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## **Problems of Policy and Political Behavior**

Stephen Cohen has written an important and, at times, brilliant essay, which is, moreover, a delight to read. It has, I think, the characteristics one has come to associate with his work: freshness, sensitivity, and the courage to tackle the toughest of problems. The criticisms that follow should be read within the context of admiration for a very informative and stimulating study, so rich and nuanced that one despairs of doing justice to its many facets. I am in substantial agreement with most of Professor Cohen's assertions, including his judgments on the outcome of Stalin's, Khrushchev's, and Brezhnev's policies. My criticisms are primarily concerned with matters of method, focus, emphasis, and scope.

Professor Cohen attempts nothing less than to capture the meaning of post-Stalin Soviet politics in terms of a continuum—or rather of the “reformist” and “conservative” points on a continuum—of political attitudes. And, going beyond this difficult endeavor, he also seeks to explain the at least temporary defeat of reformism by conservative forces, especially in the Brezhnev era, by reference to the continued influence of Stalinist traditions on post-Stalin Soviet political culture.

Although I perceive a certain inconsistency, or lack of “fit,” between the emphasis on reformism in the first half of the essay and on conservatism in the second, I find Professor Cohen's typology of attitudes useful. It has enabled him to provide a meaningful order to much data that might otherwise defy analysis. I see certain flaws in his study, however, perhaps partly resulting from failure to realize fully that, despite the significant role that professed attitudes, aspirations, and ideological formulas play in politics, analysis of these features is only one of several necessary approaches to understanding the total political process—a goal that Professor Cohen seems to set for himself in the first few pages of his article.

I also have doubts about the empirical underpinnings of Professor Cohen's typology. It is not as clear as it might be that it is derived from a sufficiently representative sample of the relevant data. Moreover, I am not sure that the subcategories of the continuum—or parts of the continuum—in terms of which he discusses Soviet political attitudes are mutually exclusive. Thus, as he defines it, conservatism signifies opposition to change, and yet some of the demands to which this label is applied—such as restoration of major features of the tsarist past—would, surely, involve significant change. Now for some details.

The first two pages, in particular the first sentence, of Professor Cohen's essay indicate that he will deal with “political life.” One is led to expect an analysis not only of attitudes but also of policies and behavior. Beginning in the second section, however, the focus shifts to the concepts “reformism” and “conservatism,” which, according to the author, refer to “attitudes toward the status quo and toward change.” This is followed by an often fascinating discussion of attitudes, trends, directions, and so forth, with brief references to eco-

nomic, political, and cultural issues. If I read him correctly, Professor Cohen believes that the shifting balance of power in the struggle between the champions of reformism and conservatism explains Soviet politics since Stalin's death. And, in the second half of the essay, he expresses the view that the post-Stalin struggle between these "two poles" derived from the fact that "Stalinism" was "a kind of dual Soviet political culture," which spawned impulses both for Khrushchev's reformism and Brezhnev's conservatism.

Space is available for a brief discussion of only a few of the many problems raised by Professor Cohen; I shall therefore be forced to neglect many features. It seems to me that it is something of an oversimplification to go as far as Professor Cohen seems to have gone in equating the significance (but not, I must admit, the content) of reformism and conservatism in the USSR and, for example, in the United States. In what Robert Dahl calls "polyarchies" (systems such as the United States and Great Britain), resources and opportunities largely unavailable in "hegemonies" (such highly authoritarian systems as that of the USSR)<sup>1</sup> are at the disposal of would-be reformers. It seems to me that differences in availability of political resources, institutions, and opportunities for effective—as distinguished from mobilized—political participation in different kinds of political systems must be taken into account when making cross-systemic comparisons. For example, must not the presence or absence of opportunities for legitimate "public contestation" in political systems exert so decisive an effect on the perception, formulation, articulation, input, and ultimate outcome of demands for reforms that the processes involved in reform, and in opposition to it, are very different in polyarchies and in hegemonies? I wonder how applicable this distinction is to the changes that were made in the Soviet political system after Stalin's death. If, as Professor Cohen argues in the second half of his essay, Stalinism defined the heritage with which Stalin's successors had to come to terms, what could be meant by "improving" it? I hope I am not quibbling, but we seem to be confronted here by an important semantic problem. In connection with the foregoing, I should say that I have the impression that, in striving to avoid excessive use of social science jargon, Professor Cohen overlooks the fact that technical terms must sometimes be used in order to achieve precision of expression.

A point more fundamental, perhaps, than any I have made thus far concerns Professor Cohen's generalizations about the distribution of reformist and conservative attitudes among the Soviet population. Space does not permit a discussion of this point, except to say that the quantity and quality of the evidence offered—and, admittedly, available—on this subject leaves much to be desired. Some help can be found in Stephen White's excellent recent study—based in considerable measure on Soviet public opinion studies—of Soviet political culture.<sup>2</sup>

While I agree, in general, that reformism was more characteristic of the Khrushchev era than of the Brezhnev era, I wonder if the difference is as great as Professor Cohen's account indicates. I fully agree that Khrushchev encouraged

1. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

2. See Archie Brown and Jack Gray, eds., *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1977), chapter 2.

a degree of freedom of literary expression—or, as Dina Spechler terms it, “permitted dissent”—not tolerated under Brezhnev.<sup>3</sup> However, Professor Cohen himself indicates in the second half of his essay—in some way contradicting, perhaps, the position he takes in the first half—that “unusual historical circumstances” favored reforms during the first few years of Khrushchev’s leadership. This means that one should probably not expect reformism to be as vigorous under Brezhnev—quite apart from his intentions—as it was under Khrushchev. There are also fields, such as the treatment of religious believers by the authorities, in which the Khrushchev period witnessed harsher repression than the Brezhnev regime has inflicted.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in fields such as science and technology—and in respect to opportunities for politically “loyal” scientists, at least, to travel abroad and generally to come into contact with foreign colleagues—the record of the Brezhnev regime has been perhaps more reformist than was that of Khrushchev.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than comparing the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods in terms of Professor Cohen’s categories, perhaps it would be more useful to recognize—as Professor Cohen does, to a degree—that the foundations for some necessary reforms would probably have been laid in the immediate post-Stalin years by almost any successor leadership, given the administrative paralysis and desperate yearning for security that was generated by Stalin’s terror. In addition, it is logical to assume that subsequent progress in effecting reforms would, within the institutional and cultural constraints built into the Soviet system, be increasingly difficult. Certainly, although less given to ill-conceived reorganizations than the Khrushchev regime, that of Brezhnev and Kosygin, especially in the crucially important economic field, does not seem to have achieved significantly more than its predecessor. Under Khrushchev, there was, one might say, muddle and confusion, under Brezhnev, stagnation.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, I would like to indicate areas that, I think, were unduly neglected by Professor Cohen. The first of these is dissent. Professor Cohen excludes from consideration “avowed dissidents” as being “outside the official political system.” This seems arbitrary on several grounds, one of which is that very few Soviet protesters admit to being dissidents. More important, the line between dissidents and reformists cannot be easily drawn. Many, perhaps most, dissidents were formerly loyal Soviet citizens who became dissidents because of the unresponsive attitude which the authorities took toward their reasonable demands that the authorities scrupulously enforce the law, or otherwise act in accordance with what they (men like Grigorenko, Sakharov, and Litvinov come readily to mind) regarded as “Soviet” norms. Was this an “extreme” attitude? I think not. Certainly, the ferocious persecution of dissidents by the Brezhnev

3. See Paul Cocks, Robert V. Daniels, and Nancy Whittier Heer, eds., *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), chapter 3.

4. See, for example, Barbara Wolfe Jancar’s essay in Rudolf L. Tökés, ed., *Dissent In the USSR* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 191–232.

5. See, for example, the chapter by Paul Cocks in Cocks et al., *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*.

6. See, for example, Robert W. Campbell in Karl W. Ryavec, ed., *Soviet Society and the Communist Party* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), and Karl W. Ryavec, *Implementation of Soviet Economic Reforms: Political, Organizational, and Social Processes* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975).

regime (and the milder, but sometimes severe, persecution under Khrushchev) indicates that the authorities believe that dissident ideas have appeal, and that, therefore, an example must be made of outspoken protesters, lest they attract followers. It is not surprising that in the unresponsive Soviet political environment many potential reformers have become open dissidents. In a sense, dissidence is the logical outcome, under Soviet conditions, of intellectual independence, accompanied, to be sure, by exceptional courage. It seems to me that, unless the Soviet political system becomes more responsive to inputs from outside the present restricted channels of interest articulation and aggregation, dissenters will continue to protest against violations of rights they regard as appropriate in a "socialist" society, thus arousing fear and anger in elite circles, bringing harsh repression upon the dissidents and blackening the image of the USSR in the West.

If Professor Cohen has not devoted as much attention to dissent and protest as I think it deserves, he has, on the other hand, made excellent use of the testimony and analysis of dissident authors, from which he has derived much of his best data. Besides dissent, it seems to me, other neglected topics include foreign policy and, perhaps most important, religion and the increasingly troublesome nationality problem. All of these influence the context in which the reformist-conservative struggle takes place. I am inclined to agree with Zbigniew Brzezinski that "the national question . . . creates a major block to gradual evolution."<sup>7</sup> Certainly, increasing tensions between Russians and non-Russians, in addition to other factors (particularly the obsessive concern of Soviet elite circles and the "masses" alike over China), feed Great Russian nationalism, and Professor Cohen's description is quite accurate. Regarding Russian nationalism, however, I think a distinction must be made between the official nationalism of people like Semanov and Chalmaev, and the more genuinely Slavophile-type nationalism of thinkers who, correctly, stress the importance of religion in traditional Russian culture.

In the interesting speculations about the future with which Professor Cohen concludes his essay, he foresees modest prospects for reform and a much higher probability of a Soviet version of "muddling through." Without rejecting this prognosis, I suggest that both less attractive possibilities, such as decay, accompanied by increased anomic antiregime violence, and more desirable ones, such as progress toward "democratization," should also be considered. Regarding the former, it should not be forgotten that a considerable amount of spontaneous antiregime violence, including a mutiny on a Baltic fleet warship in 1975, has already occurred.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, if the economic growth rate continues to decline, and nationality and other tensions sharpen, and also if the system remains highly unresponsive to peaceful protest, an increase in violent and desperate forms of resistance does not seem unlikely. These observations prompt me to say that I feel that Professor Cohen should have directly faced up to the question of whether or not—and at what cost—reform is possible in the Soviet Union. It is striking that there has been nothing like Yugoslav or Czechoslovak or even Polish or Hungarian reformism in the USSR. On a more positive note, let me say that, although I agree with Professor Cohen on the durability of the influence of the

7. See Cocks et al., *Dynamics of Soviet Politics*, p. 350.

8. See, for example, *Arkhiv samizdata*, no. 2767 (July 1976).

authoritarian elements in the Russian traditional culture, we should be constantly aware that cultures can change. Indeed, I believe that some dissidents have already created a nascent democratic culture.

Professor Cohen's essay is informative and provocative. With the aid of his two capacious—but perhaps too few, and too broad—categories, reformism and conservatism, he has described much of the symbolic reality of post-Stalin politics and skillfully anchored it in the Soviet—and, to a lesser degree, tsarist—past. If, as I believe, he has dealt more successfully with aspirations than with actions and policies, this may reflect his priorities, given the constraints that attend all intellectual effort. But it may also flow from the inherent difficulty of translating the nitty gritty of politics directly into the language of ideological and cultural programs, without systematically demonstrating the links between, on the one hand, decisions, policies, institutions, and so forth, and, on the other, their reflections in “code words” such as those used by Professor Cohen. To do that requires use not only of the political culture approach, but also of more traditional tools of analysis.