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'Icebergs', barter, and the mafia in provincial Russia

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'Icebergs'

Late at night recently I was driving through the streets of Ulan-Ude with a Buryat friend and I saw a crowd of people huddled against the wall of a dark building, their shoulders turned against the wind. I asked my friend what they were doing. 'Ah, that is the queue for gold,' he replied. 'They stand there all night, and in the morning many more people come. Even though gold is so expensive, for the last two years everyone has been trying to get hold of it. They even buy and sell places in the queue.'

A move to gold indicates a lack of trust in the value of the rouble. In Russia today this is combined, as everyone knows, with severe shortages of goods in the shops, general inflation and impossibly high prices in markets, production blockages in farms and factories, a chaotic legal situation, and the introduction of 'rationing'. But I believe that the social implications of the situation are less well known and understood and it is these which I wish to address in this article. One might imagine a parallel with the time after the Second World War, when many of these economic features were present. However, for reasons which will become clear below, the present situation should be seen as different even from that of Russia in the 1940s. Perhaps internal historical analogies can be drawn for some aspects of what is happening today, but they also are to be found further afield, and anthropology may be useful to elucidate them.

We can begin with a very brief outline of the situation in provincial Russia. The declaration of 'sovereignty' and other forms of autonomy vis-à-vis the USSR, not just by the RSFSR but by regions within it, such as the Buryat ASSR, and districts within regions, such as the Aga Autonomous Okrug, means that there is widespread uncertainty about government and law at 'higher' levels of the body politic. Consequently, organizations and enterprises in the regions, run in a personal way almost as 'suzerainties' by local bosses, have strengthened themselves and increased their social functions in order to protect their members. What are the relations between these organizations? It is not possible to rely on the law, or even know what it is these days; and at the same time government, which used to regulate flows of goods and allocation of labour – including decrees by Soviets and plan-orders by Ministries – has ceased to be universally or even generally obeyed. One could see this situation as the beginning of the reforms, the loosening of centralized authority and the devolution of power. But the social structures which are now toughening themselves are in contradiction with the goal of a free market, even with that of a regulated but all-USSR market. Symptoms of this are that economic relations between local 'suzerainties' are increasingly conducted by distinctive methods (of which people in the west have little knowledge): by coupons and 'orders', by means of direct barter, or via what is widely known as 'the Mafia' – a heterogeneous collection of racketeer associations whose common feature is that they contain their own 'protection'.

Sometimes Russians use a metaphor to describe the

local corporations which I have called suzerainties. They are 'icebergs': of different sizes, perhaps melting a little at top and bottom, or maybe growing imperceptibly, floating and jostling one another in an unfriendly sea. Such images are all very well, but the real situation is so peculiar to the Soviet economy and so unfamiliar to readers from the west that we need detailed examples in order to understand what is happening.

Let us start with the case of carpets in Ulan-Ude, an example not of production but of distribution. In September the carpet shop on Ulitsa Pobedy was besieged, a seething mass of people from morning to night, though the shelves were empty. The 'queue' had bureaucratized itself and stood at a list of eight hundred names. The manager of the shop was in despair. He telephoned every morning to his suppliers, and announced the paltry results (a few hundred square metres due from Mongolia sometime) to the customers, but 'They don't believe me! They are there all day and become quite inhuman from the fruitless waiting. I need to protect my assistants from their insults.' In fact, the manager had received some other carpets, but they had immediately been sent out 'on order' to a collective farm. But it was not this that agitated the customers. They assumed that the manager could get carpets on the side, by barter. The manager said that, no, he has nothing to give in exchange. The same was true outside, in the town markets. A few desirable carpets were for sale, but the sellers wanted only certain scarce goods in exchange, and such things are, unfortunately, hardly produced in Buryatia.

Coupons and 'orders'

Western newspapers often inform their readers that the USSR has introduced rationing to cope with such situations. This may give the wrong impression. There is a distinction in principle between generalized rationing and limited 'coupons'. What actually is being used is the latter, a multifarious collection of food-cards (*kar-tochka*), coupons (*talon*), orders (*zakaz*) and coupon-orders, the two combined. This is an important factor which differentiates the current situation from that at the end of the Second World War. Then, the centralized government was able to make an assessment of stocks and production-flows in the country and assign goods to cities and regions by a single system of rationing. The system differentiated between social categories (soldiers, mothers, pensioners, etc.) but in principle it was universal for the whole country and population. Today, no-one knows what goods there are, and even if general rationing is introduced it will be impossible to establish universal norms. Entitlements to purchase are limited by a host of local factors. The coupons and orders enabling people to buy things are issued not centrally but by all sorts of regional organizations. Local government, i.e. the Soviets at various levels, seem to have side-stepped responsibility for the regulation of allocations as a whole.¹ Crucially, the *talon* coupons and orders can be issued by the places where people work (the 'suzerainties' or 'icebergs').

Long ago Mary Douglas (1967) explained the socio-

political consequences of the use of coupons in her analysis of certain tribal economies in New Guinea. She contrasted three types of primitive economy, controlled, freely competitive, and mixed, and argued that the currencies found in the more controlled economies were more like coupons than money. 'I would expect primitive coupon systems to emerge where there is some danger that the effective demand for scarce resources may so disturb the pattern of distribution as to

'order' are advertised and people queue to put their names on the list. When the set time is up the department sends people down to the shop to collect the goods, they are brought back to the Institute, and distributed. These orders are more or less 'powerful' depending on the social weight of the organization concerned (academics, it goes without saying, rank rather low). The shops may give better or worse quality goods, or fulfil only 100 out of 300 orders on the list, for example. I know one family which lives almost entirely on the 'order' of its one privileged member, a long-time Party member and veteran of World War Two.

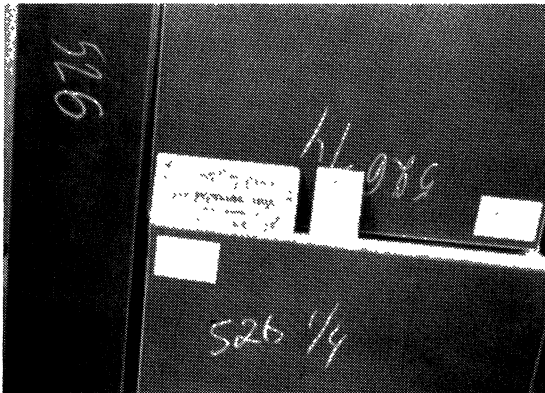
Talon coupons are similar to food-cards, but even more limited in their use. They enable certain categories of people (workers at a factory, members of a collective-farm, war-veterans of a town, mothers of many children, etc.) to buy specific products (see *illus. 1*). They are extremely heterogeneous. Sometimes coupons are limited to a specific shop, sometimes not. Sometimes they are allocated per head in a family, sometimes by the number of adult workers. They may be distributed randomly (drawn out of an urn) or they may be allocated to people who have worked especially well. Coupons may be given out by various organizations, from local Soviets to work-places.

The situation is clearly unfair, as it gives people unequal access to resources. Not only are the 'norms' different in the major cities, but in the provinces meat, for example, may be available by two different systems in neighbouring towns, in one by *talon* coupons and in other only by orders made at the work-place. In the deep countryside (*glubinka*) people often have access to none of these systems and therefore have to provide their own basic subsistence. A woman working as a secretary in a state farm, for example, has an exhausting day as she rushes to combine her job with milking her cattle, tending her pigs, and so forth. To give an example: in 1988 in the Kalmyk ASSR 4,214 tons of meat were distributed through state outlets by coupons and orders. Of this 70% was sold in the capital city of Elista, but Elista does not contain anything like 70% of the population. A meat coupon in the capital therefore 'weighed' considerably more than in the country towns, and farmers were not given coupons at all.⁵ But despite their unfairness these systems are widely popular as most people think they have something to gain from them.

Inside the organization there are many possibilities for deploying patronage and they extend to hangers-on. In Kalmykia orders for meat were also made by work-places. The construction group Kalmykstroï, for example, sent their order to the butcher shop only for it to be discovered more or less by chance that the director of the group had personally added 110 names to the list. Since many people may get left off these lists for one reason or another (e.g. their official residence is in another town, they do not work, or have part-time or unofficial employment) one could interpret the director's action as charitable, but it is also clear that the boss (*khozyain*, 'owner' 'master') only stood to gain himself by his increased patronage.

The coupon systems naturally have social effects at the receiving end too. An example is the allocation of vodka coupons in regions such as Tuva which are still subject to the 'dry law' against alcoholism. Here coupons are allocated by committees within work-places and I was assured in 1989 that they take it upon themselves to judge whether someone is 'suitable' to receive a monthly coupon. Drunkards and 'unsuitable'

Illus. 1. A furniture shop in Kyzyl, Tuva ASSR, hangs out a notice saying that these goods are available for purchase only to those with coupons issued by the City Soviet. Such coupons are not allocated to people with criminal records or other black marks against their names.



threaten a given social order'.² Both rationing and coupons (or licensing) are instruments of social policy, but whereas rationing is egalitarian in intent, coupons are not. The object of coupons or licensing is protective: to limit access to particular goods to certain groups of people. An important side-effect of coupons is to create advantages, even sometimes monopolies, for those who issue them and those who receive them. 'Both parties become bound in a patron-client relation sustained by the strong interests of each in the continuance of the system' (1967:131).

In Russia today it can be seen that coupons thus have social implications both within and between 'suzerainties'. How does this work? In large metropolitan cities since 1 December 1990 all products are now sold up to given 'norms' only to people with residence permits. On the other hand, the food-card (*kartochka*)³ is the most prevalent form in the provinces. Such cards are for specific products which are scarce in a given town or region and again they are issued only to people who have residence permits. This means that outsiders cannot buy such products at all. If a villager goes on a visit to Ulan-Ude for a month he or she will have a hungry time of it without friends to provide food. As one Soviet economist has put it, 'The *kartochki* only divide the market into "apanage principedoms" and protect resources which have been "beaten out" from "aliens"'.⁴

'Orders' (*zakaz*), which exist in several guises, are also common. A large factory, for example, may have its own grocery shop. In Moscow local government insists that such shops be open to the general public at least one day a week, and perhaps to pensioners another day a week. The other five days are reserved for the factory. All shopping at the store is done 'by order', i.e. purchase of a limited bundle of products (the 'order', e.g. 300 grams of cheese, 1/2 kilo of sausages, 3 tins of fish, etc.) which the shop changes from time to time according to its supplies. Another prevalent form is for shops selling scarce goods, such as shoes and boots, to take a consignment directly 'by order' to an office or factory where they are sold to employees by coupons which have been distributed beforehand. Just as common is a system whereby departments of an organization such as an Institute of the Academy of Sciences fetch in their own orders and distribute them at the work-place. In this case, at set times the contents of the

people are refused, and must prove themselves before their work-mates in order to get back on the list.

The coupon system itself, however, is beyond the law. You can be prosecuted in some regions for illegal distilling, but not for issuing coupons. In Yakutia recently a large cartel printed thousands of counterfeit vodka coupons. When this was discovered several hundred people were arrested. But they were released because no law could be found under which to prosecute them. They had not sold the coupons and benefited financially; all they had done was to issue their own licence to get drunk (depriving other people of vodka). As an observer commented, 'In the present system the consumer is protected by precisely nothing'.⁶

The result is that people are increasingly dependent on the services provided by their work-places, especially in the countryside. It is not always realized in the west quite how all-embracing these may be. Again the situation is utterly heterogeneous. No matter if the old Victory Collective Farm has renamed itself the Victory Agrarian-Industrial Firm, one must look closely at the individual farm to see what the reality is. This September I returned to the Karl Marx Collective Farm in Barguzin, where I had first done fieldwork in the 1960s. I found that it was now rather successful, having undergone a period in the doldrums in the 1970s, but was organizationally almost entirely unchanged. As in the old days, what I called the 'manipulable resources' (the surplus product over the amount supplied to the state under the plan-order) were used to provide services for the members as the Chairman saw fit. In this case he had decided on cultural investment: a magnificent club had been provided, an ethnographic museum built, an integrated Buryat educational programme was under way in the schools, and a sports stadium was under construction. But Gorbachev's agricultural reforms were here resolutely refused. Although one or two young men had managed to winkle out low-quality leasehold fields, the Chairman was adamant that classic collectivised farming was the only realistic alternative. Indeed, he, like most farm chairmen I met, saw individual farming as a threat: it would claim his best workers, who would put their energies into their own profits rather than those of the collective farm.

On the other hand, in the Bodongut State Farm, also in Buryatia, the Chairman had gone over to the leasehold system entirely, even before it became government policy. The farm was divided into 22 leasehold brigades. Darmayev's brigade, for example, last year sold produce worth 90,300 roubles to the state via the farm. During the year the four families in the brigade lived on an advance worth 15% of their estimated income. Payment for any farm machinery used, for fodder, and for amortization, housing and repairs was deducted from the 90,300 roubles at the end of the year. The rest of the income belonged to the families, to dispose as they wished. For this system to be profitable to the farm, the accounting office had laboriously to work out two new internal sets of prices. Taking into account the prices paid to the farm by the state for deliveries of the plan-order, the farm had to set, for each item, its own prices paid to the leaseholders for their products and the set of prices at which the workers acquired machinery, fodder, etc. from the farm. The result in this case was a brilliant success. The farm made such a profit that it was able to provide thousands of roubles to its workers for loans to build houses and acquire private livestock, to pay each year 300 roubles to mother-heroiners, 200 roubles to families with many children, 130 to war invalids, 100 to veterans, to provide paid maternity leave

for three years for each child, to hire a farm postman, club worker and kindergarten staff, to build a medical centre, a general store, and an abattoir and meat-packing shop.

What these two otherwise different farms have in common is the decisive power of the Chairman. This seems to have grown since my earlier visits, with a corresponding weakening in the authority of the Communist Party (not that there are any other political parties in Buryatia as yet). Both men had translated their economic authority sideways into politics: the Chairman of the Karl Marx (the same man who had presided in 1967) was also executive head of the local Soviet and the Chairman of Bodongut was an elected deputy to the Soviet of the Buryat ASSR. But even in lesser and unsuccessful farms, the ordinary members are dependent on the 'suzerain' in spheres which western people would think of as having nothing to do with their work. Most housing, for example, is allocated by the work-place, and even if someone wishes to build their own house the loan necessary to do so can be obtained only from the employing organization directly or via its recommendation. One's standing with the boss is of direct consequence.

Farms and other enterprises have become economic sub-systems with a noticeable degree of autonomy. There are peculiar internal arrangements designed to conserve and internally circulate their own resources. For example, I went into one farm general store and saw, prominently displayed against a rack of 'ordinary' (actually fully adequate by British standards) coats, a few glossy furs and shiny Japanese anoraks. They had notices pinned to them: they were only for sale to people who had sold 300 kilos of potatoes or 50 kilos of meat to the farm. But the Bodongut state farm went much further. It printed its own money. All internal transactions in the farm were paid in this money, which was converted into roubles only at the end of the year when the farm itself was paid by the state. The initial reason for this internal money was that no-one would give the farm a loan to pay its first year advances to the lessee brigades, but it continued to be used because, as the Chairman said, it prevented people and roubles seeping out of the farm during the working year.

A Soviet legal specialist has summed up the situation: 'Empty shop counters, as history tells us, are the initial syndrome of social discontent. Towns, oblasts [administrative divisions], republics are fencing themselves off with palisades of rationing in defence against "migratory demand", they are bringing in nothing more or less than "buying tickets". The scale and consequences of this mutual alienation are unpredictable. A large number of people support such methods, and mass consciousness brands those who penetrate into "foreign" enclaves of the rationed market through a prism of confrontational mythology as *pokupanty* [a pun, combining the idea of those who buy up too much, *pokupat'*, with occupying forces, *okkupanty*, C.H.] or *plyushevyi desant* (plush landing-forces)... In almost every region such epithets are widespread. The market is divided-up, and aggressive particularism is growing.'⁸

Turning to the relations between these defensive 'suzerainties' we should note (1) that their 'manipulable resources' are frequently goods and labour rather than money, (2) that the law gives little protection to informal contracts, (3) the virtual absence of commercial banks in the USSR, (4) the controls still exercised over farm markets, and (5) the inequalities in access to scarce resources between regions. It is these conditions

which give rise to barter and the operations of what all Soviet citizens call the 'Mafia'. As governmental decrees become less effective the sheer number of informal contracts has risen, and it is these in particular which are neither serviced by banks nor protected by the law.

The desperate attempts of the old system of decrees to maintain control is illustrated in relation to this autumn's potato harvest in Buryatia. Heavy rains during the late summer made the fields water-logged and delayed the harvest. As usual in such situations the ASSR government declared a situation of emergency and ordered all institutions such as institutes and schools to send labour to the fields. What was unusual this year is that the government increased the rates of pay, lowered the work-norms, and ordered farms to pay the helpers on time. But this was not sufficient to make enough people come out. Meanwhile city-dwellers needed potatoes. The result was that many people made their own arrangements with the farms: harvesting in return for a direct payment in potatoes. Many farms were in such disarray that they turned a blind eye to people simply helping themselves in the fields.

Factories and farms have always, if they are at all successful, ended the year with some manipulable resources in products. In the past the state plan-order was supposed to mop up all such assets, but now that enterprises are all officially based on self-accounting (*khozraschet*) it is official policy to allow them to dispose of their surplus as they see fit. In theory this could be done through the medium of money. Similarly, individual citizens with disposable assets (potatoes they have harvested, a dacha they wish to change, etc.) could use money. But in practice they frequently do not, and one reason is the absence of both commercial banks and personal bank accounts.

In the USSR today there are only a tiny number of banks offering services to individuals or institutions, and none in places like Buryatia, as far as I know. Sberbank SSR, Promstroibank SSR, Agroprombank SSR and the other state banks still play a traditional role. This means that they do not trust customers who might wish to bank with them, indeed they restrict access by placing fearsome militiamen at their doors to examine identity documents. In effect they still operate virtually entirely on instructions from above. They are ordered to finance X or Y project, and they do so, without regard for its further viability (this is one reason why so many construction projects lie unfinished in the Soviet Union). State banks even liquidate the assets of enterprises, or move funds between the accounts of various customers with impunity.⁹ Not surprisingly there is a widespread desire to keep out of their grasp. Individuals can place their money in a savings bank, but this is not a bank account as we know it. There are no cheque-books and the idea of making loans available to people who ask for them on their own initiative is a novelty (*see cover illustration*). Rather than see their money eaten away by inflation people are increasingly turning to saving in commodities (for example, gold, as we have seen).

Barter

The result is that both enterprises and individuals turn to barter (*barternaya sdelka*). This is not a new phenomenon, but it is growing. Soviet friends told me that around 60% of the Soviet economy is now transacted by means of barter. This must be an exaggeration, but it shows how the phenomenon is perceived today whatever its actual dimensions. In farms and factories

barter has always been essential to maintain production, not just to dispose of surpluses. As my previous work on barter in north-east Nepal showed¹⁰, simultaneous barter is the kind of contract which can best dispense with trust. It has no need for the *generalized* trust epitomized by confidence in the value of a national currency. The transactors see what is on offer, come to an agreement, swap their products, and can then walk away from the deal never to meet again. However, such direct barter is extremely rare, especially in agricultural economies. This is because the various products are available at different times of year, and because, since agriculture is cyclical and needs for supplies recur, it makes sense to repeat exchanges with the same partners rather than seek new ones each year. Unlike simultaneous barter, delayed barter or repeated barter requires a high degree of trust and fair-dealing. Only this can ensure that a return is made later for an item given today, or that both sides will wish to repeat the transaction in the next cycle. As a result transactors tend to establish exchange networks with 'known people'. But these can never provide the fluid, all-pervasive links of a monetary system, since they are limited by these very personalized relations, by the lack of generalized trust and information. Barter, therefore, is not only a symptom of a disintegrated economy but also perpetuates it.

All barter, whether immediate or delayed, requires information as to what is available where, when, and at what rates. In the Soviet Union this is provided not by central exchanges but by special individuals or departments within each enterprise. These 'supply departments' as they are known are staffed by highly-valued people, *snabzhentsy* (suppliers) or *tolkachi* (pushers). Their task is to travel round the country getting information and making deals. Although the products transacted may be valued in roubles no money changes hands. Let us take an example. In the Aga Buryat Autonomous Okrug the eastern region is treeless steppe-land where sheep-farms produce wool and meat, the western part is heavily wooded. Farms of the two regions have set up their own regular exchange relations whereby meat and wool is exchanged for timber and fodder.

The barter contracts are unregulated by the state and exchange ratios vary from year to year. The effect of this in recent years in Aga has been to advantage the eastern farms: timber and fodder are relatively plentiful and in any case could be acquired from places other than western Aga. On the other hand, the relative value of meat and wool has risen with the general disarray of Soviet farming. As one farm director told me smugly, his single state farm in the east was now worth more than all of the seven farms of the western region put together. Barter can be combined with the system of 'orders' and this may result in further trading. For example, a farm may give a refrigerator factory spare building materials in exchange for some refrigerators 'on order', and then trade the extra fridges for fodder with some neighbours.

Barter thus establishes little pools of trust and mutual help, though it does not necessarily save a transactor from relative decline engendered by the wider external economic situation. As in Nepal, it is clear that try as they might to influence 'their' exchange partners, the disadvantaged side is forced to agree, or to try elsewhere with people who may be less well known and less reliable in making payment. The whole system is carried out in circumstances of utmost uncertainty about its legality. Let us note, in brief, what the general attitude to the law is today in the provinces, and then

1. *Dialog*, 1992, 2, p 58.

2. Mary Douglas (1967) 'Primitive Rationing', in R. Firth (ed.) *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, Tavistock: London; p.127.

3. The reader should not be confused by this term. At present it has the character of a local

coupon as described, but the expression *kartochnaya sistema* is used for the general rationing which some economists advocate introducing for the USSR as a whole in the future.

4. *Dialog* 2, 1990, p 57.
5. *Dialog*, 2, 1990, p 58. Residence documents have therefore almost become a commodity.
6. *Dialog*, 2, 1990, p 58.
7. *Molodezh Buryatii*, 1st Sept 1990, p 3.
8. A. B. Vengerov, writing in *Dialog*, 2, 1990, p 58.
9. *Dialog*, 8, 1990, p 81. This journal praises the initiative of one new commercial bank, the Vostok, based in Ufa. But it notes that such independence is anathema to the state. Commercial banks up to recently have been allowed to operate without paying taxes. Now the Vostok has been asked to pay a 60% tax.
10. C. Humphrey, 1985, 'Barter and Economic Disintegration', *Man*, March.
11. A. Subbotin writing in *Pravda Buryatii*, 7th October 1990, p 2.
12. *Dialog*, 2, 1990, p 73.
13. There is a rather disorganized movement called the Democratic International Movement of Tuva, headed by Dr. Kaadyr-Ool Alekseyevich Bicheldey, a historian, but it is not this which lies behind the attacks on Russians. What he wants is just to revive the culture of the Tuvinians.
14. Valery Sharov, Far Eastern correspondent of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, personal communication.
15. The population of Tuva ASSR is 70% Tuvinian and 30% Russian. The disturbances have only affected regions where the two groups live side by side, not the remote Tuvinian-only regions, such as Mongun-Taiga where the documentary film in the Disappearing World series, *Herders of Mongun Taiga*, was made.

relate this to the specific circumstances of barter and other economic exchanges.

A lawyer from Buryatia has written the following:

Why has it happened that we are building the law-governed state (*pravovoye gosudarstvo*) with the help of... ever spreading legal nihilism, and they even try to persuade us that this is a natural process?

Yes, many legal statutes of the country turned out to be imperfect in themselves and furthermore they have simply ceased to correspond to new realities. Congresses and parliaments have set about creating new laws on top of the old ones. Their numbers rise with great rapidity. A large number of corrections to the Constitution have been made. But alas, this high tempo has not led to a correspondingly fast growth in legal consciousness. Rather, the reverse. The feverishness with which laws are set up and put away, and the absence of mechanisms for enacting them, has led to a reverse process. And should we be surprised?

In countries with a developed parliamentary tradition corrections to the Constitution take years to work out, but we are prepared to take them up almost by ear. The next step is quite logical – generally to ignore the law in favour of some 'higher goal'. Republics and regions (*raiony*) of the country are establishing their own acts in contradiction to the Constitution. And not just regions! Districts, even village Soviets give out declarations of their sovereignty, with the obligatory paragraph: the laws of all higher organs of power will be effective in their territory only after local ratification. This means chaos.

... How can the ordinary person even find out which laws of higher organs contradict with one another? It is much simpler to declare your sovereignty and decide which laws you will apply and which not. ... It is not by accident that Rolan Bykov recently said to Gorbachev that one presidential decree is lacking, a decree which could provide the fundament of unity for all republics – on the sovereignty of the individual.

... But would such a decree help when our people do not even understand that chaos does not lead to freedom but to dictatorship, that a man cannot count himself free unless he knows that his house is protected from a disaster, that he cannot be driven from his work because of what he looks like, that his right to elect and be elected is secure? We need a state which can guarantee these elementary human rights. A state is powerful when its subjects can not only insult it but can also observe its laws, and, if they are imperfect can change them only by parliamentary means, being guided by that wise principle which preserves stability, 'The law may be bad, but it is the law'.¹¹

What the author is complaining about is that concern with freedom/ sovereignty at the level of the state has resulted in a situation which effectively 'legalizes' (or makes unprosecutable) hitherto criminal activities. Take 'speculation', for example. Speculation involves buying something in one place, taking it to where there is greater demand, and selling it at a higher price. It has always been illegal (because no good productive labour adds value in the process) and today in theory still is so. But what about barter, which could be seen as speculation doubled?

Most people have no objection to barter, but they do feel very strongly about the new co-operatives (small private firms) which are only a step away. Co-operatives, to look at things from the outside, could be a solution to many of the problems discussed here. But in provincial Russia they are widely disliked, mistrusted, and even feared. Partly this is because of their great financial gains: a recent article estimated that whereas the state paid 5 milliard roubles to farms for grains last year, the co-operative sector had an income of 40 milliard.¹² The author's cry, 'Yet we all eat bread!' explains a great deal. No-one in the west expects bread producers to be very rich, even at subsidized state prices, yet in Russia different, age-old values prevail. The co-operatives in fact operate in those very areas of the economy where there is acute demand for high-value, scarce, and novel products – not bread but exotic cuisines, computer software, or fashions in clothing. Many are involved simply in moving such products around

the country, in pure 'speculation' in Soviet terms, or in the production of low-quality, yet glamorous, goods which are then sold expensively. When this is done by an officially-registered co-operative it is not illegal, but legitimate business. No wonder ordinary people are dismayed. From this it is another short step to Mafia-type operations. These have homed-in even more specifically to areas of extreme demand and vulnerability, but the point is that these foci for threatening activity are multiplying with increased scarcity. So it is not just the expected areas of drugs and prostitution which see such operations, but also taxi-networks (particularly in cities where there are foreigners with dollars, or where there is petrol scarcity), video-parlours, and home and vehicle repairs. There is even a specialist area of 'queue-management', which consists of taking money from people who do not have time to stand for days or weeks themselves.

In everything which has been said it is apparent that belonging to a 'suzerainty' is almost a necessity, even if it results in dependency, even if some people can perceive the general social alienation involved. How else to get 'orders' or 'coupons', let alone somewhere to live? In effect, this means having a steady job, and preferably an established position under a powerful and successful boss. But many people do not have such jobs. Pensioners, the disabled, school-leavers without training or diplomas, demobbed soldiers and refugees from areas of civil unrest may find themselves out in the cold. Ex-prisoners find it almost impossible to get good jobs. In many areas of the RSFSR this problem of dislocation has become aligned not just with social class but specifically with ethnic boundaries.

I would not say that this is invariably the case. Some non-Russian cultures encourage their own forms of integration, and this is a subject which should be further investigated by anthropologists. For example, the Buryats have both strong ties to the land, hence stable and loyal populations in collective farms, and also have a tradition of literacy and thus include a numerous administrative / intellectual class well integrated into regional institutions. The Koreans, to take another example, have maintained their tradition of intensive vegetable cultivation and successfully engage themselves as temporary summer brigades all over the RSFSR, returning home during the winter to live on the proceeds.

But we find the reverse case in Tuva. Here young Tuvinians do not want to work on the farms and yet many of them have not adapted to the urban work-ethic either. Rootless gangs of young men, with no jobs or only temporary employment, roam the towns, living any way they can (*see illustration 2*). These days people do not dare wear valuable fur-hats in Tuva for fear they be snatched from their heads; muggings, knifings, and attacks on buses and cars are common. It is this anomie which lies at the base of the Tuvinian 'nationalist' riots that have caused hundreds of Russians to flee the province. In fact, there is no real Tuvinian nationalist party or political agenda, though one may develop.¹³ The situation is that many young Tuvinians simply resent the Russians: it is Russians, who are better trained and more culturally-attuned to industrial work who dominate in the 'suzerainties' and who have access to better facilities, especially accommodation, and it is mainly Tuvinians who find themselves left outside (*see illustration 3*). Furthermore, Tuvinians, amongst whom worship of sacred mountains, rivers, trees and springs is virtually universal, hate the Russians for their careless attitude to the environment.



Top: illus. 2. A Tuvinian gang, near Kyzyl 1990.

Middle: illus. 3. Tuvinian housing, with Russian-occupied apartments in the background. Kyzyl, 1990.

Bottom: illus. 4. Factory abandoned by the Russians, Tuva, 1990.

The result in regions of mixed population is numberless, sporadic, disorganized uprisings and armed attacks on Russians and this extends to Russified Tuvinians. For example, gangs frequently stop someone in the street with a simple question; unless the answer is given in fluent Tuvinian, the person will be knifed or even shot. In provincial Russia hunting guns are to be found everywhere, and these days they are frequently stolen and taken to the cities. The stated reason for concerted attacks is often economic, especially the smuggling in of vodka, and there have been serious economic results. As already noted, Tuva is subject to the 'dry law' while neighbouring regions are not. Throughout Tuva construction projects, entirely staffed by well-paid Russians, allow the smuggling in of vodka together with building supplies. So violent have been the attacks on the workers and lorry-drivers by resentful Tuvinians

that many Russians have lost their lives. Factories and mines staffed by Russians have had to close as the workers have fled in panic (see illustration 4). In reprisal the neighbouring, and much richer, Russian regions have halted all capital investment in Tuva. Poor Tuva has hardly any paved roads, few bridges, and much of the rural population lives in yurts.¹⁴

Russians also attack native peoples for directly economic motives. All over the forested regions of Siberia there are logging enterprises (*lespromkhoz*). They are entirely manned by Russians and have begun to be much disliked by native peoples as the swathes of desolation become more and more apparent. This was so in the Karl Marx collective farm, which had objected many times to the activities of the nearby Jubilee *lespromkhoz*, though without result. I was recently told about a more serious example: the Udegei are hunters living in the Amur River region and for them destruction of the forest is the destruction of their subsistence and way of life. With the new political conditions their protests apparently met with some positive response from the local authorities. The reaction of the Russians in the logging village to this threat that their enterprise might have to close was to cut off the supply of electricity to the Udegei village.¹⁵ Such disputes are everywhere and are bound to increase, since there is as yet no effective law in the RSFSR to establish rights to land for any individual or group apart from 'the state'.

One result of all this 'aggressive particularism' is that 'protection' of various kinds is emerging all through society. This is not the night-watchmen of old, but new organizations and rackets, staffed it seems often by the very dislocated people who have lost their footholds in the 'suzerainties'. The old underworld is prominent, but so are former soldiers and even ex-members of the KGB. I have little evidence on quite how this works, but it seems probable that it is the local bosses who are the main employers of the more legitimate forms of protection. I was told that the Chairman of the first farm where I had done fieldwork in 1967 (also called Karl Marx Collective, but in a different region from the one mentioned above) had been shot by angry workers. The precise reasons are not known, but it is easy to see that the immense power of such bosses over ordinary lives might give rise to occasional, or even not so occasional, acts of violence, especially when there is the hazy and exciting idea of 'democracy' around.

We are witnessing the falling apart of civil society in Russia. The conditions I have outlined give rise to local defensiveness in economic, social and political spheres. In my view, many of the ethnic movements of small minorities in Russia are primarily defensive in character. Their aim is to preserve or resurrect different cultures, not to impose on the Russians. But every barrier which is raised, or to put this in the language used in Russia itself, these 'palisades' surrounding 'icebergs' or 'apanage principedoms', this view of outsiders as locust-like 'occupying forces' buying-up everything in sight, is also a barrier against the ultimate goal of the economic reforms, at least as envisioned by metropolitan liberals. It is difficult to see how a free market, even a relatively free market, can be attained through the hedges of coupons, orders, and local barter systems which are now beginning to form a veritable maze. Let us hope that the example of Tuva will not be reproduced elsewhere, and that these economic barriers will not also bring to nought the numberless generous gestures between social groups in other areas of life which are still prevalent in provincial Russia. □