1

The Rural Dimension, from the Tsars to Stalin

Indispensable to our understanding of either the longer stretch of Russian/Soviet history or its most recent leg is an appreciation of the crucial role of agriculture and the peasantry. And any study of the rural sector in the modern period must take into account over two hundred years of efforts to accelerate economic development, starting from the times of Peter the Great. Throughout this period, the agrarian system weighed heavily on Russia, and the transformation of this system took several revolutions and costly, dramatic convulsions.

In theory, economic development may be promoted "from above," by the state or some of its leaders, or it may be taken up and followed up by social initiative, with or without state help. The classic examples of development from above are the policies of Peter the Great, followed by others equally well known. In contrast, during the last decades of tsarist Russia much of the initiative came from the emerging entrepreneurial classes. But whatever the pattern of development, the state is

either an advocate or an obstacle; the state is either coping well, weathering crises that result from the accelerated economic development, or it is not coping and eventually falls apart. In a nutshell, all such hypothetical outcomes were fulfilled at various times in Russian history.

Despite the vigorous economic and cultural advances that followed the emancipation of the peasants, and which continued, impressively, until World War I, tsarist Russia remained an agrarian system and state. The bulk of the population continued to be engaged in agriculture of a mostly primitive type, at a time when in the West a technologic and scientific revolution had long been working economic and social marvels. But most Russian landowners, the other part of the agrarian system, did not manage to transform their domains into modern enterprises, preferring to use the abundant and cheap labor of a mass of poor peasants who worked as sharecroppers or debtors, not as wage earners.

Obviously, this rather unproductive agrarian base could not offer enough resources to finance a hectic development, and the growing needs of the state constantly strained the peasants' ability to carry the burdens. Those are well-known facts. For our purposes we have to examine briefly the sociopolitical context of Tsardom. The same landowning class that did not show much ability to manage its estates profitably was also the political ruling class: they were at the top of the government bureaucracy, as well as dominant in the tsarist courts, where crucial policy decisions were made.

We can thus talk of a social pattern, composed of the peasantry, landowners (*dvoriane*), and the royal court, with the tsar at its head, that also was still the political and economic reality of tsardom. The waves of capitalist expansion, the appearance of important industrial and

financial centers, which through market relations penetrated far corners of the empire and promised to transform the economy and society, did not go far enough or deep enough. The "rural nexus"—a term I have used in a recent work [62:12]—did not easily dissolve. Perched on this kind of nexus and reflecting it, the tsarist state could not reform fast enough to deal with the developmental tasks or, notably, with the requirements of warfare.

The revolution and civil war destroyed the old system and created a different kind of state. The social composition of the leadership, the personnel of governmental institutions, together with the very character of the system changed drastically (even if specialists and professionals from the previous era were still needed for their expertise). The new revolutionary ideology was, unlike that of the previous regime, deeply committed to industrialization and economic development. But, paradoxically, postrevolutionary Russia, during Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), was even more rural, and equally—if not more—backward than tsarist Russia. The urban population, by official count, merely returned to its prewar share of the total. A more exacting evaluation shows convincingly that no more than 16 percent of the people were city dwellers, leaving 84 percent in the countryside and dependent on a low-yielding agriculture [14:27–30].

Furthermore, during the revolution the peasants took over all lands that had belonged to landowners and to some richer peasants and thereby destroyed most of the market-oriented sectors of agriculture. The resulting ocean of small family farms was owned and organized under a complex, communal-cum-homestead system. The farmers' mediocre output—meant mainly for home consumption—left little to spare for the cities and the

state, and the capitalist inroads made possible by the reforms of the tsarist Prime Minister Piotr Arkadevich Stolypin were wiped out. The peasantry thus settled into a more archaic mode of life and production that imposed on the whole country the dilemmas of what is known today as underdevelopment. Indeed, a reputable Soviet sociologist, Iu. Arutiunian, considered the USSR in the 1920s to be at almost the same level as India and Egypt, for the combined effects of the civil war and the agrarian revolution had produced a dangerous economic backslide, as evidenced by most of the vital indices of the system. If the prerevolutionary society Lenin's government took over was backward enough, its problems were aggravated by the Civil War that wiped out many of the advanced social, cultural, and economic sectors of tsarist Russia. In sum, "archaization" [62:18] seems quite suitable to characterize the postrevolutionary situation, except for the emergence of a new agency in power—the party.

The mass of peasants now weighed more heavily on the new system than on the previous regime, notably because they restored to full dominance their communal arrangements, previously on the wane. The redistribution of land to peasants according to the number of mouths to feed in each family served a principle of justice befitting the peasants' way of life and need of survival, but it served less well the national need for agricultural productivity.

We have in mind here the famous peasant commune, the "mir," similar to ancient rural organizations elsewhere. These mirs Marx characterized as "localized microcosms," adding that this type of organization does not occur everywhere but when it does "it erects over such [communities] a more or less centralized despotism" [66:405].

Lenin concurred, referring to the Russian peasantry as constituting "a massive and simple patriarchal foundation of the tsarist monarchy." At least, that is, until the 1905 revolution awakened those peasants from their "deep political slumber" [97:141]. In 1917 the peasantry again became politicized, but it soon fell back into its "slumber" and left Lenin with the bill to pay. He found himself in the clutches of a historical reality that had been created, to a large extent, by the system of "localized microcosms" that forced the state, reluctantly at first, with considerable relish thereafter, to erect "a more or less centralized despotism." The job to be done, however, for which the new state was bracing itself, was not of the type more ancient despotisms were called to do.

Obviously, these events were crucial in making the new system and directing its historical destiny. To understand the next stages in Soviet history, we need at this juncture to borrow some concepts from the thought-provoking work of Fernand Braudel. In his analysis of the eighteenth century, when the economy in the West was still predominantly preindustrial, Braudel discerned three basic layers in socioeconomic life. The mass of people lived on the bottom layer, in a system of elementary "material life." Above this layer was emerging a "market economy," which was complex but still correlated in many ways with the more primitive subsoil. The third layer, "capitalism," was depicted by Braudel as an external force, different in scale, methods, and substance, from the other two. In due course, capitalism would deeply transform the two lower layers, imposing itself on them from above [10:112].

Braudel also emphasized that the slower-moving, more primitive layers were deeply hostile to the faster-moving forces of modern growth. The peasantry, he

maintained, and the small-scale market mechanisms serving it, on the one hand, and the dynamic forces of capitalism, on the other, "were two universes, two ways of life foreign to each other."

When we look at twentieth-century Russia, Braudel's three socioeconomic layers are clearly discernible, especially once the topmost layer was in effect dislodged by the Russian Revolution. Indeed, in a situation unique in this part of the world, revolutionary events could "peel off" the capitalist layer, because it was still a separate layer that had not yet had the chance to replow the economy and society as it had in the West. But then the new state had to face the country's enormous, primeval social and economic life, represented mainly by a peasantry oriented toward basic subsistence. It was up to this state now to do the job capitalism did elsewhere: to create large-scale enterprises and industrial, scientific, and cultural forms—all quite foreign to the experience of the small-scale rural worlds. In doing so, the state unavoidably inherited the tensions and hostility between "the two universes."

Facing the stubborn routine of the peasantry—a world with which the upper echelons had little in common and one that the lower officialdom wanted to quit as soon as possible—was not going to be an easy task for the new and ambitious state. Staffed largely by cadres of popular extraction, the state was torn between the tendency to move slowly and cautiously or, alternatively, to exert powerful pressure from above. Lack of communication with the other "universe" accounts for the latter tendency, but also the fear that the rural world, the world of small-scale producers and of small-scale markets, would reproduce the capitalism that the revolution had just abolished.

Lenin contributed to these fears by his statement,

made during the civil war, that the countryside was producing capitalism every hour, every day.* It may well be that he changed his mind at the end of his life, but in any case, it is doubtful that Marx would have agreed with this analysis. Whereas Lenin and others in his party feared "markets," Marx (in a statement that Braudel would have liked but apparently didn't know) stated that "production of goods and their circulation is no more than a premise for the capitalist mode of production." Further, Marx held that capitalism could emerge only after a division of labor had developed, a division "possible only on the base of cities where there is a great concentration and density of population, differentiation of its activities and [a high level of] intercourse" [15:31].

So, according to Marx, the breeding ground of any capitalist menace was not the countryside, but the cities. Another great authority, Max Weber, offered an even more sweeping statement in his book on medieval cities. For him urban development, while not alone decisive, was a carrier of both capitalism and the state [109:181]. We can add that, under favorable conditions, cities also promoted a third phenomenon, democracy.

Despite such authorities, the approach among Soviet leaders, based on a fear of the countryside as the source of capitalism, prevailed—at least in the ideological discourse. In fact, the problem was the peasant *tout court*.

All these facts and concepts go some way toward helping us to grasp the character of the Soviet system, the terms that defined its stages of development and even, to some extent, its prospect in the future.

*Lenin used stronger wording: insofar as the peasant farm remained a small-scale commodity producer, it "engendered capitalism and the bourgeoisie permanently, every day, every hour, spontaneously and massively" (V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie sochinenii* [Moscow, 1963], 41:6).

Thus at Soviet Russia's point of entry into the NEP, the country was still saddled with a version of the agrarian nexus. No court, no gentry anymore, but an agrarian economy and a huge muzhik ocean. Though the urban sector was expected to serve as a springboard for further advances, it still was, before and after the revolution, deeply embedded in rural society. Most cities were small, and their rural origins and connections with the country were highly visible. The occupations, ethos, and way of life of many city-dwellers bore deep similarities with the prevailing peasant models: small-scale family businesses, traditional festivals and mores, high rates of illiteracy—all quite well documented by ethnographers [4:63–87]. Data reported by the noted Soviet demographer V. Ts. Urlanis about tsarist cities before World War I were still valid for the Soviet period under the NEP: Most of the houses in the cities were built of timber; only one third had iron roofs, one third had timber roofs, and one quarter had thatched roofs. Half the cities had no library of any kind, and 95 percent had no institutions of higher education [105:44–45]. Though this semiurban branch of the rural world kept developing into new directions, whenever new waves of migrants arrived from the villages a considerable "ruralization" often occurred—to which many cities easily succumbed.

Evidently, the bigger cities, especially the capitals, were better able to resist such waves. They created and kept reproducing, even spreading, models of a genuine urban civilization. Yet they were still, under the tsar as well as under Lenin, just islands in the muzhik ocean.

The next period in Soviet history was to become crucial for the future of the country and was to pose an extremely complicated problem for the national con-

science. This period began in 1928 with a dramatic change of policies in reaction to old problems coupled with a crisis, one of several, in the vital flow of grain supplies. The new policy showed the state's ability to muster its institutions and whatever public support was available into a program for accelerated economic growth. The subsequent "big drive" changed the entire country and the political system quite profoundly. It produced a new state model, some of whose features became fixed in the system, while others subsided or disappeared in later decades. This set of policies and patterns, usually referred to as "stalinism," accomplished what any government of this type would hope to, but it also relied on terror of an unprecedented scale. A vast complex of police forces and concentration camps—certainly a key feature of this system—was crowned by a peculiar (some think, peculiarly oriental) brand of personal absolutism exercised by the general secretary.

It is not easy to discern any rationale for the mass imprisonments and murders during the great purges of the late 1930s. And the explanation of such events will not be found in any such rationale. Rather, to explore this phenomenon, we must begin by reconsidering the agrarian nexus, the prevailing social landscape. As noted earlier, the effects of the country's backwardness were compounded by the archaization of the system as a result of events between 1914 and 1921. Clearly this backsliding clouded the prospects of the regime, but it also left the state as the sole potent actor capable of mobilizing scarce social, cultural, and economic resources in the service of a program for change. A combination of state bureaucracies and the specific agency called "party" produces the leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, and indoctrinators during the leap forward of the 1930s. But a

mechanism parallel to the one that destroyed the tsarist regime then came into play, as the powerful developmental thrust into rural society caused a protracted social crisis. A series of furious economic, educational, and military undertakings shook up and restructured society, affected all its social classes, and thereby caused havoc in the system. Sudden changes of social position, occupation, status, and location operated on such a scale as to create a "quicksand society" [62:221] characterized by flux, uncertainty, mobility, high turnover, and anomie.

The resulting chaos, especially in the early 1930s, much of it creative, much unexpected and damaging, is an important historical factor. The system was supposedly planned and administered, and much was, in fact, tightly controlled. But although the government tried to dominate the work and movement of people, there was also at play an enormous spontaneity and drift. An unprecedented, quite spontaneous influx into the cities of about 27 million people (in a decade), to mention only those who not merely visited but stayed, brought a new, awesome wave of "ruralization" to the cities, the working class, and parts of the bureaucracy.

Bureaucratization is the other relevant phenomenon. It was growing by leaps and bounds, but this social and political product was crumbly, as one would expect from such sudden growth in the absence of an adequate and timely supply of necessary cadres. Although in due course a modernized Soviet bureaucracy would abolish the stalinist police-autocracy, at this stage the cadres were extremely disoriented (not unlike the whole social system at the time) and not yet "modern" at all. They were most often self-made, quickly "baked," promoted en masse to ever more complex jobs. No doubt the rapid

advancement was an exhilarating novelty for them, but certainly they needed more time and instruction to learn how to handle those jobs and conduct themselves in the new environment. It is no exaggeration to see the cadres of these years, with some notable exceptions, basically as *praktiki*, that is, responsible, often top-level cadres in political, social, technological, and even cultural positions whose training was inadequate or nonexistent; they learned as they went along.

It is neither possible nor necessary here to trace the stages of Stalin's ascension to supreme power. (There is a good literature on this period, although we are still uninformed about many of its aspects.) But it is clear that this period of social upheaval and crisis sorely overtaxed the freshly promoted, still unstable bureaucracy, and that the struggling bureaucracy's shortcomings and lack of experience presented a particularly propitious ground for the usurpation of power at the top—by a dictator and at lower levels by despotic bosses. The displacement of power was easily effected at the broad layers of the government bureaucracy, though it took somewhat longer to happen inside the party.

The making of a despot thus reflected the inability of society and the bureaucracy to establish some rules for the government. This vacuum invited an arbitrary and capricious use of power and a paranoid interpretation of, and reaction to, what was happening in the country. The bureaucratic apparatus created to dam the flood, to overcome the social crisis, found itself in a crisis of its own and then threw itself into the arms of a miracle-worker with an appetite for ruling.

While Stalin often blamed the failures of the system on "sabotage," the disorder among the population was a normal reaction of a hard-pressed, disoriented body so-

cial trying to defend itself and cope with everyday problems and tasks. Such predictable spontaneity, however, was deeply unsettling when seen from above. Misunderstanding the character of spontaneity and thus fearing it, the police-autocracy inflicted retribution on the masses of people.

By now we have come to realize how feverish and almost chaotic was the large-scale restructuring undertaken during those years. In particular, the process of state building has been deeply affected by the social phenomena of the 1930s. We have in mind here the resurgence, again, in a new and peculiar form, of the rural nexus. This time the poorly collectivized peasants were flanked by millions of poorly urbanized ones, and they were ruled by a mass of bureaucratic praktiki, many of whom, at least in the lower ranks, were also partly of rural or semirural origin. Such was the social background of the regime in those years. Confronted by the baffling sequels to its policies, the regime resorted, out of despair, but mostly by inclination, to methods that corrupted the state system. The resulting pathology was soon sanctified by a dogma produced for the occasion, and the improvisation of the 1930s hardened into patterns that were bequeathed to Stalin's heirs.

Still, stalinism turned out to be a passing phenomenon. That is one provisional conclusion we can make at this stage. The civil war produced one pattern of rule, the NEP another, and yet another emerged under Stalin. They are species of the same genus, no doubt, but the differences are quite striking. Social change and structure are the crucial factors, for each change of key parameters of the social structure—around the turn of the century before the revolution, after the civil war, and in the early

1930s—was followed by changes in the outlook, composition, and methods of political institutions, as I have argued in detail elsewhere [62:21–26].

The power of the state under Stalin, however harsh the controls and the dictatorship, could not thwart the force and impact of spontaneous social developments. In the social sphere a persistent and irresistible autonomy gathered its own momentum, posed reactions to state actions, and created many unpredictable results. For no matter how stern or cruel a regime, in the laboratory of history only rarely can state coercion be so powerful as to control fully the course of events. The depth and scope of spontaneous events that counter the wishes and expectations of a dictatorial government are not a lesser part of history than the deeds and misdeeds of the government and the state.

To illustrate these contentions, let us consider the main social groups during the stalinist period. Workers, for instance, reacted to the worsening conditions of life by learning and applying the techniques of self-defense: the turnover rate soared and labor discipline plummeted. Widespread connivance between managers and their labor forces proved to be ineradicable, despite official efforts to instil or coerce discipline and productivity. When authorities did achieve some success in pressuring cooperation but did not propose the improvements that workers expected, a new "front" would open up against procedures and norms, mostly by tacit agreement, without any organizers or leaders, just by a barely visible wink. This was a constant battle, with victories and defeats for both sides.

The same applies to the peasants in kolkhozy. Their reactions to collectivization included a massive slaughter

of cattle, the flight to cities or construction sites, and endless strategems to beat the system. Great zeal was shown in working on the private plots, little zeal displayed in working in the collectivized fields. On many points, the government finally had to yield: the granting to kolkhoz families of the right to a private plot and a cow is one well-known example. In any case, the state never got from the kolkhozy all it really wanted. The pressure of the peasants managed to transform the kolkhoz into a hybrid organization that was nothing like what state authorities had hoped for.

The bureaucracy is yet another case in point. Although the state gave orders and expected their execution, it never truly mastered this social group. For the bureaucrats, too, had their techniques of self-defense: they knew how to conceal realities and performances, how to help each other get jobs during interminable contractions of staffs (which nevertheless kept growing). In a word, the bureaucracy never became the pliable tool it was expected to be. Purges and persecutions only lowered the bureaucracy's performance, sharpened the "creativity" of its defensive techniques, and intensified the lobbying and pressuring of superiors.

Indeed, whatever field, function, or action we study, we discover that the government's battle for its programs, plans, and objectives always encountered social reaction, drift, spontaneity, and the powerful force of inertia.

In the field of culture, for example, various social groups accepted certain values preferred and propagandized by the government, but they also created their own countercultures or subcultures. Every official slogan, song, or even speech by Stalin was immediately para-

phrased and parodied, sung or recited by students, soldiers, and peasants all over the country. The camps that were supposed to isolate the population from all kinds of "enemies of the people" produced an enormous output of texts and songs, some of them deeply gloomy and hooligan in style, some of a political character. These lampoons and scornful satires stalked the country despite the fact that no media were at their disposal other than word-of-mouth communication. Everywhere people made barbed jokes and witticisms, thousands of them, that were irreverent, uncensorable, often punishable by a minimum of five years in a labor camp—and indomitable.

Ideological indoctrination was not ineffective—far from it—but it wasn't fully effective either. People could listen attentively with one ear, and let the message pass through the other. Re-education was successful only up to a certain point, depending on the character of the social group and its filters. Some slogans were accepted, if they did not seriously contradict the listeners' perception of reality. Social, economic, and cultural developments signaled to the population, sometimes sooner than to the authorities, what life was really about. But the authorities complained constantly that people did not go where asked, found ways of doing things their own way, exploited any loophole to play or outplay the system, and helped themselves through networks of friends, acquaintances, briberies, and adventurous risks.

The idea that the Russians and the other nationalities of the USSR are unquestioningly obedient and are easy to rule is a pipe dream. I could cite many government decisions and orders, sternly worded, that no one paid any attention to. Aware that it was losing the fight, the

government resorted to the ultimate tool that denotes frustration and ineptitude: terror. Sometimes even terror had no effect or produced results contrary to the perpetrators' intention. Every state measure, control system, interdiction or exhortation provoked some sort of battle, quite often a losing one. Some things worked: many, sooner or later, didn't. The internal passport system, for instance, was introduced to control the movements of, in particular, the peasant population. But it could not stop spontaneous and unwanted migrations: peasants continued to move into cities, where growth was to be controlled, and out of the kolkhozy, where they were badly needed.

Should we ever see the memoirs of people who really knew Stalin, surely we would hear of him often repeating the well-known statement about an ancient, frustrated Russian prince: "Monomakh's hat is very heavy indeed." (*Tiazhela shapka Monomakha*, referring to Prince Vladimir Monomakh of the twelfth century.)

Often the state got what it wanted, but at the price of being considerably derailed or rerouted. The train of history is not really a train. The engineer guides it into some station, yet the train arrives somewhere else. All this, without organized opposition, open or clandestine, and without any widespread political dissent. Simply the work of the laboratory of history, in which more takes place than the mere obeying of orders.

Let me conclude this review of the spontaneous effects and acts that shadowed the dictatorial and powerful state at every step and "corrected" or frustrated it by simply mentioning the phenomenon that is at the center of my argument: urbanization itself. The growth of even the capitals was very much a spontaneous development, yet the cities eventually turned out to be the main engine

of Russia's most momentous social—and soon, probably also political—transformation.

The study of Russian and Soviet history must be conducted on these lines, especially when dealing with Stalin. For he is entirely undecipherable if one ignores the structural constraints and spontaneous actions and reactions of society.

Were it otherwise, states and dictators could really "plan" or drag history according to their own designs; they would not only master individuals and whole groups but also run the entire historical game. The world is, unfortunately, not immune to despotism and to oppressive states—but, fortunately, no state has ever figured out how to master the complexity of human society for longer than a limited time span.

2

The Rise of the Cities

Various factors trigger and sustain the creation of urban settlements and an urban system: industrialization, first and foremost, and such developments as educational and scientific achievements, the growth of administrations, and the momentum of urban society itself once it takes root and manifests its potentials. But for our purposes it is the outcome of these undertakings that is our key theme and focus. From the demographic data concerning the growth of Soviet urban society in the last half century much can be inferred about the series of deep transformations the USSR went through and about the latest, crucial stage in which it finds itself today.

The pace of Soviet urban development in the 1930s, its scope, intensity, and speed, was described by the American geographer Chauncy Harris as "record breaking" [29:239]. The urban population grew at an annual rate of 6.5 percent between 1926 and 1939, peaking at an annual rate of over 10 percent in the later thirties. Concur-

rently, the urban share of the USSR's population rose from 18 percent to over 32 percent. Such an increase, Harris notes, required three decades in the United States, from 1856 to 1887 [29:240]. He might have added that in the Soviet case these percentage shifts represented far greater numbers of people: in the 1930s the Soviet urban population grew from 26.3 million to 56.1 million. Many new cities were created, and many others saw their populations double or triple in twelve years. Further, these figures include only those people who permanently settled in the cities. Millions of others arrived in towns and cities only to soon wander away or run away, according to their circumstances.

Such a degree of social flux could not but trigger crises and mutations. But let us follow the story into the postwar period, when the USSR crossed the threshold of urbanization. In 1960 the urban population accounted for 49 percent of the total; by 1972 urban dwellers outnumbered rural dwellers, 58 percent to 42 percent.* Between 1972 and 1985 the dominantly urban Soviet society became almost predominantly urban, accounting for 65 percent of the total population and 70 percent of the population of the RSFSR. Today over 180 million Soviet citizens live in cities—compared to 56 million just before World War II.

Urbanization has entailed both the vigorous creation of new settlements and the expansion of old ones. The most recent intercensus period, 1959 to 1980, shows an

*In comparison, the urban sector passed the 50 percent mark in the U.S. in 1921. France almost reached it in 1911, but experienced a slowdown and finally crossed this threshold, with some difficulty, between 1925 and 1931 [19:20]. Germany had already reached the 65 percent mark by 1925—a meaningful pointer to events that were to unfold.

increase in all categories of towns, townships, and settlements, but of particular importance are the bigger cities:

Population	*Number of Soviet Cities*	
	1959	*1980*
100,000 to 250,000	88	163
250,000 to 500,000	34	65
1,000,000+	3	23

All in all, in 1980 some 272 Soviet cities had more than 100,000 inhabitants (compared to only 89 cities in 1939), and these cities are now home to almost half of the urban population and about one third of the total population of the country.

That one fourth of the nation's people live in the biggest cities testifies not only to a powerful process of urbanization but also to an internal regrouping of the inhabitants in favor of the biggest agglomerations. Some of the smallest towns are struggling, but many are quite dynamic, including those labeled "settlements of urban character," a category pertaining to settlements of different sizes that have not received the status of cities but whose populations are employed predominantly in nonagricultural pursuits. The number of these settlements increased from 2,700 in 1939 to 4,619 in 1959, and to 5,938 by 1980 [48:23].

As these data indicate, the pace of urban formation during the postwar period, especially after 1959, has been quite remarkable. During the last three decades an average of twenty-two new cities were created every year. In this field of social development surely lies one of the most momentous achievements brought about by the Soviet period. Only about 700 cities were chartered

by tsarist Russia; today there are over 2,000 formally designated cities. Since the 1930s some 400 cities, by now often big and bustling, were created from scratch, on the site of small villages or on empty terrain. This, despite the fact that much of the decade immediately after World War II was devoted to the task of restoring the hundreds of cities that had been destroyed or badly damaged during the war.

Finally, we may note that in recent years growth in the urban sector has been slowing. Since the 1960s the population of the cities has increased by 3 million a year, partly from internal growth, partly due to migration from rural areas. Between 1959 and 1970, some 1.5 million migrants a year came from villages, even 1.9 million a year in the 1970s. But this influx has tapered off, and in the past ten years it has been the migration from smaller to larger cities that has come to the fore in fashioning the character of the urban phenomenon. The overall size of the urban sector is remaining steady, giving the new complex urban system time to assimilate decades of momentous change. New cities are still being created, especially in Siberia, but everywhere the system and its institutions are, as it were, taking stock.

Thus it is evident that the postwar years, a period of Soviet history that many Western observers characterize as an era of stagnation, actually constitute a period of deep social change. Unfortunately, all too often, the Soviet urban phenomenon has escaped the attention of analysts, with the exception of several books and articles by a few pioneering scholars [28, 29, 63, 67].

But before we consider what Soviet society has become in the wake of its urbanization, we must return again to the countryside. Such backtracking is neces-

sary, from time to time, in order to highlight the novelty and relative immaturity of the phenomenon and to caution against too rosy a view of urbanization.

In discussing the 1930s, I earlier referred to the ruralization of the cities. The flood of peasants to cities old and new was enormous: in the 1930s almost 27 million peasants migrated to towns, doubling the size of the urban population. Although the tide receded, the influx remained considerable and certainly too high for the good of either agriculture or the economy. About 24 million migrants moved to the cities between 1939 and 1959, another 8.4 million between 1959 and 1964, and 16 million between 1964 and 1970. This continual influx of peasants, most of them young people, did not effect a ruralization comparable to that of the 1930s, but the recurrent dilution of urban culture is a social phenomenon of considerable importance. At least during the earlier postwar period of rapid and extensive urbanization, up to 1959, even as the cities quickly became industrial their culture and way of life remained rural [15:149].

The problem is that the rural mind, way of life, and culture are extremely tenacious. It may take some three generations for the peasant outlook and mentality to disappear and for a true urbanite to emerge. This transformation is still in mid process in the Soviet Union today, still an important feature of the social and cultural scene, although subject to considerable regional and national variations. In most cities about half the residents were born in the countryside, half born in the cities [4:58–59]. But by now the balance of reciprocal influence has changed, so that when urban dwellers visit their parents in the villages, they are more likely to leave behind more than they take away. Too, those villagers

who often travel to cities are easily recognizable there, but they certainly weigh much less on the ways of the cities than they once did—except for those cities that have many rather recent migrants.

Migration and adaptation to urban life is a difficult and often traumatic process, and is described as such by contemporary Soviet sociologists. This is the case even if the migrant comes from a smaller to a bigger city [91:68]. For the newcomer from a remote rural area, it is like trying to penetrate a fortress without understanding its internal rules. The newcomers face hard times and their psychological resources are heavily tested. But defensive mechanisms appear, consisting of clinging to relatives and *compadres* and sticking to some familiar cultural mechanisms. This is especially obvious in the case of national minorities, who tend to reinforce their ethnic identity so as to better face adversity [92:68–69].

In cases when there is no ethnic difference, a kind of class solidarity emerges among immigrants, a camaraderie based on their origin and their low social position in the new environment. All too often, the newest migrants find themselves at or near the lowest rungs of the social ladder, and some will stay there for the rest of their lives. For that reason, entire districts are to be found in most Soviet cities, especially of recent minting, inhabited by former peasants who are quite identifiable by their outlook and behavior. These fledgling urbanites coalesce into layers that combine properties of class, status, and culture, and they express their identity by adhering to ways carried over from rural traditions [4:33–49]. This type of social coalescence, this recreation inside the cities of a version of the rural world, may well continue for quite some time in Russia. A sim-

ilar phenomenon in the history of French urbanization was observed and interpreted by Braudel in his last work [11:235].

Studies of many small towns by Soviet sociologists and ethnographers [4:45] fully justify such assumptions, prompting us to be cautious when assessing the effects of rapid urbanization on the disappearance of rural creeds, mores, and culture. It is precisely the speed of the transformation that may contribute to the preservation of rural culture inside the cities—an obvious defensive mechanism against pervasive urban pressures that the newcomers perceive as destructive.

Where does the sturdiness of the peasant mentality come from?

The tenacity of the peasants' little world—which is being reconstructed by migrants in cities when adaptation to a complicated and hostile environment proves difficult—is a result of a long process of socialization in and by, precisely, the small rural world, the village. Unlike the city, where multifarious influences shape people, the traditional village is a compact social, cultural, and economic unit that is relatively isolated from similar units, and therefore a more powerful molder of people than other forms of social life.

In the village, relations between the community and the individual, as well as among individuals, are mediated mainly by families. This basic cell of the community is a tightly knit amalgam of human functions—procreation, education, farming, and socializing—that in urban conditions are split into separate, multiple roles, played by members of the family inside and outside its confines. In the village, every person is in the public eye almost permanently and is expected to be vis-

ible and understood. Privacy has a very limited place in these conditions. Human contacts and communications are direct, deeply needed and, by definition, informal. The fleeting, formal, polite but shallow contacts so characteristic of the towns are rare in the experience of a villager. Everyone knows everybody, not just in the village but in the small nearest marketplace. Villagers feel secure in their rather predictable, familiar network of relations, based on a foundation of values acquired in similar circumstances and shared by their neighbors. Tradition, morality, work, and nature as well as established principles of a communal order all contribute to a way of life characterized by patriarchal authoritarianism and reliance on practice rather than abstractions. A syncretic correlation of the main social, cultural, and psychological features makes the mir—the village as a community and a "world"—into an "organic," as some say, or compact entity that has been able for centuries to resist endless pressures.

The small social world and its human relations are transparent and are perceived empirically, directly and sensually; whatever is less understandable or bewildering is handled by the magico-religious substratum of rural culture and psyche, where abstractions too are "ruralized," translated into practices and symbols familiar to the villagers and growing out of their needs and experience.

When "products" of this kind of socialization—even if their ethos is diluted considerably by economic development and urban influences—emigrate to towns, in particular if they have not had much urban experience, they face a world so different that their own is threatened with a precipitous and painful disintegration. Un-

less they can summon some resources of their small world, the migrants face a severe crisis of personality and moral values.

Tenacity of the rural spirit, nevertheless, is not always a stalwart defense against the disturbing effects of an often hostile new environment, so different from the familiar rural ways. A sense of loss, dissolution of moral certainties and criteria, and value crises often do occur—and on a large scale at that. In the context of the Soviet drive for overarching national objectives and the concomitant neglect of the microworlds, of privacy, and of the amenities and standards of living, a shattered or lost system of values and principles cannot easily and quickly be replaced by anything firm and wholesome. This problem is particularly acute in those newly burgeoning cities that themselves still lack solid cultural and institutional foundations.

When such phenomena are reproduced massively over an entire national system that is undergoing a hectic industrialization and urbanization, we can certainly speak of a stage, transitional, specific, and exhibiting complexities and aberrations in society, culture, and politics.

That is what we observe throughout Russian history, in different forms, but occurring with particular intensity in the 1930s and again after World War II. Nowadays ruralization on any significant scale cannot happen anymore, but the sequels of the previous stages and of the last, equally traumatic one are still part of the new urban scene.

The making of a stable and more self-controlling urban culture and moral world is certainly a difficult task. Once the aftershocks of the previous shattering events

begin to subside, the cities begin to reconsider their own identities, and urban problems come to the fore, becoming the subject of public awareness and of political and scholarly treatment. But some of the older tasks remain on the agenda; the diminishing but still important battle between the rural and urban worlds, or cultures, continues. This is certainly a universal phenomenon in our time in urban societies in recently urbanized countries. In the Soviet case, an awareness of this phenomenon will help us to understand better some of the ambiguities we encounter when trying to interpret current events or gauge the prospects of current policies.

Having disposed, for the time being, of the rural impact on cities, we may now concentrate on the cities as urban objects per se. In countries still in the early stages of urbanization, the city tends to be viewed in comparison with the prevailing rural surrounding; the city is defined as a non-village. But with the unfolding of urbanization, the city emerges as a social reality whose particular dynamism cannot be grasped by any simple contrast with the rural world. The difficulty of defining the city, the urban phenomenon, is considerable, for a city is such a condensation of all kinds of dimensions and relations, of cultural trends, of professional and social differentiations, of sociopsychological and personality correlations. To isolate the essential qualities of the modern city, to define it, seems an incalculable task. One may be tempted to propose that the very complex condensation of innumerable traits in a limited space *is* the definition of a city. But it turns out that a defined and limited space is no longer a central trait. The modern ag-

glomeration belies any effort to define the urban phenomenon by reference to a single, easily identifiable specimen, the city. Rather, we have to look at an intercity system, a whole hierarchy of forms, a network of complicated interconnections on a national, even international scale.

Though such reflections belong in specialized treatments of urban studies, without some sense of this modern concept of the city one cannot truly appreciate the new reality that has emerged in the Soviet Union during the past fateful three decades. I will have more to say later about the effects of the *newness* of this structure—the lingering peasant mentality and ancient mores being one of its sequels—having to interact with traits of advanced urban society and culture. Sometimes it offers the worst of both worlds, as the crude and uncouth mores of disgruntled peasant-migrants bump up against the seedier trends of advanced urban societies, such as falling birth rates, gentrification, high rates of crime, and widespread psychic stress. And it is not simply a matter of dozens of individual cities undergoing urbanization. From the urban phenomenon in its fullness emerges a hierarchical system that exhibits a great variety of forms and specific problems, replete with different cultural features, standards of living, and new inequalities of status, culture, and national roles.

The varieties of towns and cities in Russia are not unlike those known elsewhere. Functionally, there are predominantly industrial, administrative, cultural, even scientific cities, some of them subsisting on just one branch of industrial activity or transportation. At the other pole are the most developed, multifunctional centers, notably the capitals, mighty concentrations of eco-

nomic, political, and intellectual power. Population and propinquity also serve as classifying criteria. There are small, medium, large, very large, and megacities, some incorporated into a regional conurbation or agglomeration with easy intercity contact, others isolated in the Kazakh or Siberian wilderness. The problems created by this variety of forms are endless: contemporary Soviet studies give us ever more insight into the city system, its woes and prospects, policies already applied and new ones attempted. But the cry from many experts is for a program of integrated urban-rural development in order to master the huge country, punctuate it more uniformly with urban centers and conglomerates, resettle the population more evenly in and around powerful economic and cultural centers.

Music of the future? However grandiose the designs, they start from an ever more solid mastery of basic facts and phenomena, and it is rather the weight of those that can be read from the hopes pinned on the national programs for regulating urban development.

In the meantime, the plight of the small, rather isolated cities, crying out for revitalization, is also on the agenda. Many have been helped by an implantation of industry or assignment for a service function of importance (vacation spot, communication hub). Other small cities are decaying, losing their young people to the metropolises. Clearly, urbanization is not just the movement of people from the countryside to the city but from the small cities to the megacities.

It is this broad picture of social change induced by the spread and growth of cities, in particular of the large and largest ones, that sets the tone for the rest of the country, that in many ways actually defines the country

today. Of course, other countries have had similar experiences, but not on such a scale, not so powerfully compressed in such a short period of time. And this in a country already a superpower even before urbanization was consummated.

For Russia, for the Soviet system, in any case, it is all new and unique.