professionals would inevitably lag behind in their

competence compared to the professionals of those areas. Perhaps if their tasks were limited to supervision, the problem would remain marginal. But in a system where they were held personally responsible for every failure or underperformance, they had a vested interest in delving deeper and deeper into the economic issues of their regions. This dilemma was compounded by the influx of the white collar professionals into the party.

The size of the administrative elite was simply insufficient to supply two, rigidly separate governing classes. This combined with the institutional propensity of the party (whose legitimizing claim was tied inextricably to its identity as a modernizing force), to consistently increase its penetration of society, and consequent responsibility for the ever-growing array of managerial duties. The result was the persistent inability to adequately staff its managerial class. The rapid industrialization placed an ever-growing premium on pragmatism, a result-oriented focus, culminating in a new generation of Communist technocrats. An unexpected consequence was the unwelcome discovery that co-optation worked both ways and many of its members were becoming more warriors than priests, focusing on technical rather than ideological literacy. Thus, the party would find itself in an ongoing conflict over its identity, challenged over its role both vis-à-vis the state and its own priorities: Reds vs. Experts, ideologues vs. pragmatists.

Thus, the unique features of the regime, such as its ideological character, and its utilization of such tools of modernity as mass mobilization, reinforced and exacerbated an old problem. After all - the core issue found at the center of the above paradigm was the persistent shortage of qualified manpower afflicting the Soviet elite. This problem did not originate with the establishment of the USSR. Rather it was an inherited dilemma that afflicted the Muscovite state and the Imperial bureaucracy before them, as the Russian state had to deal with the problem of governing a society spread over vast distances, connected by poor infrastructure and afflicted by low literacy.^[2]

Specifically, even as the Muscovite state outsourced the education of its service elite to the gentry, and Imperial Russia invested considerable resources into evolving a professional bureaucratic caste, both had to come to some sort of accommodation with the social stratum from which they had to recruit the members of the governing caste. Just as the tsars had to compromise with the gentry and military autocracy, the Romanovs had no choice but to seek a certain accommodation with the emergent professional classes.^[3] The Communists too were forced toward the negotiation with the service elite that characterized the pre-Revolutionary Russian state. The process had, of course, undergone a necessary adaptation to the radically changed social and political structure, yet the fundamental imperative of reaching a consensus between the state and the service elite remained central to the Kremlin's ability of governing successfully.

Moreover the traditional problem of the qualified cadre scarcity was exacerbated by the unique features of the new political system. The pre-Revolutionary professionals and intelligentsia were not only scattered and decimated physically by the Revolution and the war, but also delegitimized by the changed ideological structure.^[4] The nonparty experts, unversed in the intricacies of the Marxist-Leninist discourse were immediately suspect in the eyes of the new regime.

This component to the new process of elite formation produced a twofold effect. Significantly it set up the aforementioned dichotomy in the party's policy-formation paradigm. An enduring conflict would be germinated between the ideologue faction and the pragmatists.^[5] The tendency of the latter was to adhere to the traditional method of Russian policy and come to an accommodation with the social stratum capable of supplying the members of the administrative elite, primarily focusing on achieving tangible, practical results. This propensity would periodically clash with the insistence of the fundamentalists on ideological purity and literacy as the overriding and

paramount marker of belonging to that elite.

This, in turn, contributed to another consequence of the ideological framework of the new order. In effect, the dual nature of the governmental structure of the Soviet state established a new competitor for the already scarce resource of the educated, literate professionals. Whereas under previous Russian regimes, this social stratum was simply pressed to provide suitable members of the service elite, the situation within the ideological framework of the USSR was uniquely different. The would-be member of the *nomenklatura* was now faced with a double burden of acquiring not simply the professional education, but also functional literacy in the Bolshevik theoretical precepts.

This situation, of course, contributed to the conflict between the ideologues and pragmatists, and would become even more complex due to the compromise following the Great Break. In the wake of that process, the regime reached a consensus with the white collar professionals and the intelligentsia, allowing considerable numbers of them to join the ranks of the party.^[6] Yet this was an imperfect solution that simply served to internalize the dichotomy even deeper within the interparty dynamic itself. The tension between the nonparty experts and the Bolsheviks never fully disappeared, but following the inclusion of a great many technocrats into the party, the primary focus of the conflict shifted. It now resided mainly within the confines of the elite, of which the technocrats were now part. Distrusted, suspected of disloyalty, and subject to purges, yet they were now unmistakably a faction of the ruling class.^[7]

By the mid-1920s, the Soviet state finally emerged out of the “continuum of violence” that profoundly changed the structure of society and the economy, leaving the imprint of aggression on almost every institution.^[8] The infrastructure was in terrible shape, urban population had escaped into the countryside to avoid the famine, and much of the old elite was either destroyed or driven out of the country.^[9] In a very real sense the new state had to solve the very same problems that shaped the old Muscovy and, unsurprisingly, turned toward many of the same solutions.

The first problem for the rulers was the exertion of control over the country and the attendant issue of new elite formation. This task was simultaneously easier and more complex for the Bolsheviks than it was for their predecessors. Despite the “archaization” of the society, the rebuilding process was, after all, not starting from scratch. “A census of the state bureaucracy in 1928 showed that holdovers accounted for 27.8% of administrative personnel.”^[10] The old bureaucrats were of necessity promoted in order to utilize their skills—and as such exercised a disproportionate influence on the new elite and its governing mechanism. The ultimate authority, however, lay with the party and it was its leadership that charted the new course.

The similarities between the new apparatus and the old system are due as much to the fact that, faced with the ancient and enduring set of dilemmas—vast distances, poor communication net, limited governance class, and a largely peasant population—the new state had only a limited range of practical answers, often the same solutions that were available to the tsarist state. It was unsurprising that the new regime would turn toward historical models of its forebears on a wide scale. As Robert Tucker pointed out, the archaization of the society led to the archaization of the political system and “resurrection of the historic Tsarist pattern.”^[11] In times of fluid social and political processes, the people turned to older, cruder, and more durable mechanisms of association and cooperation.

Of course, one must be careful of pressing the analogies and continuities too far. Certainly, there had never been anything comparable to the Communist Party in Russia’s history. This unique feature of the new regime necessitated duplication of the governing apparatus, exponentially increasing the demand for the qualified personnel to staff not simply the state bureaucracy but also that of the party. Another of its consequences was the germination of the famous conflict between

Reds and Experts within the pool of the qualified personnel.

The demands on an aspiring apparatchik were no longer limited to, or even primarily focused on, technical education. Ideological literacy was now a significant factor, and this new aspect significantly influenced the negotiation process between the state and the administrative elite, making it infinitely more complex than the similar process of pre-Revolutionary Russia. The subsequent problem of finding an appropriate balance between the ideological and technical professionals was never fully resolved by the Soviet system and became yet another endemic condition.

The state would be consistently forced into having to choose between technical competence and ideological purity. As the party relentlessly expanded its power throughout the rapidly modernizing state, the technocratic tendency would often win. This in turn would lead to push-back from the political purists, beginning the cycle anew.

The turbulent decade that followed the civil war was a sort of incubation period for much of the party-state's later methods. As the war drew to a close the new Soviet State had to come to terms with the immediate goals of its continued existence. The country was brought to the brink of collapse by World War I, the internecine conflict, and the War Communism.^[12] Taking stock, the Communist leadership came to the reluctant conclusion that "the stability of the regime and its defense against external enemies depended on economic reconstruction and the attention understandably turned to the question of long-term economic development and industrialization."^[13]

Two schools of thought quickly emerged that would remain in existence throughout the existence of the Soviet polity, eventually coalescing into the so-called Reds and Experts. While both were defined by the fundamental precepts of the ideological commitment of building a socialist, nonmarket society, their approaches quickly diverged. The core of the original debate concerned the fate of the nonparty specialists.^[14] While the proto-ideologues mistrusted their loyalty and vehemently argued for mobilizing the revolutionary fervor of the proletariat/working class, pragmatists increasingly saw the utility of bringing bourgeois experts into the fold and making use of their skills.^[15] The NEP (New Economic Policy) encapsulated the conditional victory of the pragmatic point of view. Yet, it was a policy that never sat easy with the party as a whole, many seeing the alliance with the material creators of the bourgeois culture as betrayal of the Revolution's collectivist principals.^[16]

As the country, driven to the brink of collapse, came to a compromise, the technical elite of the army and the industry were reluctantly courted by the Party. It was the end to the revolutionary upheavals that had driven as many as two million people (most of them from the educated social strata) into exile, with only one teacher for every 704 rural inhabitants remaining.^[17] In his seminal work, Kendall Bailes examined this process in minute detail, and articulated the immensely precarious place of the old elite in a largely hostile society. The state played the role of the protector, shielding the remnants of the old order against the proletariat and much of the rank and file of the party whose passions had been aroused by the Revolution.^[18]

Whether the policy was driven by pure pragmatism, or due to the sympathy Lenin had for co-members of the intelligentsia remains an issue of debate, but—reluctantly and with constant worry about being corrupted—the party-state downplayed the grassroots' tendency toward class war and came to the necessary accommodation with the technical intelligentsia. "Cultural policy in the 1920s rested on the premise that the Soviet state needed the services of bourgeois specialists and would have to pay for them."^[19]

While the drastically diminished size of the service elite made its embrace by the state almost inevitable, it also gave an added impetus to the party to redress the problem. Never easy about the

loyalty of the specialists and inherently rooted in the ideological commitment to a technical modernization, throughout the 1920s, the regime worked feverishly to promote literacy and to build an educational infrastructure. While restraining the “specialist-baiting by the rank and file, the state undertook incredible effort to create its own educated class that could replace them.

The newly emergent bureaucracy co-opted many members of the underprivileged classes that were already socially mobile, but discontented, before the Revolution.^[20] Throughout NEP, the degree to which the Soviet state made education accessible to the proletariat and the peasantry had no ready parallel in Russian history. Between 1923 and 1925, enrollment in colleges and universities from among these classes rose rapidly from 24.2 to 49.6 percent. And the admission rate of the *rabfak* (Workers’ Faculty, a transition institution for the proletarians seeking to enter academia) members in the mid-1920s was consistently between 88.3 and 99.4 percent.^[21]

Yet, as Fitzpatrick demonstrated, the nature of the educational infrastructure and policies throughout the 1920s reflected the divide between the two approaches to governing evolving within the party. Thus, even as monumental efforts were made to develop vocational schools and technical institutions of learning, a considerable investment was also being made into social sciences, creating an educational structure aimed at producing a new elite.^[22] Emblematically, the Socialist Academy was established as a rival to the “bourgeois” Academy of Sciences, and proudly focused on producing Marxist philosophers rather than natural scientists.^[23] It was soon emulated by a variety of similar institutions. In that branch of the system, social origins and educational indoctrination took clear precedence over technical aspects.

The influx of a large number of people with the most rudimentary education had the predictable consequences of overwhelming the still-fragile educational infrastructure and provoking a backlash not only from the remnants of the old technical elite but also from the factions of the party apparatus tasked with running the economy. While the former resented the dilution of their status and the lack of strict standards, the latter found themselves with newly minted managerial cadres that were simply not up to the job.

Not for the first or the last time, the delicate balance between ideological and practical demands had to be renegotiated. As a consequence, that era was defined by the conflict between the radicals and the moderates.^[24] Thus, 1926 saw the peak and the crisis of the experiment, with moderates getting the upper hand. Educational standards won over the demands to increase the socially acceptable base of the educational elite and a purge of the inadequate representatives of the first wave of the new elite was undertaken.^[25]

The victory was short-lived, however. The advent of the Great Break in 1928 signaled yet another swing of the pendulum.^[26] Stalin’s decision to champion the reawakening of the simmering embers of the class war was widely supported by the party, which—as most recent scholarship agrees—was never easy with the “temporary retreat” of NEP.^[27] The ideology would now be the primary focus, as the attacks on the old intelligentsia coincided with the attempt to once again promote their replacements, the Red Experts who would combine ideological purity and technical expertise.

The increased fervor in the regime’s attack on the technical intelligentsia was not due simply to Stalin’s attempt to ride the anti-intellectual resentment to power. The show trials that bracketed the Great Break were a result of conscious evaluation by the regime of the growing threat of the formation of a rival nexus of social ideology—technocracy.^[28] The state had heavily propagandized technical education as a mark of status in the new regime. By the end of the 1920s, the Party had grown wary of having created a rival center of power and moved decisively against the technical

intelligentsia that was becoming socially conscious as a separate social class, presenting a rival and depoliticized vision of modernization and showing a tendency to strive for a greater political role. Some among the technical intelligentsia began advancing the vision of engineers as the pragmatic, rational, and apolitical architects of society.^[29] As Loren Graham argued, “most engineers from the old regime were enthusiastic about the potential offered by a planned socialist economy, and spoke out only against irrational choices by the Stalinist leadership.”^[30]

What they saw as objections against irrationality, the regime saw as an assault on the ideological foundations of the system and a threat to party’s legitimacy. Whether or not the threat-assessment was realistic, or a product of the siege mentality of the party, the assault on the Experts was tremendously destructive. And although it did not result in the achievement of the party’s goal of enthronement of the completely ideologically and socially loyal service elite, the mixed results produced by the Great Break came very close. The old elite could not be completely discarded and once again an accommodation had to be reached. A turn in the educational priority was one of the concessions made, as the practical—primarily engineering—education was now made a priority, with the social sciences losing their prominence.^[31]

Unlike the previous armistice of 1926, however, the character of the administrative class was wholly changed by 1931. As the revisionist school demonstrated, the *vydvizhentsy* made tremendous inroads into the upper strata of the Soviet society that could not be rolled back.^[32] While not a pure Red Elite, the result of the Great Break was an amalgam of old and new, where the elements loyal to the new order predominated.

In that respect, despite the cost to the society, the Great Break could have been called a success—had it, in actuality, moved the equilibrium from the dead center. That was, however, not the case—it did not solve the fundamental problem of Ideology vs. Expertise, but rather recast it into different terms, internalizing it to the party itself. The problems of finding a balance between compromised standards and compromised ideological purity remained, as *vydvizhentsy* struggled with the duties that often overwhelmed their inadequate preparation and the old elite was slow in accepting them as equals.^[33] Yet, notably, the influence of the pragmatists in the party was slowly growing, as the evolving bureaucratic apparatus of the industry and the state grew cognizant of the need for the technocratic expertise. Thus, lobbying by the Vesenkha (Supreme Council for National Economy) and various regional party organizations was extremely influential in drawing the pogrom of the nonparty experts to a close.^[34]

The upheaval of the late 1920s would be replayed again, but in its future incarnations it would take place primarily within the context of the intraparty conflict. In fact, the foreshadowing of these processes was clear in the immediate aftermath of the Great Break, as the new elite was tested in the cauldron of the first five-year plan. The results were not encouraging as the regime’s intent to control the course of events it set in motion far outstripped its ability to do so and the Plan became trapped by unrealistic goals and inadequate cadres.^[35] It was also throughout the same era that the Bolshevization of the educated classes occurred, as they made the decision that they could live, coexist, and work with the regime and within the party. By cutting short the excesses of the Great Break, the state signaled its willingness to compromise on the cultural values of the emergent professional class; by adopting the campaign for *kul’turnost’* it signaled its willingness to accommodate the strata it so desperately needed to form the new administrative class.^[36]

The tirades of the Soviet leadership against the crassness and corruptibility of the materialist culture and its trappings gave way to the permissiveness and even encouragement of the new class of consumers.^[37] Consumerism, in fact, was now redefined as a pathway to achieving the prized level

of cultural development. It is within that framework that the Soviet variation on the social entity resembling the Western middle class was germinated. And the members of that—still very amorphous and yet growing caste—were all too eager to take the regime up on its offer, offering loyalty, cooperation and, expertise. Yet, much like NEP as a whole, the *kul'turnost'* campaign rested on an uncertain foundation of theoretical conflict and could not last. “The idea of material acquisition as a perfectly justifiable reward for honest toil cut across a key tenet of Soviet labor ideology: that work should be its own reward.”^[38] This contradiction would eventually form the background for Stalin’s triumph and the end the NEP. The reassessment of NEP would not occur in isolation, but rather as part of a systemic re-evaluation of what the new accommodation with the service elite meant for the party.

The regime became increasingly concerned about the social composition of the party that was being rapidly affected by the new compromise with the white collar professionals. The traditional policy of the party from its inception had been an unrelenting focus on maintaining its identity as the vanguard of the proletariat. Despite the post-Revolution disintegration of the nascent Russian working class, the idea of admitting that they were a militant party with no substantial social roots was anathema to the Bolsheviks – the thesis expressed forcefully by Alexander Shliapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai during the Tenth Party Congress.^[39]

The attempts to create such a connection, sometimes through the flimsiest of bureaucratic maneuvers and definitions, would continue to persist. By 1927, almost half of the party claimed working-class roots, and that claim was of incalculable value in speeding one’s progress up the career ladder within the apparatus. In 1929 that need to maintain the constant and overwhelming influx of the proletariat in order to remain ideologically pure was expressed through the Central Committee Resolution, that “required that 90% of all recruits in industrial areas and 70% in rural areas should be workers in production.”^[40]

The trends in the social composition of the party from 1925 to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War are readily traceable in the party’s statistics.^[41] The percentage of the proletariat in the party grew sporadically but steadily through the 1920s and 1930s, and by 1933 they reached their apogee in assuming the clear majority within the party through the sometimes murky definition of their social origin, while the representatives of petty bourgeoisie and various professionals were reduced to 7.6 percent.^[42] The reversal came shockingly quickly as the Great Break ran its course and the white collar professionals began flooding the party in numbers that took the regime by surprise and forced it into another cycle of futile attempts to resolve the old issue of finding the proper balance between ideology and expertise.

It was Stalin’s speech in February of 1931 that marked the real turn in policy. It rehabilitated “the specialists of the old school” and informed a convention of economic managers and industrial leaders that class struggle alone was not at fault for the extent of wrecking uncovered by the Shakhty trial. “We are to blame,” Stalin proclaimed. “Had we handled the business of industrial management differently, had we started much earlier to learn the technique of business, to master technique, had we more frequently and efficiently intervened in the management of production, the wreckers could not have done so much damage.”^[43]

Closing the door on class warfare, Stalin pointed the party toward technical education, implicitly signaling the temporary lessening of political literacy. When Stalin proclaimed that “cadres decide everything,” he, simply recognized the *fait accompli*—the composition of the party already reflected the slogan, with the professionals forming the majority strata of the party for the first time.^[44] The improvements in the industrial and agricultural spheres swiftly followed, paralleled by a more positive reaction toward the regime from the intelligentsia.^[45] Yet this change in course and

demographics would mark an enduring feature of the new party. Throughout the 1930s, the influx of the white collar professionals into the party continued to increase precipitously, reaching the unprecedented figure of 62.5 percent by 1941. Thus their proportion essentially doubled in one decade.^[46] The 1930s represented the triumph of the technocrats within the party, just as the 1920s culminated in their muzzling as an outside force.

The task set by Stalin in 1931 was deceptively simple—to forever free themselves from dependence on the uncertain loyalty of the intelligentsia, the Communists had to educate and involve themselves in the every aspect of industry and economy. “We must ourselves become the experts, masters of the business; we must turn to technical science—such was the lesson life itself was teaching us.”^[47] The problem in this call for the Communists to become technocrats occurred when the path of the least resistance was taken through the speedy and mass co-optation of the non-Communists already possessing the necessary skills to run the increasingly complex industrial state. The unforeseen consequence of this was that, while bringing a higher level of general education, the new candidates and members evinced with them a considerably lighter focus on the ideological literacy and political learning.

This should not be construed as a suggestion that the new generation was less loyal—but the new wave of Communists and *vydvizhentsy* defined their loyalty differently. Less concerned with the minutiae and arcana of the Marxist debates, they instead concentrated on achieving practical, technological expertise.^[48] This was a necessary compromise for a party increasingly composed of young professionals and concerned with digesting and consolidating the gains of almost fifteen years of intensive efforts that utterly exhausted the party as well as the society. The revolutionaries were becoming managers and increasingly experiencing mission creep, extending the party’s authority into the everyday management of industry, agriculture, and the entire economy, rather than limiting it to political oversight. As the insatiable demand of the industrializing Soviet Union demanded the expansion of managerial class, expediency demanded the melding of the party with the technocracy.

The party was not blind to the process and attempted to counter it. Thus the 1920s and 1930s saw a substantial investment in party education. By 1934 there were already more than four million students in the vast network of the party schools, courses, night universities, etc. The white collar professionals entering the party, however, swamped its system for ideological indoctrination, proving it inadequate for the task. This, in fact, occasioned yet another cycle as the 1932–1933 purge that attempted to stem the tide, to purge the most egregious of politically illiterate Communists out of the party and to heavily increase investment in political education.^[49] That impetus, however, petered out very quickly the Terror that would follow a few years later would once again see a regime heavily favoring the *vydvizhentsy* and technocrats.^[50]

Between 1934 and 1939 more than five hundred thousand Communists were promoted to leading party positions. A large portion of these party members moved into the newly created positions of the rapidly expanding party apparatus that was growing even as hundreds of thousands of Communists were being expelled, convicted, and executed.^[51] The new elite possessing the technical skills prerequisite for running the rapidly modernizing Soviet Union, filled their niche. Stalin himself referenced the timing of the purge and its connection to the emergence of the new Communist technocracy in his speech to the 1937 Plenum of the VKP(b). He remarked that the grand process of cleansing the party had to be delayed until the new wave of loyal professionals was educated and made ready to step into the breach.

The Terror, however, had to be brought short, as the party began to be concerned over the technocrats within its ranks rapidly outnumbering the ideological core. The emphasis of the education of the new Communists pouring into the party now shifted slightly, with the focus

primarily, yet again, on the political rather than technical education, on the expansion of the qualified Bolshevik cadres.^[52] Yet another signal that the priority was once again shifting toward the ideological quality of the Communists was a series of directives from the center excoriating the party apparatus for compromising the individual vetting standards of party admission. These were, of course, structured primarily to ascertain the would-be Communist's political purity. Such procedures, however, were increasingly abandoned by the local organizations in favor of mass admissions.^[53]

The CC (Central Committee) resolutions decried the facts of mass admission by the party organizations. This flood of new members underwent only the barest of vetting, with a dozen or more applications being reviewed at a single party meeting.^[54] In a memo to Stalin on 29 October 1937, Georgii Malenkov outlined the rough blueprint of the shifting political landscape. Examining the ongoing process, he complained that "while the great work of purging Trotskyite-Fascist agents is being done, some party organizations and their leaders make serious errors, which complicate the process. . . . Despite the repeated orders from the CC, local party organizations often take incorrect and lighthearted approach to expulsion of the communists."^[55]

Mass expulsions had become the norm, in a flagrant violation of the party principles, individual case review had given way to mass work, with sometimes hundreds of appeals being sorted through at one bureau session, with the inevitable consequences of inattention to details and a propensity for one-size-fits-all solutions.^[56] In the winter of 1938, the Central Committee Plenum mirrored Malenkov's memorandum from the previous year almost to the letter.

Among other reasons accounting for this aspect of the party work was the same trait that inculcated the flaws decried by the Kremlin. The enduring shortages of the qualified personnel drove the local organizations toward a myriad of practices that allowed them to save the time of their overburdened and undermanned personnel, but a vicious circle was thus created. Until the shortfalls in the manpower could be replenished, the party principles of the individual admissions, expulsions, and appeals would continue to be routinely abandoned in favor of the mass reviews.

The Eighteenth Congress called on the party to abandon the mass work-habits of the Terror that eschewed the individualized approach toward each Communist and often resulted in the abridgement of the party members' rights.^[57] Yet the call fell on deaf ears. Until the methods being decried by the Congress succeeded in reinforcing the party ranks, they simply could not be abandoned. The relative and absolute scarcity of the trained Bolshevik cadre precluded the application of the individualized and thorough vetting of the new members that characterized the pre-Revolutionary party and still remained the ideal. Pressed for reinforcements and constrained by the lack of professional cadres, the party was, once again, being swamped by the "opportunists, random people and wreckers."

Lacking a credible check on their power, the reach of the party continued to spread steadily, only exacerbating the problem. As the Five-Year Plans began to take effect, the strain became all the greater—leading to the sequence of institutional reforms of the 1930s that mirrored the hurried improvisation of the personnel policies. The acute shortage of cadres was publicly admitted at the Sixteenth Party Congress. Apart from other measures, this resulted in structural changes within the Secretariat of the Central Committee. What followed was a focus on the specific management of the cadres and creation of two departments to deal specifically with cadres throughout the party: the Department of Organization and Instruction, and the Department of Assignment.^[58]

These changes, however, simply could not cope with the fundamental problems of the personnel shortage and in 1934 another program of reform was unveiled. This time the party attempted to organize its work by the branches of economy rather than by the party functions,

resulting in nine new industrial departments. Each Department was responsible for all party work within its area of responsibility.^[59] The familiar sequence of events unfolded as the interminable argument raged between the ideologues and technocrats—now all ensconced within the party. The former argued that the reorientation toward industrial-branch departments would result in the de-emphasis of ideological expertise. They were trying to fight the rising tide, however. As industrialization picked up speed it resulted in increased focus and the spread of direct party influence over the economic functions of the state. In practice, this inevitably meant the diffusion of the party's focus as they encroached on the supposed functions of the state (soviet) organs and industrial or economic institutions.^[60]

In 1934, Stalin, speaking for the victorious technocrats, reported to the Seventeenth Party Congress that: “The bureaucrats have long become past masters in the art of demonstrating their loyalty to party and government decisions in words and pigeon holing them in deed. In order to overcome these difficulties it was necessary to raise the level to put an end to the disparity between our organizational work and the requirements of the political line of the party; it was necessary to raise the level of organizational leadership in all spheres of the national economy to the level of political leadership; it was necessary to see to it that our organizational work guarantees the practical realizations of the political slogans and decisions of the party.”^[61]

The industrial departments were in many ways a direct result of these directives, since the party was the institution that ultimately had to be responsible for overseeing the implementation of its orders, of raising the level of the economic leadership. But put in this position, the party inevitably usurped more and more the direct duties of the industrial managers. Paralleling the trend that was playing out within the dynamic of the party organs and the soviets, the party was inexorably moving deeper into the spheres of responsibility it originally meant simply to oversee and mobilize.

Moreover, distributing the responsibility of the personnel allocation to the industrial branches once again de-emphasized the demands on ideological preparedness. And so, at the end of the Great Terror, in concert with a greater effort to renew the political purity of the party, the apparatus was reformed yet again. In 1939, the Eighteenth Party Congress dissolved the industrial departments.^[62] Among the cited harmful effects were their competition for qualified cadres and their lost focus, neglecting the political and party-organizational work and concerning themselves with the concrete job of economic management, and, as a consequence, progressively undercutting the managers' autonomy and sense of responsibility.^[63]

The Cadre Department presided over by Malenkov now controlled all the issues pertaining to personnel allocation and organization, while Andrei Zhdanov's Department of Propaganda and Agitation oversaw the education and ideological instruction. In macabre irony, the entire sequence of reforms brought the party back exactly to the status quo ante of 1934. Moreover, this amounted largely to cosmetic changes, while the Great Terror exacerbated the underlying problem of understaffing.^[64]

Predictably, the somewhat frenetic and schizophrenic series of reforms threw the party apparatus into confusion as each change reverberated and had to be adapted throughout the system. By 1941, the latest slate of reforms was again a failure and Malenkov successfully advocated formal recognition of the spontaneous reassertion of greater party control over the economic life of the country that had taken place in the interim. The Eighteenth Party Conference recognized the process officially, ordering the local party organs to create the post of a secretary specifically tasked with oversight and management of the agricultural and industrial matters of their district or region.^[65] The sequence was beginning anew.

Again and again, the interminable need of the state for qualified cadres emerges as a

fundamental feature of the sociopolitical environment, driving the regime to its repeated willingness to tolerate not simply questionable educational standards, but also the dilution of ideological literacy. The compromise in the qualitative level of the *vydvizhentsy* was an acceptable trade-off for the rapid quantitative expansion of the new administrative elite. And the compromised political education was worth the professionalization of the party, which was quickly becoming synonymous with the managerial class as its role grew, inexorably attempting to regulate every aspect of the economy.^[66] The manpower shortages continued to define the policies of the party-state, intensified by the still-fragile infrastructure.

These dilemmas of the Soviet state found their expression in the early, heady days of the victorious Revolution. As early as 1918, the Communist government was confronted with a body politic and state apparatus that were seemingly disintegrating before their very eyes. The early years of the USSR were defined in many ways by the attempt of the Moscow regime to curb the localism of the provincial power centers, be they the Soviets or the partisan commanders.

Thus, very early on, Lenin carefully triangulated the utopian dream of eventually doing away with the tsarist state. He began distinguishing the necessary destruction of the repressive and reactionary features of that edifice from the modern, regulatory aspects of the bureaucratic apparatus that the new regime needed in order to maintain even the most basic grasp on the state.^[67] With time, this theoretical tendency would reach its logical apogee and, in a radically open departure from classical Marxism, the idea of the state “withering away” was loudly and repeatedly repudiated.

At the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930, the new party line held that the state had not yet developed to the pinnacle of its evolution and thus was not yet at the phase of withering. By 1939, a more secure Stalin put the matter even more blandly in his report to the Eighteenth Party Congress. Those Communists waiting for the state to die away were scorned as formalists clinging to the letter rather than the spirit of classical Marxism, betraying their “underestimation of the role and significance of our socialist state and of its military, punitive and intelligence organs, which are essential for the defense of the socialist land from foreign attack.”^[68]

This evolution of the theoretical and rhetorical superstructure went on against the backdrop of two decades of constant negotiation of power between the center and the periphery. The danger of localism was predictable, given the history of Russia, and the party attempted to guard against it by maintaining a dual structure of authority. The extent of the powers and responsibilities of the local governmental and state institutions remained unclear and vague. Merle Fainsod argued that this lack of definition was purposeful, part of the strategy by the party to limit the historical tendency of the local authorities to develop illusions of autonomy.

“While they were required to adopt “all appropriate measures for developing the cultural and economic life of the territory” and to solve “all questions of purely local importance,” they were also subject to the control of superior organs in the Soviet hierarchy and were required to execute “all instructions issues by the appropriate higher organs of the Soviet authority.”^[69]

Besides the vague delineation of their powers, the soviets were also hobbled by the tight control over their budgets, decided and outlined by the central organs. The role of the party was envisioned primarily as that of the guardian of the proletarian values, an organ of oversight that was to control the morale and subsequently productivity, and to serve as a mechanism of ensuring the loyalty of the state organs, where the danger of “wreckers” could never be discounted. The state would act as the manager of a separate, “neutral” bureaucratic structure responsible for the implementation of the broad policies sketched out by the party. It was the business of the state to govern, it was the duty of the party to keep the state ideologically honest, and Lenin railed against

the mixing of the two as early as 1922.^[70] Nor was it simply a convenient fiction or empty rhetoric.

In a country dominated by peasantry with little or no education and where the party remained a select institution of radically outnumbered, enlightened minority, the tedious business of implementing policies, of overseeing the nuts and bolts of governance, had to be at least partially outsourced to the non-Communists and institutions other than the party. Any attempt by the party to do everything would inevitably result in the diffusion of its core identity and purpose as the ideological pathfinder.^[71] In effect, the party would dilute its core strength as the ideological experts in order to become second-rate managers.

The blueprint outlined by a succession of the Bolshevik theorists and leaders sought to prevent that trend. The reality of running the country, however, proved to be more complicated and the tendency toward growth and incursion into the ever-widening circle of duties and responsibilities of the state and society by the party proved to be an irresistible temptation.^[72]

The spheres of power refused to stay rigidly separate, due in no small part to the fundamental problem of understaffing of that administrative apparatus and the fragility of the communication and infrastructure network between the center and the periphery. Much like the *voevodes* of Peter's time and the officers of the nineteenth century *zemstvas*, the provincial party bosses inevitably found themselves with an increasing degree of autonomy and power within their bailiwicks as their tenure lengthened. Just as in the earlier eras, the lack of qualified personnel was made good through the construction by the local potentates of a coterie of similar-thinking individuals with personal loyalty to the local party apparatus boss rather than the system, in effect contributing to the continuation of the personalized system of patronage rather than professional bureaucracy.

The soviet organs proved a very tenuous counterweight to their analogues among the party organizations in practice. Since both the state and party institutions were drawing on the common and very limited pool of the educated elite capable of serving as administrators it was only inevitable that they would combine and link their resources. And "as the authority of the party apparatus over other official agencies grew . . . these local cliques took on more and more of clientelist character with the provincial party secretary as patron."^[73] This tendency was further strengthened by the unpredictable nature of Soviet politics, which made the cruder personalized networks more secure and dependable than formal bonds of professional association.

The pressure on the regional party bosses to fulfill and overfull the economic plans also fostered an endemic willingness to turn toward informal channels in order to achieve required results. As a result of these trends, the institutional integrity of the party-state remained irrevocably compromised even as the personalized power networks and systems of favor trading or *blat* crept ever upwards, eventually including the TsK secretaries who engaged in building up factions throughout the party system in their rivalries.^[74] As Khlevniuk articulated in his biography of Ordzhonikidze, in a system where purges were an acceptable tool of discourse, while their rationale was often a mystery, it became absolutely necessary to acquire a powerful patron who could shield his people through his own personal connection to Stalin.^[75]

Thus, throughout the prewar period the term *semeistvennost'* or "familyness" became an integral term of interparty jargon, often cited as a common flaw of the local organizations and their leaders. More worryingly, the personalized networks spread horizontally as well, including not simply the party apparatchiks but also state functionaries and industrial managers. The often bandied about comparison of the party to the church was coming true in an unforeseen way; the society was corrupting its spiritual guardian faster than the latter could redeem (or re-educate) it. Under the constant pressure to produce results, the ideological overseers often became accomplices of the economic professionals, running interference for them, seeing it "as their function to cope with

bureaucratic and political impediments, while the experts handled the business.”^[76]

The purges served as a periodic quick fix to the accumulating problems, but the flaws were not a problem but rather a condition of the system. Much as Grozny’s successors, the Soviet state had to discover that while it could always liquidate a regional magnate (or an entire slew of them), the purges did little to solve the underlying social trends. Furthermore the loyal adherents sent out by Moscow to replace the repressed apparatchiks quickly replicated the latter’s behavioral and organizational patterns.^[77] Wholesale terror provided only a brief respite from the conundrum, simply exacerbating the preconditions that led to the crisis.

As always, lack of qualified replacements also played a part, limiting the range of options available to the state—often the incompetent leaders were simply transferred to a different locale.^[78] In pre-Terror era especially, the latitude was wide and “in cases where Moscow detected any kind of local abuse of power, the republican and provincial party secretaries generally managed to escape criticism.”^[79] The center consistently pushed back against these local fiefs and attempted to maintain control through a variety of channels, the primary attempt being stationing a representative of the Party Control Commission (KPK) as an observer.^[80]

These modern equivalents of Louis XIV’s *intendants* were sometimes permanently stationed in a certain *oblast*, others acted as roving agents and troubleshooters for the Central Committee, directly presenting data and recommendations to them. In a drawn-out struggle, however, the regional elite usually managed to co-opt these people or force the center to recall those who became too disruptive. The power of the local party grandees was such that the Kremlin’s emissaries were often reluctant to chance their retribution with any real investigation of wrongdoing.^[81] The situation was not unique. Thus the KPK’s predecessor-agency (Central Control Commission) had to be shut down in the 1920s, because it became part of the milieu it was supposed to police.^[82] The same cycle of fervor fading into complicity would also play out throughout the KPK’s history, eventually leading to its demise.

As James Harris demonstrated, the regional power networks possessed a wide range of tools with which they could influence the center—subversion of the oversight channels was one, another was indefinite delay in the implementation of the central directives even as the provincial party organizations engaged in the ritualized process of promising to fulfill them.^[83] “Regional leaders had no power to compel the center to given policy decisions, but taken together their actions created pressured that substantially influenced those decisions.”^[84]

This dynamic would not be unfamiliar to the regime, since it paralleled the complexities plaguing the Kremlin’s attempt to conceptualize its relationship with the armed forces. As the Stalinist state matured in the 1920s and 1930s, its stability would come to rest on the unsteady tripod of the power centers located in the party itself, the security apparatus, and the military. Of these, only the army presented a significant rival to the party, because it was a nexus of its own identity that could exist independently from the Bolshevik idea—if allowed. the state had faced the emergence of a similar threat vis-à-vis the incipient technocracy and eventually solved it by absorption.

^[1]“O politicheskoi strategii i taktike russkikh kommunistov,” (written in 1921) in I.V. Stalin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (Moscow, 1952), 5: 16.

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- [14]Loren R. Graham, *Science in the Soviet Union: A Short History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 88.
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- [16]Graham, *Science*, 88.
- [17]William G. Rosenberg, “Introduction,” 6.
- [18]Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 45–46.
- [19]Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 91–92.
- [20]T. H. Rigby, *Political Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to*

Gorbachev (Worcester: Billings and Sons, 1990), 37.

[21]Farmer, *The Soviet Administrative Elite*, 39–40.

[22]Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 41.

[23]Graham, *Science*, 86; Michael David-Fox, “Symbiosis to Synthesis: The Communist Academy and the Bolshevization of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1918-1929,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 46, no. 2 (1998): 219-243.

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[25]Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 96–99.

[26]Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 254-255.

[27]Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 16–17.

[28]Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 97, 116.

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[35]Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 73.

[36]Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 218.

[37]Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov, “Directed Desires: Kul’turnost’ and Consumption” in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolutions, 1881–1940*, ed. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291–93.

[38]*Ibid.*, 312.

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- [42] “Spravka,” RGANI (18 August 1953) f.5, op. 15, d.409, l.47.
- [43] I. V. Stalin, “O zadachakh khozaistvennikov,” *Pravda* February 5, 1931.
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- [49] Roi Medvedev and Zhores Medvedev, *Neizvestnyi Stalin* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), 498; Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 21.
- [50] Farmer, *The Soviet Administrative Elite*, 60
- [51] Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, 176–78.
- [52] *Pravda*, 29 March 1937.
- [53] “Ob ustraneniі nedostatkov rukovodstva v mestnykh partiinykh organizatsiіakh v dele priema novykh chlenov v partii,” RGASPI (10 July 1940) f.17, op.3, d.1025, l.135.
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