

# Maurice Dobb and the End of NEP: A Critique

by Kent Osband

As a social science in a socially-divided world, economics can't help but take on a political dimension. Thus it is not surprising that in the English-speaking lands most books on Soviet economic history have taken a view on the evolution and subsequent development that could be described as Cadet or Menshevik positions. Among that much smaller group of English-speaking writers sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, few have been competent economists. In this context Maurice Dobb stood out until his death as both an extremely knowledgeable economist and an articulate exponent of what might be termed "a Soviet point of view." In 1926-27 Dobb wrote his first book on Soviet economic development, *Russian Economic Development Since the Revolution* (published in 1928). After World War II he revised and updated it. The renamed *Soviet Economic Development Since 1917* appeared in 1948. Dobb continued to update the work for subsequent editions, the last of which appeared in 1966.

Note that I said Dobb took "a" Soviet point of view and not "the" Soviet point of view. As events have unfolded, as the composition and character of Soviet leadership have changed, so too has the official Soviet view of its own development. It turns out that Dobb's own views changed substantially, and that these changes fairly closely followed the Soviet ones.

Nowhere were the changes so dramatic as in the evaluation of the "reconstruction phase" of NEP (New Economic Policy) beginning in late 1924 or 1925 (or the "NEP phase of reconstruction," as it would later be reinterpreted). Dobb's first work was written before the great turn towards maximal industrialization and rapid collectivization, and did not anticipate it. He thought, as did the Soviet leadership of the mid-twenties, that the problem of reconstruction under NEP could be resolved within the NEP framework. In 1948 Dobb not only defends the great turn, he also sharply criticizes opposition views that Dobb himself had held earlier. In 1966 Dobb sticks to the 1948 version of events with one alteration: he lays some responsibility on Stalin for overzealousness during collectivization.

What I want to do in this review is analyze Dobb's change of views on reconstruction. I want to do this for several reasons. First, Dobb's work has helped shape the views of many English-speaking Marxists. To this day it remains one of the main reference books for people interested in alternatives to standard bourgeois analyses of Soviet economic development. To criticize Dobb is to invite many to reexamine some of their own conceptions.

Second, given the close correspondence between Dobb's and official Soviet views, to criticize the one is implicitly to criticize the other. The last few years have witnessed a

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resurgence of pro-Soviet apologetics among sections of the radical US intelligentsia. No doubt this resurgence is in large measure a reaction to even more sinister (considering that we are Americans) apologetics for US imperialism. Still, the one does not justify the other. Marxists must strive as best they can to combat apologetics, of whatever sort, with truth.

That brings me to my third point. What is the truth about the end of NEP? In this review I draw some tentative conclusions, based on evidence painstakingly gathered by Dobb and other Western writers from Soviet sources, on the origins of the crisis and Party response. I hope readers will not be put off by what may appear at first to be minor details. These details turn out to be crucial for understanding the metamorphosis of NEP. In fact, the evidence I present raises additional questions (concerning, among other things, changes in the Left Opposition's views, the power of the village assembly (skhod), and the role of the trade unions) that I have as yet been unable to answer. The situation calls for further research.

Having said that, I realize I may have struck a nerve for some readers. The objection I anticipate is this: Given all the pressing issues of the day, both theoretical and practical, why worry about the subtleties of a crisis fifty years past? This brings me to my fourth reason for undertaking this study. What I am interested in is not so much relative priorities in industrial development, or the timing and pace of collectivization, as in the connection between economic trends and the ossification and backsliding of a revolutionary regime. As we trace through Dobb's analyses of the end of NEP, I ask the reader to concentrate on the following questions: What objective processes lay underneath the crisis of NEP? How did the consequences of these processes work out to some extent independently of, and even against, the will of Soviet leaders? And how did the misapprehension of those processes exacerbate the problems?

## Dobb's Views of 1927

Let us begin with Dobb's first book on the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union Dobb visited in 1925 could already claim some economic successes to accompany its political ones. NEP had pulled the country back from the brink of economic disaster. Production had recovered to 75% of pre-war levels. However, this very recovery was at the same time the greatest mark of NEP's shortcomings. By European standards, pre-war Russia's industry had been underdeveloped and its agriculture atrociously backward. Even with expropriation and redistribution, neither

industry nor agriculture could provide material abundance to millions of workers and peasants. Providing these millions with more was one of the crucial tasks facing the new Soviet regime. But this in turn demanded an accelerated accumulation of the material means of production, and technological innovation.

Soviet prospects for achieving this were shaky. The overthrow of tsarism and the expropriation of the idle rich had removed an enormous dead-weight off society. The Bolsheviks had inspired and mobilized the "common people" in a way no tsarist or capitalist government could do. Against this must be set the hostility of the surrounding states and the opposition of much of the managerial strata within the country. On the material side, conditions for accumulation were much less favorable in 1925 than before the war. Most of the larger, technically more advanced estates and kulak farms had been subdivided into small peasant homesteads. The proportion of cultivated land in large estates fell from 30% before the war to 4% after the land reform.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the stock of plants, equipment, and inventories in industry had dwindled enormously. Much had been destroyed by civil war. The excesses of War Communism took an added toll. Even after the Civil War, during the first few years of NEP, many needed repairs were put off and little new investment undertaken. Soviet sources estimated that from 1921 to 1924 expenditures on reconstruction amounted to only a quarter to a half of current depreciation for those years.<sup>2</sup>

A Soviet survey of steam boilers and prime movers gives some idea of how serious the situation had become by 1925. Boilers and prime movers less than ten years old accounted for only 4% and 9% respectively of installed capacity. Thirty per cent of prime movers and fifty per cent of steam boilers exceeded in age the estimated normal service life of twenty to twenty-five years.<sup>3</sup>

The weakness of the Soviet machine-building industry made reconstruction even more difficult. Before the war Russia had imported most machines from abroad, relying heavily on foreign credit. Now substantial credits were not to be had.

By 1925 all Party leaders agreed the main emphasis of economic policy had to shift from recovery to reconstruction. They did not agree, however, on the dimensions of the shift or its practical implications. At the Fourteenth Party Conference in 1925 and the ensuing Party Congress later that year, the Party majority, led by Stalin, Bukharin, and Rykov, decided on further extension of NEP. Agricultural taxes were cut 50% to stimulate production and improve the peasant's lot. Restrictions on the leasing of land and the hiring of farm laborers were substantially eased. Industries were exhorted to cut costs by improving working methods and management. Some measures were taken to restrain workers' wage increases behind increases in productivity. More state funds were to be applied to new investment.

Results were mixed. On the one hand, total industrial production rose substantially, investment in new means of production was way up (2 billion rubles for gross investment including depreciation in 1925-6, according to Rykov)<sup>4</sup> and the harvest was better than average. On the other hand, goods normally purchased by workers and peasants, especially by the latter, were in short supply. (I say "goods purchased by workers and peasants" instead of "consumer goods" because peasants normally purchased a portion of their means of production as well as consumer goods from industry, and both were in short supply.) This in turn threatened to provoke a more general crisis. With industrial goods scarce in the villages the peasants had less incentive to sell their products to the collection agencies. With grain and

other non-perishables they could build up their own reserves and wait for higher prices. With both perishables and non-perishables they could simply consume more of what they produced. Shortages of agricultural goods in the cities cut into both workers' expected consumption and planned industrial expansion. Urban attempts to sustain these tended to reduce still further the flow of industrial goods to the countryside. Thus, town and country tended to squeeze each other.

What had caused the "goods famine" and how could it be prevented in the future? Discussions within the Party, already heated, grew increasingly bitter. Trotsky and his supporters—Preobrazhensky, Radek, and others—had argued at least since the "scissors crisis" of 1923 that industrial capacity was lagging behind demand for industrial goods. It was bound to fall behind even further unless the government greatly accelerated the pace of new construction, with emphasis on heavy industry supplying goods to other industries. The Trotskyists had been joined in 1925 by Kamenev, Zinoviev, and their followers, who felt that the concessions to the kulaks granted in 1925 had gone too far. The so-called "United Opposition" saw in the "goods famine" the confirmation of their analysis and the realization of their fears. "See," they said, "industry in its present state cannot possibly meet peasant demands. The rate of new investment is not high enough to be able to remedy that situation anytime in the near future. It is not sufficient to substantially reduce unemployment. It is sufficient, however, to provoke a crisis. Meanwhile, you, the leaders of the majority, make more and more concessions to small-scale peasant agriculture. Such a policy is not only politically dangerous—since it strengthens the kulaks and threatens to dissolve the proletariat in the petty-bourgeois sea—it is economically unsound as well. The kulaks get richer but hoard their grain in anticipation of higher grain prices. The mass of poor and middle peasants may get an extra few yards of cloth this year, but at the expense of Soviet industrial capacity to really transform their conditions of life in the future."

Most of the Left opposition, the Trotskyists especially, did not foresee any purely domestic solution to NEP's problems. Only a victorious workers' revolution in the West, they said, could provide the Soviet Union with the necessary political and economic aid. Accordingly, their policy recommendations were directed towards helping the fragile workers' state hold out as long as possible. Squeeze the kulaks, they said, by increasing their taxes and taking firm measures against hoarding. Set industrial prices higher relative to agricultural ones to siphon off more funds for industry; and possibly rescind some of the agricultural tax cuts. On this last point the United Opposition was less than united. Smilga, for one, considered the 50% cut a major cause of the goods famine.<sup>5</sup> He felt that taxes stimulated marketings—the peasants had to sell grain to pay the taxes—whereas poor terms of trade might drive the peasants from the market. Preobrazhensky, however, favored the "invisible" surcharges of price as politically less offensive to the peasant.<sup>6</sup>

As for cutting costs in the industry, the United Opposition viewed it as more an outcome of increased new investment than a precondition for it. Some even applied this argument to the question of wage hikes. As head of Vesenkha (the Supreme Economic Council) from 1924 until his death in 1925, Dzerzhinsky had tried to restrain wage increases behind productivity gains, but not always with success. In opposition, Preobrazhensky claimed that higher wages would promote higher productivity. He criticized peasant complaints about the widening gaps between their standard of living and that of workers as naive and reactionary.<sup>7</sup>



In his rebuttal of the Left's position, the "1927" Dobb argued first of all that it was not industry but agriculture that was lagging behind. By 1925-26 industrial output was closer to reaching pre-war levels than agricultural output. Furthermore, agricultural marketings had recovered much less than total output: first, because the fall in *total* production relative to 1914 (which includes a portion set aside for consumption) caused a proportionately much greater fall in the surplus marketed; second, because the long-impooverished peasants were eating more themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Dobb rejected the Left's contention that industrial prices were too low relative to agricultural ones. Since industry had developed more rapidly than agriculture, Dobb claimed that agricultural prices ought to rise. This would stimulate agriculture and help industry find a market for its products in the countryside.<sup>9</sup>

Dobb concedes some substance to Smilga's criticism that reduced agricultural taxes swelled peasant demands beyond available supplies of industrial goods. But, he says, this could not be the whole, or even the main explanation of the goods famine, because the shortage involved agricultural goods as well as industrial ones. The main problem was overinvestment. In middle and late 1925, wage increases had once more outstripped productivity gains. Given this and the agricultural tax cut, there was simply not enough surplus left over to sustain two billion rubles of gross investment.<sup>10</sup>

Dobb advocates continuing then current policies in agriculture. Agriculture needs help urgently, and this means above all helping the middle peasant. Give the middle peasants the chance to prosper, and they will produce more and sell more to the towns. Some restrictions are necessary on the kulaks, but given the preceding excesses of War Communism and the relatively stagnant state of agriculture, the greater danger by far would be to exaggerate the "kulak menace."<sup>11</sup> In industry, press on with reconstruction, but not to the point that it saps the countryside of goods. Adapt industry to peasant needs; in particular, develop light industry providing consumption goods for peasants alongside heavy industry. To secure funds for needed investment, cut costs in industry. Restrain wage hikes. Trim bureaucracy. Improve the system of management by combining centralized steering of the economy with more decentralization of responsibility.<sup>12</sup> Overall, Dobb considers a 8-9% annual rate of industrial expansion for the next few years as a reasonable goal and 10-11% as optimistic but not infeasible.<sup>13</sup>

To carry out this program successfully, Dobb stresses, the Party must strengthen its ties with the populace. Sink more and deeper roots in the village. Fight against bureaucratic tendencies in the Party. Success depends crucially on Party willingness to criticize its own shortcomings. Fortunately, says Dobb, this is one of the Bolsheviks' strongest points.<sup>14</sup>

Dobb contrasts this approach with the more "revolutionary" policies favored by the Left. Sure, says Dobb, moving more slowly has its problems. NEPmen, kulaks, and, to a lesser extent, highly-paid bourgeois specialists threaten to restore the old social hierarchy. A new official caste might emerge, using its position to gather privileges for itself. But the danger is not imminent.<sup>15</sup> Better to stick with NEP than to try to uproot all capitalist elements by administrative decrees. This would only antagonize the peasants and swell the bureaucracy, without making socialist elements any more capable of shouldering the necessary economic tasks themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Such, in brief, is Dobb's 1927 view of Soviet prospects.

## Critique of 1927 Dobb

It is not hard to see where Dobb draws his inspiration—Bukharin's views of the mid-twenties. Long-term reliance on market mechanisms, bolstering private peasant farms, "optimal" instead of "maximal" rates of industrial growth, "encircling" capital, and the growing of NEP into socialism—all this bears the Bukharinist stamp, down to the choice of words. Indeed, Dobb's very approach is Bukharinist. Throughout his book Dobb focuses on equilibria and on the forces threatening to disrupt equilibria; e.g. "smooth" NEP market relations between town and countryside as an equilibrium and excess State industrial investment as a disruptive force.<sup>17</sup> Such an emphasis brings to mind Bukharin's well-known "theory of equilibrium."

According to this theory, everything in the world contains opposing forces. When these forces balance each other, things are in a state of (relative) equilibrium. When one set of forces overpowers the other, the equilibrium gives way. In the ensuing shift some forces weaken and others grow stronger, until eventually a new balance is struck.

Thus, the theory of equilibrium explains development through the conflict of opposing forces. This, at first glance, seems very similar to the Marxist conception of the dialectic, or internal contradiction. Bukharin himself in advancing the theory of equilibrium thought he was simply cleansing Marx's theory of its Hegelian trappings. In fact, there is a crucial difference between the two theories. The notion of equilibrium by itself tells us nothing about the origin of the opposing forces. They are external to each other; in effect, they are external to the system of equilibrium.<sup>18</sup> In the Marxist view, by contrast, processes are by their very nature self-contradictory, bound up with their opposites. Thus, whereas the Marxist theory of contradiction focuses on the internal causes of development, the theory of equilibrium tends to shift attention to external causes.

Let us try to apply this distinction between external and internal causes, to Dobb's analysis of the goods famine. There is no question the goods famine signalled, among other things, imbalance between town and country. Both proponents of official policy and the Left opposition agreed on that. What separated them was, first of all, their different perceptions of which way the balance had shifted. The Trotskyists and their supporters claimed industry was lagging behind agriculture. Dobb argues, on the whole convincingly\*, that it was agriculture that was lagging. Jack

\*One argument Dobb makes I can't agree with: He claims that one way agricultural backwardness held back the development of Soviet industry was by restricting the market for industrial products in the countryside.<sup>19</sup> His concern that insufficient peasant demand might provoke industrial crisis is misplaced. It was not markets *in* the countryside, but supplies *from* the countryside that industry needed. The goods famine itself proved that demand was excessive rather than insufficient. Dobb picked up this idea from Bukharin.<sup>20</sup> Granted it possessed a kernel of truth: insofar as industry had to gain agricultural supplies through trading things of equal value on the market; any contraction of sales to the village meant a corresponding contraction in purchases of supplies, and hence a restriction on industrial growth. Still, it misses the mark; first, because it incorrectly specifies how stagnation in the countryside could retard industry; second, because it assumes that all supplies are gained through "fair" market trades, precisely the policy the opposition was contesting.



up industrial prices relative to agricultural ones and you aggravate the problem; for the peasants tend to market less grain in favor of storing and consuming more. Requisition grain surpluses and you might ease shortages in the town this year; but you are liable to worsen them the next year as the peasants decide to sow less grain. In general, if you leave people possessing their own means of production with nothing to show for surplus labor, they will stop producing a surplus unless force is applied. If peasants think all grain surpluses are going to be taken from them, they will sow less grain, unless they are forced to sow. The Bolsheviks learned this lesson the hard way during War Communism. Apparently it did not sink in. In 1927-8 they would receive their first in a series of refresher courses.

There is also no doubt that State taxation and spending decisions in 1925 precipitated the goods famine. The debate here concerned which decisions were in error and in what ways. As we recall from the discussion above, Dobb criticized Smilga for focusing too narrowly on the inflationary impact of the reduced agricultural taxes. Why single out the tax cuts, Dobb says, when industrial wages were rising faster than productivity, and state investment had grown so enormously? Assuming Dobb has accurately portrayed Smilga's views, I agree with the criticism.

However, none of this resolves the question of *why* agriculture was lagging behind industry. Dobb's 1927 book never satisfactorily answers this question. He confuses the state decisions that precipitated the goods famine with the sources of the agricultural lag itself. Here lies the distinction between external and internal causes I referred to earlier. State policies were in a sense "external" to the agricultural lag. They may have aggravated the lag—some of the policies certainly did—but they did not cause it. The real sources are to be found within NEP industry and NEP agriculture themselves. Closer examination of these, particularly of the latter, will show why the Bukharinist programs of 1925-6 could not work.

For all the changes it wrought, the land reform of 1917-18 abolished neither misery nor inequality in the countryside. By European standards agricultural techniques were wretched: primitive implements (some peasants still used wooden plows), crops dispersed into small strips, virtually no modern crop rotation, workstock scarcity, and virtually no agricultural machinery. Redistribution of most estates among private peasant households was, from a technical angle, a step backward. In addition, war had destroyed tools, livestock, and transport and storage facilities. Replacement was much easier in agriculture than in industry; still it was painful.

Hand in hand with the backward techniques went the grinding poverty of the mass of peasants. Complete equality between households would not have eliminated the large latent surplus population in the countryside. And there wasn't complete equality. Land had been redistributed, horses and tools had not. With most people so poor, even a little extra grain could make the difference between having to work for others and hiring others to work for you. Stratification naturally tended to increase under NEP. By benefit of prior accumulation, by hard work, by luck, some peasants prospered; others fell behind. Soviet laws restricting leasing of land and hiring of laborers tended to inhibit stratification; when they were relaxed in 1925, the pace of stratification quickened.

Let us not exaggerate the extent of this differentiation. The land reform considerably reduced inequalities; the countryside had by no means polarized into a rural bourgeoisie and rural proletariat. The great majority of peasants were middle peasants ("seredniaks"), working mainly for themselves. At peak seasons they might hire

others to help them; occasionally they might hire themselves out to others. Still, definite strata of both "batraks" (hired hands) and "kulaks" (peasants who regularly hired hands and/or rented out tools or livestock) existed. The statistics available suggest that by 1929 families regularly hiring wage-labor comprised about 2% of all peasant households.<sup>21</sup> Most of these were small masters, hiring only one laborer and consequently obliged to work themselves.<sup>22</sup> Another 1% or so regularly hired out equipment or livestock but did not regularly hire labor.<sup>23</sup> Upper-middle peasants ("zazhitochnye"), who had accumulated a close-to-kulak-size share of land, livestock, tools, and grain, but who depended less on hired labor, comprised another 10-15%<sup>24</sup> (Part of the problem with the statistics here lies with defining this stratum precisely.) At the other end of the spectrum, batraks numbered about three million, about as many as the zazhitochnye.<sup>25</sup> Their conditions were slave-like; they were paid a pittance, worked 12 to 14 hours a day, ate and slept like animals, and were abused by their employers. Remember that these are figures for 1929. In 1925 there may have been up to a third fewer kulaks and batraks.<sup>26</sup> This would not change the basic point—that differentiation, while limited, was significant. The influence of both the kulaks and the batraks on patterns of village life—the one by wealth and prestige, the other by degradation and rootlessness—was out of proportion to their numbers.

Dobb correctly stresses the Soviet Union's urgent need to increase production in agriculture, both to improve the situation in the countryside and to supply more for the towns. This is why the 1925 agricultural reforms were enacted. It was hoped that lowering taxes would give peasants more incentive to produce. Unfortunately, the framers of the 1925 proposals did not adequately consider all the effects of leaving more surplus with the peasants. Writing after the fact, Dobb realizes that lower taxes might result in less marketed production and even perhaps less total production. He stops short, however, of calling for tax restorations, presumably on the grounds that agriculture needs funds for new investment. One possibility Dobb apparently overlooks is that of maintaining fixed or nearly fixed taxes on land and stocks to stimulate production and sale, then returning the levies to agriculture in the form of public-works projects (irrigation, drainage, etc.) and credits for equipment.

Regardless of who disposes of the surplus, as long as farming is in private peasant hands it is they who make most production decisions. Let us examine how different strata of peasants tend to allocate surplus funds and the social effects of these allocations. Start with the poor peasants. If you leave them with more of their crops or give them additional aid, are they going to trade all or most of it for industrially produced equipment? It is very doubtful. Most likely they have much more urgent needs: to pay off old debts, feed their families better, buy new shoes, perhaps buy a horse. All of these will tend to raise the peasant family's social status and make its existence less precarious; they will also yield some increase in production. A better-fed, better-clothed, and more secure peasant should work better; horses increase yields substantially, though they consume some of the increase. But from the standpoint of marketed production, the returns may not cover the investment; the immediate needs of poor peasants are so great, and their plots so small, that they may not return more than a fraction of what they "absorb" in aid.

What about leaving more grain with the kulaks or giving them extra aid? This is much more likely than in the previous case to be translated into investment in equipment and improved techniques, providing the kulaks can lease more land and hire more laborers to make the investment



worthwhile. Hence the coupling of the tax cut with the relaxation of restrictions. One consequence of the latter was a certain sacrifice of the interests of *batraks* and *bednyaks* (poor peasants) to the *kulaks*. The leasing and hiring restrictions, for all their curbs on agricultural productivity, had served as a primitive form of protective labor regulations in agriculture. Supporters of the 1925 reforms argued that the economic benefits of increased employment would outweigh, for the village poor, the sacrifices in labor protection. From a narrowly economic viewpoint, they may have been right. But politically, and here we are speaking of the long-term interest as well, it was foolhardy. It meant increasing the *kulak's* authority in the village at a time when the Party's own authority was very weak. It meant jeopardizing Soviet plans for eventual socialist transformation in the countryside, and ultimately Soviet power itself.

Bukharin and other Party leaders of the majority were not oblivious to the dangers. They intended to keep *kulak* development within bounds by administrative restrictions and progressive taxation. Politically, they hoped the reforms and the consequent "lighter hand" of Soviet rule in the countryside would win the middle peasants' loyalty. Notwithstanding Bukharin's ill-famed "Get rich" slogan, I think his underlying intention in 1925 was not so much to nurture *batrak*-exploiting *kulaks* as to develop a class of prosperous pro-socialist middle farmers. But could this goal be realized? Favoring middle peasants over *kulaks* within a market system would require, at the very least, careful administration, whereas village officials were notoriously unreliable. Further, even supposing it was possible to help the middle peasants without strengthening *kulaks* more, could the developing *zashitochnye* be counted on to support socialist transformation in agriculture? However nice and romantic it may be to believe they could—"one good turn deserves another," and all that—the reality appears very different. If family farmers really are prospering on their own, why should they want collectivization with its risks and strange new relations? Granted, *if* socialist agriculture were already vastly more productive than prosperous middle farms, and *if* working and living relations within the collective were clearcut and attractive, the *zashitochnye* might indeed welcome collectivization. For socialist agriculture to evince such a clear and overwhelming superiority it would need many years of practical experience. But the possibility of gaining such experience is ruled out by the very predominance of private farming that Bukharin was trying to bolster.

History, both before and since Bukharin's time, shows that moderately prosperous family farmers tend to be zealous defenders of private property. This observation applies not only to Western capitalist countries, but also to those Eastern European countries in which industry was nationalized while most of farming was left private. Are Polish and Yugoslav peasants any more amenable to collectivization now than they were in 1948?

What about undertaking a massive ideological campaign to convince the *zashitochnye* of the merits of collectivization? Now I would grant that revolutionary ideology can play a critical role in convincing peasants to collectivize. Indeed, it appears to be indispensable to making collectivization a success. But ideology needs the right material soil in order to sink its roots. Propaganda for collectivization is likely to appeal to the poor and lower middle peasants before the *zashitochnye*. And poor cooperatives may well need some State aid to make them a success. I won't claim that either propaganda for collectivization or aid to cooperatives is incompatible with aid to private, better-off farmers. I do claim, however, that both can't be equal

cornerstones of agricultural policy. It's too schizophrenic. When State funds are limited, to whom do you give priority? Whose side do you take in labor disputes between part-time hired hands from cooperatives and private farm employers? Most importantly, which strata of the peasantry do you rely on to implement the programs in the countryside? No matter what you say in theory, in practice you have to emphasize one approach or the other.

One last road to socialization within NEP would involve encircling agriculture through market relations: forming trade co-ops or making direct production contracts with industry. In one of the last articles he wrote before his death, Lenin expressed high hopes for the former. It turned out that the trade co-ops did not react much on farm organization in the absence of technical transformation in agriculture. Neither was Soviet industry strong and technically advanced enough to hook agriculture directly to it. This was a major concern of the Trotskyists, and helps explain their insistence on more rapid industrialization as a prerequisite to agricultural transformation. If industry were developed as Bukharin counseled, without temporarily impinging on the peasants, transformation must be delayed for many years. Meanwhile, private agriculture would have to be helped (assuming little collectivization) or the economy would founder, and this, as explained above, inevitably would mean helping the *kulaks* and/or *zashitochnye* entrench themselves.

In short, the theory that NEP agriculture could grow over peacefully into socialism—a vital cornerstone of the Bukharinist program of 1925—was a pipe dream. Belief in it animated a number of decisions of the 1925 Party Conference and Congress. It underlay Dobb's 1927 suggestions for Soviet agriculture. Only it did not correspond to reality.

Let us now look at Soviet industry. Productivity had fallen well below pre-war levels, due to slower pace of work, broken-down equipment, and inexperienced management. Attempts to "speed up" labor were only partially effective. Raising minimum quotas, lowering piece-rates, and dismissing sub-average performers tended to antagonize the very class whose support the regime was relying upon. I am not saying the Soviet government should not have used propagandistic, economic, and legislative means to encourage hard work—it could not afford *not* to; but experience quickly showed this could not very well be the main method of reducing costs. Success in raising the pace of labor depended critically on inspiring workers' enthusiasm. Workers in turn would not be too enthusiastic unless they say the authorities making maximum efforts in other spheres to reduce costs.

One obviously appealing method for cutting costs would be to improve technology. But this would require initial outlays, in some cases very large ones. So we are back to the problem of how to cut costs in industry or tap additional sources outside it. One avenue the Soviets explored was foreign credit. It did not lead very far. The Soviets might propose, but the Western powers disposed; and in the 1920s they were not about to grant substantial credit to the Soviet regime. (Accordingly, I will not enter here into discussion of the pros and cons of borrowing heavily or granting concessions, but the current crisis in Poland should be remembered as one example.)

We have already mentioned a second possibility: that of extracting more from agriculture for industry. This was the subject of the famous debate over "primitive socialist accumulation." According to Preobrazhensky, just as full-scale capitalist development had required a prior accumulation of capital and free landless wage-laborers from non-capitalist sectors, so, too, full-scale socialist



industrialization in backward Russia required a massive accumulation of funds from outside industry. The Soviet Union might get the necessary aid from the West if there were victorious workers' revolutions there. Otherwise, it had to try to get it from inside the country, mainly from agriculture.

As we know, the leaders of the Party majority in 1925 completely rejected the notion of "primitive socialist accumulation." It seems to me this is giving Preobrazhensky's ideas short shrift. After all, while the Party reduced agricultural taxes, it still had not eliminated the scissors between agricultural and industrial prices; it was still exacting some tribute from agriculture. Preobrazhensky helped account for this and explain why the tribute could not be quickly eliminated. Before long, Stalin came to see this point of view (some would say, with a vengeance); eventually, even Bukharin would change his mind. But on the main point, what priority the Party should place on strengthening its base in the countryside, I think the party majority of 1925 was correct. Revolutions in the West were not imminent; a break with the mass of peasants would jeopardize Soviet power. (It may be objected that the Stalinist program of maximal industrialization and rapid collectivization would show that the Soviets could fight a virtual civil war against the peasants and still survive; my preliminary response is that "successfully" implementing the program wrought such changes in Party and state institutions and so separated the authorities from both workers and peasants that it is questionable whether Soviet power in the sense of the 1925 debates survived.)

Given the urgent needs of the peasants and of agriculture, urgent as we have said, not simply for their own sake but also for the sake of industrial development and Soviet power, the net contribution agriculture could make to industry was severely limited. Therefore, in order to maximize the surplus available for industrial investment, the Soviets had to emphasize trimming the state bureaucracy and running industry more efficiently. Dobb is absolutely correct here. Progress in reducing bureaucracy and improving management in turn would tend to stimulate workers to pay closer attention to their own work and organize tasks more efficiently.

In line with official policy statements, Dobb emphasizes adapting industry to the needs of agriculture. Bear in mind that adaptation involves the production, not only of consumer goods, but of tools and other means of reproduction for agriculture as well. Official Party documents from 1925 up to the great turn, continually warn against viewing the supply of hand tools and horse-drawn implements to agriculture, or even of iron that could be fashioned into tools by village artisans, as beneath the dignity of Soviet industry. Relatively cheap and simple innovations, it was claimed—weed-free seed, different cultivation methods, replacement of wooden with iron implements, and the like—could effect enormous gains in agricultural productivity. Unfortunately, too little was done in practice to teach peasants new methods or supply them with necessary materials.<sup>28</sup>

One major reason for this shortcoming had nothing to do with insufficient zeal on the part of the authorities. Where was the regime to find the manpower and material resources needed to supply each of 25 million peasant households with basic tools and technical advice? The same technical benefits could be gained much cheaper by consolidating small farms into larger units and supplying only the latter with advice and equipment. Let us not forget: the social appearance of a kulak hiring out his tools or his horse to bednyaks at extortionist rates signals technically that independent peasant production is limiting the use of available tools.

Hence the advice of non-Bolshevik economists still working in NEP Russia was to encourage kulak farming for the good of the economy. In fact, we see that given the severe constraints on what industry could supply agriculture, attempts to raise agricultural productivity inevitably drove the Soviets towards large-scale farms, either kulak ones or collective ones. *Here lies the real secret behind the waverings of Party agricultural policy in the mid-twenties and its eventual turn towards massive collectivization.* Note that it does not depend particularly on the personalities of the leaders. (This is not to say that the specific collectivization program adopted and the personalities of Soviet leaders bear no relation to each other. On the contrary, I will argue later that the path taken demanded—in a sense, produced—a special brand of leadership.)

Even with the careful husbanding of available resources, the State could not afford to undertake massive reconstruction simultaneously in all spheres of industry. Subsequent attempts to do this severely aggravated the goods famine, antagonized the peasantry, reduced worker productivity in industry and caused massive bottlenecks and delays in setting new plants into operation. Unfortunately, Dobb does not specify what he sees as priority sectors (machine-building, iron and steel, railroads?). In 1927 neither he nor the Soviets paid the questions enough attention. Given the novelty of the tasks, mistakes in this regard were probably unavoidable.

The good sense in Dobb's advice to decentralize managerial responsibility under central guidance and to strengthen Party ties with the populace is proven by the consequences of future Soviet neglect. However, our analysis so far suggests that it would be much more difficult to implement the advice than Dobb thought. It is one thing to talk about strengthening Party roots in the village if the cornerstone of official agricultural policy is encouraging private farming, quite another if it is laying grounds for collectivization. Similarly, if industrial development has to be concentrated in priority sectors, central authorities tend to have to supervise subordinates more closely.

Do the goals mentioned by Dobb become impossible to achieve? I don't think so. Certainly they are harder to achieve. Since many of the tasks involve breaking completely new ground, many mistakes are to be expected. How serious the mistakes are depends to a great extent on how long it takes to recognize and correct them. Dobb is fully justified in emphasizing the need for self-criticism. His expression of confidence in the Party's ability to handle self-criticism, however, rings very ironic today.

## Dobb: 1948 and Later

Let us jump twenty years: past collectivization, past the First and Second Five Year Plans, past the massive purges, and past World War II. Now how does the end of NEP look? Or more to the point, how does Dobb, who has lived through those twenty years, look back on the end of NEP?

What we find is a great transformation. In both approach and conclusions, Dobb's 1948 *Soviet Economic Development Since 1917* differs substantially from his earlier work. Subsequent editions update the 1948 account and offer different perspectives on post-war development, but they do not revise the pre-war economic history much. The only difference I found between the 1948 and 1966 versions of the 1925-30 period was an additional note in the 1966 edition to the effect that Stalin was responsible for some of the excesses of collectivization.<sup>29</sup> The basic line on the end of NEP and the great turn remains the same. Hence,

I will discuss the 1948 and 1966 editions together as Dobb's "later" work.

Sharp differences from the earlier work strike us from the very beginning of the later work. The 1928 book, we recall, was preoccupied with equilibrium. In contrast, the 1948 and later editions begin with a critique of equilibrium theory. Dobb does not reject all notions of equilibrium, just those which make equilibrium paramount.<sup>30</sup> Properly interpreted, says Dobb, equilibrium refers to "certain internal relationships . . . to which any scheme of development must conform."<sup>31</sup> Equilibria and adjustment to equilibria are worth analyzing but cannot account for all the phenomena of change. Sometimes, for example, rates of movement are greater than rates of adjustment.<sup>32</sup>

Dobb criticizes even more strongly another aspect of equilibrium theory. The theories of equilibrium—those of "dynamic equilibrium" included—tend to reduce all changes to quantitative shifts in forces. In real life we see leaps as well as gradual changes, shifts from old states to qualitatively new ones. These changes in quality always have quantitative aspects but cannot be reduced to the latter.

Dobb admits he has changed his views. Formerly he considered economic planning as primarily the regulation of the relative proportions in which things are produced.<sup>33</sup> Now he emphasizes the indivisibilities and "non-plasticities" of means of production; they are not so easily shifted from one sector to another, or replaced by extra labor and different materials, as the merely quantitative differences in price between different goods and different techniques might suggest. Existing output capacities in industry limit the amount and types of equipment and consumer goods that can be produced over the next several years. In general, economic development faces many constraints in materials, in labor supplies, in ownership and organization, and so forth. The constraints cannot all be tackled at once; under such conditions the economic planner has to pick a few main objectives to concentrate on. In this respect economic planning is like military strategy.<sup>34</sup>

Since Dobb's general overview of economic planning already emphasizes industrial capacity, it is not surprising to find him insist, in his review of the 1925 reconstruction debates, on the urgency of new heavy industry construction.<sup>35</sup> In addition to allowing increased consumption in the future, building a solid heavy industry base will help both materially and socially (by enlarging the industrial proletariat) to offset anarchic, individualistic tendencies of private peasant agriculture and to defend the country in case of foreign attack. Dobb advocates stepping up agricultural exports in order to import more machinery from abroad.<sup>36</sup>

This is quite a different tune from the one Dobb was singing in 1927. Then it was, strengthen market ties between industry and private peasant agriculture, lift all strata together, don't exaggerate the menaces, and don't overinvest. Now Dobb sounds more in harmony with the United Opposition critique. However, in line with official Soviet positions from 1925 down to the present, Dobb cannot bring himself to criticize any of the decisions of the 1925 Party or Congress. For example, in discussing the 1925 agricultural reforms, Dobb admits it was the well-to-do peasants who benefited most from the extension of leases from six to twelve years and permission to hire regular wage-laborers in addition to occasional harvest-helpers. From this Dobb concludes, without presenting any further evidence: "Doubtless there was no intention of these concessions being more than temporary."<sup>37</sup> How Dobb gained this insight I do not know. Assuming he is correct, we have two alternative interpretations to choose between:

either "temporary" means at least twelve years, or the majority leadership all along intended to renege on its program, only it did not want the Left saying so publicly.

As for the 1925 decision to industrialize at a "moderate" pace, significantly slower than what the Left was demanding, Dobb does not address this directly at all. Instead, he shifts attention to the sins of the opposition.

Once again, Preobrazhensky's theory of "primitive socialist accumulation" draws Dobb's fire. Squeezing the peasants in the way Preobrazhensky's theory implied would have ruptured the worker-peasant alliance and possibly even reduced agricultural supplies to industry. The theory underestimated possibilities for increasing productivity in industry. Dobb adds one new criticism: the theory did not envisage mass collectivization. But he admits this omission was common to almost all pre-1928 views.<sup>38</sup>

Dobb also rebukes the Left for exaggeration of the kulak menace. In "Counter Theses" circulated prior to the 15th Party Congress of 1927, the United Opposition declared that rich peasant farms constituted between 15% and 25% of the total number of farms, depending on region; and that they encompassed 25% to 45% of cultivated area and possessed 40% to 60% of machinery. They claimed that the kulaks held massive reserves, and that imposing compulsory grain loans on the upper 10% of peasant households could release huge extra supplies for export without cutting into peasant consumption or genuine emergency stocks.<sup>39</sup>

What the "Counter Theses" had done was to take the broadest possible definition of the upper-middle peasants, lump them together with the kulaks, overestimate total reserves and underestimate safety reserves stored against drought or other natural disasters. Dobb supports Molotov, who by 1927 agreed that kulaks had to be struck at harder but questioned the Left's proposed methods. "Here the 'Counter Theses' offered no solution," says Dobb, "merely an emergency expedient of dubious practicability."<sup>40</sup> Dobb cites alternative estimates that kulak farms covered little more than 10% of arable area and held only 15% of village grain reserves.<sup>41</sup>

Dobb's criticism of Left agricultural policies is persuasive. Unfortunately, in evaluating subsequent Soviet practice, Dobb betrays a double standard. In 1928 and 1929 the regime would impose a series of emergency measures on the peasants, each set harsher than the last. Upper-middle peasants would increasingly be treated like kulaks. Safety reserves would increasingly be viewed as hoards stored for speculative purposes. Both rich and poor would be forced to sell to official collection agencies at low prices. I will examine the emergency measures in more detail below when I take up the emergence of the Right opposition. For now, I am simply pointing out the marked similarities between the Counter Theses' "emergency expedient of dubious practicability," and the measures subsequently adopted. Dobb claims the latter were necessary. If they were necessary, then why not commend the United Opposition for its foresight? With more advance preparation the campaigns might have been run more smoothly and effectively.

As in 1927, the later Dobb continues to criticize Left views on industrialization. Only here Dobb performs a complete about-face from his earlier position. Dobb says nothing about official mocking of the Left for supposed "super-industrializing" plans. Instead, he faults them for not placing *enough* emphasis on heavy industry. As evidence, he refers to the Left-initiated Vesenkha draft plan for industrialization in 1925-30. Investment rates would be very high initially, concedes Dobb, but the rate would fall in later years and light industry would be expanded as fast as heavy



industry. Textiles would receive one-sixth of all industrial investment.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of the merits of the Vesenkha draft plan, it is obvious that Dobb has taken it completely out of context. At the time, the Left oppositionists were being attacked as "super-industrializers" who would press heavily on the peasants. They took pains therefore to convince the majority that investment would return additional consumption goods within a few years. To increase investment and shift resources from light to heavy industry, as Dobb suggests and as actually happened, would tend to bear down even more on the peasants.

In short, Dobb gets caught in the same glaring inconsistency that characterizes all post-1929 official Soviet criticisms of United Opposition economic policies. They fault the Left for proposing to bear heavily on the peasant, when the path taken in the end, the path they support, turned out to bear more heavily on the peasants than anything the Left had envisaged. To put it crudely, Stalin saved the peasants from "primitive socialist accumulation" the way the hunter saved the duck from the dogs.

To his critique of the Left opposition, the Dobb of 1948 adds a critique of the Right opposition. In 1927 Dobb had not mentioned such an opposition, at least not one extending into the top Party leadership. The majority leadership of 1925 still seemed solid to him. Before long, though, it had split between Bukharinist "Right" and Stalinist "Center." What precipitated the split was the reappearance of the goods famine and the debate over remedies that followed. Let us briefly recount what happened.

The goods famine of 1925-26 eased the following year, as the government cut investment back some. Relief proved temporary. In the fall and winter of 1927 came a flurry of new construction, financed out of industrial trusts' cash reserves and newly-extended bank credits. Between July and December of 1927, purchasing power grew by 11.6%, supply of finished industrial goods by only 3.2%.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, State grain collection agencies held grain prices down, ostensibly to prevent kulak speculation. The result was a repeat of the 1925-26 goods famine, only more severe this time around. In November and December of 1927 grain collections dropped to less than half of the level of November-December 1926. Grain exports abroad fell drastically, thereby threatening machine imports.

Why had the goods famine recurred? Bukharin and Rykov argued similarly to how they had in 1925: there had been too much investment in industry. They advised cutting back new construction, sending more industrial goods to the countryside, and raising grain prices. True, they hesitated saying to go all the way back to the 1925 policies. Practice was confirming some of the Left predictions and indicating that increased industrial construction was necessary. Bukharin and Rykov were beginning to modify their views.

Meanwhile, another section of the Party questioned whether slight modification was enough. The goal of harnessing private peasant agriculture seemed as elusive as ever, the peasants enigmatic. In contrast, industrial successes far surpassed expectations. The working class was growing in numbers and skills. Perhaps a new path was called for.

The Left oppositionists, in a sense, sat out this debate on the sidelines, many of their leaders having been expelled from the Party at the 1927 Congress. However, Left ideas were not expunged from the Party with them. Indeed, their ideas gained more credence as their predictions of accentuated goods famine came true.

Over the objections of Bukharin, Rykov, and others, a new majority leadership decided to experiment with the Left

approach. Instead of cutting back construction, it enacted the first set of emergency measures to procure grain. The measures forbade hoarding and required peasants to turn over their grain to official collection agencies at the existing low prices. The leadership pledged to soften the blow on the poor and middle peasants by hitting hardest at the kulaks and by sending more goods to the countryside. Sincere as these pledges may have been, in practice, industrial construction and urban wage hikes did not permit supplying the countryside with more than a fraction of the industrial goods it would have purchased, while the arbitrariness and excesses of the searches tended to antagonize the middle peasants as similar searches had done under War Communism.

The emergency measures were lifted in spring so as not to jeopardize sowings. This did not correct the underlying problems. Industrial goods were still scarce, and grain prices low relative to industrial ones. Safety reserves needed replenishing. And, of course, the events of the previous winter had not exactly ingratiated the regime with the peasant masses. This prompted a second reimposition of emergency measures in summer. In July the government was forced to import grain, as Bukharin had been advocating for months. Once more the measures were lifted; grain prices were raised in the fall, but marketings continued to deteriorate due to bad harvests and the previously mentioned considerations. Grain prices on private markets reached double the State-offered prices.

There followed yet another resort to emergency measures. In the "Ural-Siberian method" championed by Stalin, the Skhod or village assembly was persuaded to agree to sell all grain surpluses to official agencies and to set high mandatory quotas to kulak deliveries. The aim was to obtain mass support from poorer peasants for struggle against the kulaks and for greater collections. In practice it appears to have provoked even greater resistance.<sup>44</sup> Emergency measures were strengthened through 1929, with correspondingly increased turmoil in the countryside. The crisis was near a breaking point.

Judging from his earlier book, we might expect Dobb to zero in on credit inflation, and on excess industrial investment, in particular, as the underlying cause of the goods famine and production crises. That is not what he does in 1948. He criticizes Bukharin and Rykov for continuing to focus on mistakes in State planning as the basic cause of the goods famine. This may have been understandable in 1925, says Dobb, but not when the goods famine continues to recur despite changes in State policy.<sup>45</sup>

This time Dobb blames the crisis in grain marketings on the backwardness of private peasant agriculture and the equalization of peasant holdings. He refers to the following table, earlier presented by Stalin, for support;<sup>46</sup>

	Total grain production (m. poods)	% of total	Grain marketed outside village (m. poods)	% of total	% of total harvest marketed outside village
Before the War:					
Landowners	600	12	281	21.6	47
Kulaks	1900	38	650	50	34
Poor and middle peasants	2500	50	369	28.4	14.7
Total:	5000	100	1300	100	26



	Total grain production (m. poods)	% of total	Grain marketed outside village (m. poods)	% of total	% of total harvest marketed outside village
1926-27:					
State and collective farms	80	1.7	37.8	6	47.2
Kulaks	617	13	126	20	20
Poor and middle peasants	4052	85.3	466.2	74	11.2
Total:	4749	100	630	100	13.3

Before the war, kulaks and landowners together produced as much grain as all the poor and middle peasants put together. In 1926-27 poor and middle peasants produced seven times as much grain as kulak and state and collective farms. The difference was due to a shift of production from big to small farms. Poor and middle peasant farms on the whole were less productive than big farms (at least relative to the labor they employed), and therefore their surpluses tended to be smaller. In addition, poor and middle peasants tended to be less concerned about maximizing profits and less dependent on industrial goods. Naturally, then, they tended to market a lower proportion of grain.

Not all of the decline in marketings can be attributed to the shift of production from big farms to small farms. While state and collective farms marketed the same proportion (47%) of their grain outside the villages as private estates had before the war, peasant farms marketed less. Poor and middle peasants sold 11.2% instead of 14.7% of their grain to the cities and abroad, kulaks only 20% instead of 34%. Had the two groups sold the same proportions as they had before the war, total grain marketings outside the villages would have increased 228 million poods (14% times 617 equals 86 million poods from kulaks, 3.5% times 4,052 equals 142 million poods from poor and middle peasants). This is a huge amount. Still, it would have covered only a third of the deficit. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to expect that higher grain prices, even complete elimination of the price scissors, would have induced the peasants to market as high a proportion of their 1926 crop as their pre-war crop. Relieved of many of their tax burdens, the poor and middle peasants were consuming more grain themselves. Nor can the kulaks be reasonably accused of sitting on anywhere near 86 million poods of grain out of spite. Due to expropriation and leasing and hiring restrictions, the kulaks in 1926-27 were on the whole much less prosperous than their pre-war counterparts; understandably, therefore, they and their livestock and laborers tended to consume a larger share of the product.

It follows, then, that neither squeezing the kulaks harder as the Left Counter Theses had suggested, nor raising grain prices as Bukharin and his followers suggested (unless the price scissors were completely reversed, which would have been prohibitively costly in terms of both the drain it would have put on State finances and the impetus it would give to the kulaks) could overcome the stagnation in agricultural marketings. In this respect, Dobb's criticism of Bukharin's analysis of the goods famine hits the mark.

But if Dobb has taken a big step forward since 1927 in his appreciation of the agricultural side of the goods famine, he has fallen backwards in his understanding of the industrial side. In his earlier work Dobb recognized that declines in agricultural marketings did not by themselves explain the shortages of industrial goods. The sum of investment, intermediate production, and consumption demands for industrial goods must be exceeding current industrial output, and therefore something must be cut back. Twenty

years later Dobb has apparently forgotten this fact. He criticizes Bukharin's well-known 1928 article, "Notes of an Economist," for advocating cutbacks in industrial investment. If current demands are too great, suggests Dobb, why not step up investment in order to meet future demands as soon as possible?<sup>47</sup> This, we recall, is the remedy that Trotsky and Preobrazhensky had advanced as far back as 1923. Only they at least admitted investment could not be stepped up without cutting back current expenditures in some other areas. Dobb's criticism of Bukharin's "Notes" avoids this aspect of the problem.

This is not simply Dobb's personal oversight, either. Beginning in 1927 the Stalinist Center attempted to overcome goods famine by increasing investment. Since other expenditures on industrial goods were not cut back to the same extent, the shortage of industrial goods got worse. Consequently, the Center escalated industrial construction targets again. Industrial investment chased good shortages like a cat chasing its tail.

Of course, the funds for extra investment had to come from somewhere. In 1927, we recall, Dobb stressed trimming bureaucracy, improving industrial management, and restraining wage-hikes behind productivity gains. In 1948, though, he says very little about applying these methods to Soviet development problems of the late twenties. To what extent Dobb thinks the methods were not applicable under the prevailing conditions, and to what extent he simply wants to avoid embarrassing the Soviets (whose practice in 1927-32 was notoriously different in this regard), I cannot say. What is clear is that, given the lack of foreign credits, failure to substantially pare industry and state apparatus costs leaves agriculture by default as the prime source for extra accumulation in industry.

Dobb never admits this directly. However, he does criticize Bukharin for refusing to sanction such a course. After summing up Bukharin's "Notes" (which in all essentials express Dobb's own earlier views), he comments:

The implications of this document were plain, if cautiously expressed. In form it did no more than underline a passage in the resolution of the Fifteenth Congress which had said: "It is incorrect to take as a starting-point the demand for a maximum pumping over of means from the sphere of agriculture into the sphere of industry; for this demand would mean a political rupture with the peasantry as well as an undermining of the home market, an undermining of export and an upsetting of the equilibrium of the whole system." But the whole tenor of the argument was a warning against a rapid *tempo* of industrialization and an emphasis on the need to adapt industrialization to the demands of the peasant market.<sup>48</sup>

Bear in mind that the "rapid tempo" of industrial growth Bukharin was warning against far exceeded the 9-11% rate the 1927 Dobb considered the maximum achievable without squeezing the peasants. Dobb's 1948 endorsement of such a tempo signifies that he now accords industrial development first priority over relations with the peasants, and hence over agricultural development as well (since under Soviet conditions of the twenties it was impossible to substantially raise agricultural productivity without peasant help).

Dobb implies that Bukharin violated the spirit of the 1927 Party Congress. This requires interpreting the Congress in a way I don't think is warranted. Congress documents, it is true, equivocated on certain key points. On the one hand, they called for more industrial construction, affirmed the necessity of taking some surpluses from the peasantry for the sake of industrial development, and called for more attention to collectivization. These are the recommenda-



tions Stalin would refer to later as justifying the great turn. On the other hand, the Congress warned against excessive haste. Private agriculture, it was claimed, would remain the foundation of Soviet agriculture for many years to come, and, as long as it did, market exchange should remain the main means of "coaxing" grain from the peasants.

Furthermore, the Congress clearly rejected policies of "maximal" industrialization.<sup>49</sup> The very word used in the Congress documents to describe the desired rate—"optimal"—is taken from Bukharin's polemics against the Trotskyists, where he used it to describe a rate of industrial growth that would not impinge on the peasantry. Dobb, following the post-1929 Soviet position, claims that "maximal" rates refer to something more than was attempted in 1929. This is absurd. We have already seen how Dobb criticizes the Left-inspired Vesenkha draft plan of 1925 for not stressing heavy industry *enough*. The fact is that the Soviets ended up adopting a plan setting higher industrial growth rates than any ever before proposed—and even that one was only accepted as a binding *minimum*.

So if Bukharin violated the spirit of the Fifteenth Congress while holding to its form, the path actually taken violated both spirit and form. What needs explaining is not so much why Bukharin would come out in his "Notes" against the Stalinist Center, but how the Center emerged in the first place. (When the final split came between Center and Right, Bukharin himself was reportedly shocked to discover how many people he considered his supporters had defected to Stalin's side.)<sup>50</sup> Official Soviet histories—Dobb's later work, too—tend to avoid this question. They portray the Party majority as steering a middle course, remarkably stable considering the circumstances, between the Scylla of Trotskyism and the Charybdis of Bukharinism. If the policies the Center pursued changed so much between 1925 and 1929, then on the whole, the needs of Soviet development demanded those changes.

So, for example, Dobb rejects E. Strauss's contention that the Bolsheviks should have taken the offensive against the kulak earlier, as the Left had suggested.<sup>51</sup> Dobb repeats Stalin's arguments of October 1928: earlier the peasants were not in a mood to take to collective farming, the Party was not capable of organizing collectivization, and state industry could not supply collective farms with tractors and other machinery.<sup>52</sup>

Stalin's first statement is partially correct. The late twenties saw a great spontaneous surge of poor peasants towards the collectives. But one should not on this account exaggerate the differences between policy needs in 1925 and in 1928. On the one hand, the surge might have been stronger had the Party tried earlier to encourage it; on the other hand, the middle peasants, i.e. the great majority of the villagers the Party was trying to win over, were still showing no signs of turning to collectives en masse. Stalin's other two statements are irrelevant. A year and a half after Stalin spoke, Party and industry were still woefully unprepared for full-scale collectivization.

To Dobb's credit, he does not get completely swept away by the flood of Stalinist self-congratulation. He says that, given the critical situation in the villages and the fear of foreign invasion, "the belief that there was only one correct solution to the problem of industrialization is . . . more easily appreciated."<sup>53</sup> He does not say the belief was justified. Still, we might ask: why was the particular solution chosen; and further, notwithstanding Dobb's claims, was it a correct one?

## The Stalinian Choice

Earlier I sketched some aspects of the Center's emergence. Let me pursue the topic further here. Most of the Party leaders who had fought the Left opposition from 1923 to 1927 were not so much wedded to Bukharinist theories of NEP "growing over" into socialism as they were rankled by Trotskyist insistence that socialism could not be built in one country. This seemed to them to concede defeat in advance. Yet they themselves did not know how to proceed. The successes of the October revolution and the early NEP recovery, along with the near-fatal mistakes of War Communism, convinced the majority leaders that winning the middle peasants' support was crucial. But it was one thing to enlist middle peasant support for a struggle against the old regime, quite another to draw them into socialist construction. The group of leaders who would develop into the "Center" tried the path of least resistance: this path took them, as I have tried to explain, from a Bukharinist extension of NEP to Trotskyist offensives against the peasants. Quickly, it led them to a pass where the only choices seemed to be to press forward against tremendous obstacles or to retreat to step one. The path of least resistance turned into the path of most resistance.

Here is where the question of the Center's leadership comes in. To speed up industrialization in the midst of agricultural crisis and goods famine, with the threat of foreign invasion hanging over the country, called for unyielding will, strict discipline, and, yes, a certain ruthlessness towards opposition. It called for a leader who was able to project those qualities and willing to demand them from others. In short, it called for a Stalin. A Stalin arose. If Joseph Djugashvili had not been there, someone else would have taken his place. The Soviet Party of the late twenties was budding with potential Stalins. In fact, Stalin got the immediate job done. The cost, though, was very great: petrification of the internal life of the Party, smashing of the peasants, mushrooming of the bureaucracy and security forces of the State, further aggrandizement of the apparatchiki, and, in the end, detachment of the regime from the masses of workers. The means by which the Center won the battle may have cost it the war.

Was there, then, no way out? By now the reader may think so. After all, we have criticized the United Opposition for banking too much on European workers' revolutions, for neglecting agriculture, and for exaggerating kulak strength. We criticized Bukharinism for denying that industrial construction required any tribute from the peasantry, for spreading illusions about NEP private agriculture "growing over" into socialism, and for tying the regime too closely to the development of the upper strata in the countryside. Finally, we criticized the Stalinist Center for swinging from one extreme to another, for petrifying internal Party life, and for fostering an enormous bureaucratization. What else was there?

I think there was an alternative. To begin with, the Soviets should have made earlier and more careful preparations for collectivization. Stalin's protestations to the contrary, by 1929 the mass of the middle peasants had *not* yet taken to collectivization. The Party had *not* penetrated very deeply into village life. The soviets did *not* command anywhere near the authority in daily affairs that the *skhod* had.

In this situation the Party increasingly relied on plenipotentiaries recruited from the towns to procure grain and forceably collectivize. Since such policies were unwise to begin with, bringing in outsiders to administer them only alienated the peasants further. This in turn prompted increased reliance on urban plenipotentiaries and on



coercive measures. I don't deny that kulaks did what they could to stir up the middle peasants against the regime. But without the grist provided them by the Party they could not have been so spectacularly successful. Indeed, the middle peasants proved quite capable of acting on their own account. *It was not kulak conspiracy, but misguided Party policy, that eventually ruptured the worker-peasant alliance and led to civil war in the countryside 1929-32.*

So we see that the question of alternative approaches to collectivization really boils down to a political one: How could the regime change the economic form of the worker-peasant alliance (from a private farming base in the countryside to collectivized agriculture) without breaking the alliance itself? What was needed was less rummaging for hidden stocks of grain and more education for collectivization, less glorification of the soviet "principle" and more down-to-earth efforts to transform the existing village assemblies, less bold promises of future industrial supplies and more instruction in basic cultivation techniques. Already in 1925, when Soviet leaders recognized the necessity of passing from recovery to reconstruction in industry, they should have started laying plans for collectivizing grain farming. Since they lacked experience, they should have concentrated on a few districts to start with.

At any rate, even under the best of circumstances collectivization would involve a massive upheaval in the countryside. That would have been all the more reason then to have given agriculture priority over industry. As it was, after 1927 the Soviets always gave heavy industry first priority. It seems to me that the Stalinist program never gave the collectives a chance to be successful, except in terms of the number of peasants involved. So few consumer goods were supplied to the villages, procurement prices for grain were set so low, that it was practically to the peasants' advantage to produce as little as possible for the State.

When I say that collectivizing cultivation of grain and the chief industrial crops should have taken precedence over heavy industry, by no means do I wish to suggest that all new construction should have been postponed. What was needed was better and stricter ordering of priorities within heavy industry. Paradoxically, and as contrary to popular notions as it may sound, the second main defect of the first Five-Year Plan (behind overemphasis on heavy industry) was *insufficient* planning within heavy industry. The Plan soon degenerated into a scramble to build as much new heavy industry as possible. Tremendous bottlenecks resulted as available supplies of steel and other building materials (such as bricks and concrete) were not sufficient to meet even planned project needs.<sup>54</sup> I think the Soviets should have placed main emphasis on increasing capacity in the steel and building materials industries. This would not only have furnished a material base for developing the machine-building industry in the future, it would also have enabled the Soviets to undertake construction of housing, schools, and irrigation and drainage canals, and to repair and extend railroads. Many small village metal-working industries that had to close down due to want of iron might have stayed in operation.

How could the Soviets have kept purchasing power from exceeding available supplies and provoking a goods famine? Here I have three recommendations, each opposite to what the Soviets did. First, concentrate on improving management and trimming bureaucracy. This was not simply an economic necessity but also, to an even greater extent, a political one. History shows that the apparatchiki pose a greater danger to a revolutionary socialist regime than either private agriculture or foreign invasion.

Second, narrow the scissors between agricultural and industrial prices and replace that supposedly "hidden" tax with more fixed taxes (such as rents on land and stock). Low procurement prices do not ingratiate the government with peasants any more than fixed taxes. Low procurement prices discourage production, since the peasant always pays the same share of product in taxes; with fixed taxes, the peasants must produce a certain minimum for the state and everything above that is theirs. Finally, low procurement prices encourage black-market speculation.

My third recommendation is to restrain wage-hikes behind productivity increases. Big wage hikes tend to widen gaps between town and countryside, since the peasants get wages only for off-farm work. In addition, they raise expectations among the workers that in the Soviet case could not be fulfilled due to shortages of goods. In the short run, purely nominal wage hikes may fool workers; in the long run, they make them more distrustful of State and Party authorities.

Could the policies I am recommending have worked? I do not know. The Soviets might never have won over the peasants or overcome the apparatchiki. The policy of wage restraints might have provoked too much resistance from urban workers. What I am saying is that the policies had to be attempted. Out of inexperience, out of disregard for experience, out of fantastic hopes for the future and terrifying fears of the present, they were not.

### Postscript: Bukharin versus Bukharinism

When I sent the original version of my review to the editors of the *Theoretical Review*, they made two major criticisms. The first was that I did not sufficiently clarify the relation between the economic and political in the crisis of NEP. Accordingly I have tried in this revision to bring out what I thought was implicit in the original. Second, the editors of the *TR* have suggested that I come down too hard on Bukharin in my review. As their correspondence with me indicated:

... we get the feeling that you consider Bukharin's idea of the transition to be fairly static. On the contrary, Bukharin's concept went through several transitions of which the *Notes* was a culmination which was itself in transition still. Bukharin understood the complexity of the transition while Stalin's was simplistic and economist at best. The greater complexity of Bukharin's multi-levelled conception of the transition, we contend, made it more open-ended and available to correction than Stalin's economist, class reductionist, and rigidly conceived and executed 'plan'.

This is a point of great political importance which deserves to be recognized. In this regard, Bukharin's was the most advanced line in opposition to the Stalinian conception: a soberly non-romantic *political* reality.

Both *politically* and *economically* we find this to be true, as does Bettelheim and surprisingly, yourself, though your article hardly admits it. What you suggest at the end of your article is in many ways the Bukharinist position, whether it is specifically recognized or not."

To this criticism I responded as follows: "I personally admire Bukharin very much and believe he remained a Communist to his death. When it comes to evaluating Bukharin's theories, however, I find things much more complex. He tended to be somewhat mechanistic in his philosophical outlook. (Perhaps he changed radically in this



regard in the last years of his life; I don't know, I'm only concerned here with Bukharin during the middle and late 1920s.) Recall Lenin's comment about Bukharin never having really grasped dialectics, for example. Of course reference to Lenin's opinion is not proof, but the mechanistic slant in Bukharin's version of historical materialism is admitted even by writers anxious to defend him—take Cohen, for example. This mechanistic slant, if it did not cause, at least played into the tendency to carry a good idea to its logical extremes, beyond the point where it was valid, to try to 'freeze' certain conditional relationships in the form of eternal principles. If Soviet conditions of 1918 and 1919, and the Bolsheviks' own strengths and weaknesses, pushed the Party into a policy of War Communism, then Bukharin is there to explain why War Communism is the universal model for the transition to (small 'c') communism. If later events convinced Party leaders of the necessity of restoring market relations between town and countryside, then Bukharin is there to claim that the peasants should "enrich themselves." On the other hand, Bukharin was enough of a Marxist and a revolutionary to admit his mistakes and correct them when events proved them wrong, which is a lot more than most of us can say. I wholeheartedly agree with you that he was groping for solutions to very difficult problems, and that his ideas "went through several transitions of which the *Notes* was a culmination which was itself in transition."

"When I criticize 'Bukharinism' in my essay, I am referring to certain aspects of Bukharin's views in the 1924-26 period that were molded into a somewhat mechanistic system, partly by Bukharin and partly by his followers (granted, partly by his opponents, too). Bukharin well understood the importance of the worker-peasant alliance, you claim, and I agree. What I do not agree with is that individual peasant production and market relations between town and country must be (for lack of a better term) the economic 'pivot' upon which this alliance turns. In spite of the success of restoration of market relations up to 1925, and partly because of that success, "more of the same" (even less restrictions on hiring labor and leasing land, etc.) would not and could not further the consolidation of socialist relations in the countryside of the Soviet Union as a whole. This is a key argument in my essay. I note that Paul Costello in his Nov.-Dec. 1980 article on Poland argues along basically the same lines about the counter-productiveness, from a socialist standpoint, of Polish agricultural policy, and that you yourself raise no objections to my basic point. I take it you must be bothered by calling it 'Bukharinism'. I will agree with you this far: I need to elaborate on my use of the term and distinguish which of Bukharin's views I am objecting to more clearly. But if you think I am off the mark even concerning Bukharin's views of 1924-26 and their general slant then you should cite your source of information. I'm not saying I can't be convinced, but all the sources I've run across, including Bukharin's own statements, suggest otherwise."

"While you're trying to convince me, may I try as well to convince you? Lewin, whose *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power* (which I think is the best single history available in English on the events leading up to the Great Turn; Bettelheim's book, in my opinion, is very good, too, but more a history of ideas, and deals with the actual events in very general terms), devotes much space to the development of Bukharin's economic views. See especially pages 132-213 and 294-344. Lewin thinks, as do you, that Bukharin's *Notes* are in general excellent, and I agree with both of you. But he lays into Bukharin's 1925 views on agriculture."

"Yes, I realize that 'what (I) suggest at the end of (my) article is in many ways the Bukharinist position,' if you

allow me to change the words 'the Bukharinist position' to 'Bukharin's position of 1928-29.' However, any way you slice it I still think it was wrong to see individual peasant farming as 'the proper foundation' of Party agricultural policy 'for many years to come,' as was expressed at the 1927 Congress by both 'Stalinists' and 'Bukharinists', and I find it hard to believe that Bukharin genuinely disavowed this policy by 1928-29. Again, as I try to emphasize in my essay, my advocacy of collectivization is not meant to justify the particular methods and pace chosen."

I go on to say that I recognize my interpretation is not a new line. Not only Bukharin, but representatives from the Left (Rakovsky) and the Center (Kirov) moved towards very similar views on economic policy in the early thirties.

Whether my explanation will satisfy readers I do not know. The main thing is that readers be able to judge for themselves from my response and whatever additional points the editors make whether we have a substantive issue at hand or mere semantic differences.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development Since 1917*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948). Hereafter referred to as "Dobb (1948)"; p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Dobb, *Russian Economic Development Since the Revolution*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1928). Hereafter referred to as "Dobb (1928)"; p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate, 1924-28*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Rykov, "Report to Fourth Soviet Union Congress," cited in Dobb (1928), p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> Smilga, in *Planovoe Khoziastvo*, 1925, No. 9, pp. 10-14; also No. 1, pp. 43, 49; cited in Dobb (1928), p. 312.

<sup>6</sup> "The way of direct taxation is the dangerous way, leading to a break with the peasants." Preobrazhensky in *Pravda*, January 18, 1924; quoted in Erlich, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Preobrazhensky, "Economic Equilibrium in the System of the USSR" (1927) in E. A. Preobrazhensky, *The Crisis of Soviet Industrialization: Selected Essays*, ed. by Donald A. Filzer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1979), p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> Dobb (1928), p. 324.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 325-26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 333-55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 384-89.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 379-80.

<sup>14</sup> "The healthy assumption in the whole matter is that the evils which exist are recognized and are even more proclaimed from the housetops, as the public declarations which have been quoted abundantly show. About washing dirty linen in public the Bolsheviks have never had delicate feelings"; *ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>16</sup> "So long as private capital was bitted and harnessed, the Soviet state was willing to feed and stable it tolerably well." *Ibid.*, p. 368.

<sup>17</sup> "Communism was not a poem born of the cool night wind, nor was it a guest of the mythical land of Cathay. It was a realistic problem of the search for a new social equilibrium." *Ibid.*, p. 160. See also pp. 168, 286-7, 370-1.

<sup>18</sup> "The internal structure of the system . . . must change together with the relation existing between the system and its environment. The latter relation is the decisive factor . . . the interrelation between environment and system is the quantity which determines, in the last analysis, the movement of any system." Bukharin, *Historical Materialism*, in Stephen Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 117.

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definition of the "class character" of art.<sup>6</sup> Having said that, I'd answer that the music tends to uphold a middle-class drop-out, anarchism (as differentiated from worker-rooted syndicalism) with the general direction being toward the political/collective and away from the individualist/nihilistic. Biafra describes himself as a sort of anarchist. This brand of politics is mainly based in a cross-class rebel tradition in US youth culture, as well as reflecting righteous disgust with foreign models of "socialism," and the semi-religious bent of the local dogmatists as well. Marxists are wrong to sneer at these politics, which are often instinctive and not really dogmatic and fixed, and dismiss the possibility of working with (and even learning from!) these folks.

The DK's cannot be expected to simply transcend their origins in a country which has spawned very little in the way of class cultures or institutions (as opposed to ethnic/racial). A music and culture that are a direct expression of a working class standpoint can only really emerge with the emergence of an autonomous/revolutionary working class dependent on larger factors than the political line of a miniscule number of Marxists. While Marxist cultural workers can at best link their perspective to the living elements of class consciousness among people today, in the absence of mass class consciousness and struggle such attempts will naturally be ambiguous and strained.

Where the DK's are heading is not quite clear; but the fact that they've survived the past few years and have retained the best of their creative and critical approach is a hopeful sign. Most importantly, they have maintained a dynamic relation with their audience; firing them up, responding to the audience's initiatives, and carrying on a positive dialogue with people, rather than "giving the (dumb) public what it wants."

Jeff Goldthorpe

<sup>1</sup> Lead singer Jello Biafra ran for Mayor of SF following the assassinations, when two "moderates" vied for votes. Biafra ended up finishing third ahead of the SWP and all the other oppositional candidates.

<sup>2</sup> Recently there was also a separate release of a record by Biafra and other musicians (anonymously) called "Witch Trails." While Biafra seems to be the overriding influence, it's not quite in the DK formula. The LP-sized 45 is full of grim and ghoulish electronic music, hypnotic percussion, chanted lyrics, etc. There is one sort of sado-masochist sex song with a disco beat ("Beat the Meat") and two science fiction style songs, one of which is a tale of the revenge metted out to politicians/business by post-holocaust mutants ("We're trapped in a playground, where you play your war games, We are the mutations, of your Agent Orange, Our ancestors died off..."). This connection to science fiction arises in other music as well and would be interesting to study, as an example of the convoluted influence of mass culture.

<sup>3</sup> This is an example, common with the DK's of a somewhat elitist and one-sided view of mass culture as merely a tool of the ruling class to control a passive mass, which was a popular view in the '60s youth culture, and is, I believe, partly due to the influence of Marcuse's view of culture.

<sup>4</sup> This complex issue of aesthetics, sub-cultures and class is beyond the scope of this article. For starters see Paul Thompson's "Youth Culture and Youth Politics in Britain," and accompanying book reviews in *Radical America* Vol. 13, No. 2, March-April, 1979.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the interesting punk fanzine *Ripper* No. 5 (available for \$1.00 from Ripper, 1494 Teresita Dr., San Jose, Ca. 95129).

<sup>6</sup> See Elaine Zeskind's article on punk in *Urgent Tasks* No. 5, where she quotes Engels writing to a English novelist about her depressing portrait of a passive English working class.

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<sup>19</sup>Dobb (1928), p. 324.

<sup>20</sup>See Erlich, op. cit., pp. 20-22.

<sup>21</sup>Larin, *Na Agrarnom Fronte (NAF)*, 1927, No. 4, p. 43; and Rykov, *Bolshevik*, 1929, No. 2, p. 74; both cited in Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 21-22. In the estimates referred to by Rykov, "regularly" is defined as more than fifty days a year.

<sup>22</sup>Kritsman, *NAF*, 1928, No. 4, p. 116; in Lewin, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>23</sup>Rykov, *Bolshevik*, 1929, No. 4, p. 74; in Lewin, op. cit., p. 22. Whether peasants renting out tools should be classified as kulaks was a subject of heated debate. Those against inclusion argued that employment of wage-labor is the decisive feature of agrarian capitalism. But to distinguish between labor-hiring and implement-renting (often at extortionist rates) peasants on these grounds is to make more of the labor-hirers than they were. Only a small fraction of peasant families who hired wage-labor accumulated wealth mainly through these means. See Dobb (1928), p. 375: "The village kulak is usually less wealthy than a small English farmer or village grocer." Although this comparison tends to downplay the kulak position (since the kulak's authority rests not so much on his absolute prosperity as on the gap between him and his neighbors), it does not point to the necessity of distinguishing between the great majority of kulaks and, say, full-blown industrial capitalists.

<sup>24</sup>Gaister, *NAF*, 1927, No. 11-12, p. 20; in Lewin, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>25</sup>Lewin, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>26</sup>See Lewin, op. cit., pp. 50, 55. The figure of "up to a third less" is my estimate, not Lewin's. Data for 1925 is very scanty. In arriving at this estimate, I assumed that the number of batraks did not grow more from 1925 to 1927 than from 1927 to 1929, and that the number of kulaks increased less rapidly than the number of batraks. It may seem that the relaxation of labor-hire restrictions in 1925 would have caused a greater growth in use of wage-labor than this. However, the use of wage-labor can rise substantially without affecting numbers employed if those employed work more days. We know that from 1927 to 1929 there was a shift from regular to day labor-hire; I am assuming that the reverse occurred between 1925 and 1927.

<sup>27</sup>Paul Roy Ewell, *Contract Farming and Vertical Integration*, (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1972), pp. 115-35; Jim Hightower, *Eat Your Heart Out: Food Profiteering in America*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), pp. 168-69.

<sup>28</sup>Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR; Second Period: 1923-30*, trans. by Brian Pierce, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), pp. 105-7.

<sup>29</sup>"It has now become fairly clear that Stalin himself was responsible both for shortening the time-table of 'mass collectivization' and, in part at least, for the measures of 'pressure from above', including violent and arbitrary police measures, at this time." Dobb (1966), p. 247. To this comment he appends a note: "In discussion of a report by a special commission presided over by Y. A. Takovlev in the Politburo on 22 Dec. 1929 amendments had been pressed by Stalin and Riskulov which, inter alia, removed the report's emphasis on adhering to the principle of 'voluntariness' (cf. *Voprosi Istrorii KPSS*, 1964, No. 1, pp. 32-43)."

<sup>30</sup>Dobb (1948), p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

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formulated first and foremost by myself . . . It is clear that Stalin was right in smashing every manifestation of fractional activity based on the theories of the Right opposition, and right in destroying its root and branch.

In that same speech, Bukharin mentioned how some of his former pupils had been punished "as they deserved."

*The Trial of Bukharin* unfolds a story of complete betrayal, in the 1930s of the socialist vision held by the Bolshevik leaders at the time of the October Revolution. The most elementary notions of socialist legality were not only ignored, but trampled upon, and with them the political practice necessary to construct a genuine socialist society.

Paul Sanford

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## **The Incredible Shrinking American Dream: An Illustrated People's History of the United States States**

by Estelle Carol, Rhoda Grossman, and  
Bob Simpson, Alyson Publications,  
1981, 171 pages, \$6.95.

This publication is an ambitious attempt to present a Marxist interpretation of American history in comic book form. It begins with a portrayal of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England and covers the plunder of Africa and the Americas by the European maritime powers. Succeeding chapters provide a surprisingly sophisticated presentation of slavery, mercantilism, the American Revolution, Westward expansion ("Step Aside Buddy, I'm an American"), the Civil War and Reconstruction. The book continues through an analysis of industrialization, "Adventures in Imperialism," the Depression and both World Wars. Perhaps the most comprehensive chapters are the concluding ones on the "Nifty Fifties" and the mass movements of recent times. A valuable bibliography is included.

The book uses hundreds of jokes, caricatures, and cartoons to present its message in a humorous and popular style. The very density of this material at times hinders the overall readability of the book. However, each page contains separate narrative paragraphs which succinctly summarize chronologies, concepts, and biographies.

Throughout the book a militantly anti-capitalist, class-conscious viewpoint is projected, without much recourse to left-wing rhetorical verbiage. There is a strong sensitivity to the issues of national and radical oppression, as well as a critique of male supremacy. American history is placed within a solidly anti-imperialist, internationalist perspective, as exemplified by treatment of immigration, the Spanish-American War, Vietnam, etc. The final chapter critiques bourgeois ideological hegemony in the US by satirizing 23 "myths" which perpetuate belief in the system.

The book concludes with an appeal for a working class party and a proposal for socialism in America. The authors

are careful to make general criticisms of the existing socialist countries while presenting the transition to socialism as a long and complex historical epoch. *The Incredible Shrinking American Dream* helps to meet our movement's pressing need for popularly written works on American history and culture.

Ben Rose.

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fact, there is no significant contradiction between comrade Levins' six points and the arguments and analyses of Lecourt in his book *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*. What is in contradiction is comrade Levins' defense of the notion of the existence of the two sciences (proletarian science and bourgeois science) and the theses presented above.

<sup>1</sup> Some introductory readings: J. D. Bernal, *Science in History* (four volumes, MIT Press, 1971); Rita Arditti, Pat Brennan, Steve Conrak, eds. *Science and Liberation* (South End, 1980); Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (Monthly Review, 1974); Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko* (NLB and Humanities Press, 1976); "Science for the People," monthly journal produced by Science for the People, 897 Main Street, Cambridge, Ma., 02139.

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, CW, Vol. 14, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Lecourt, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, p. 378.

<sup>5</sup> Bernal, Vol. 1, prefaces, pp. 1-18.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>Dobb (1928), p. 168.

<sup>34</sup>Dobb (1948), pp. 2-11.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 177-80.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>41</sup>Yakovlev, in *Pravda*, Nov. 5, 1927; in Dobb (1948), pp. 198-99.

<sup>42</sup>Dobb (1948), p. 192.

<sup>43</sup>*Ekonomicheskaya Zhizn*, cited in Dobb (1948), p. 220.

<sup>44</sup>R. W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-30*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 61-4.

<sup>45</sup>Dobb (1948), p. 203.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 216-17.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 204-5.

<sup>49</sup>Bettelheim, op. cit., pp. 382-5.

<sup>50</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>51</sup>E. Strauss, *Soviet Russia*, pp. 156-57, 160-1; in Dobb (1948), p. 206.

<sup>52</sup>Dobb (1948), p. 206.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>54</sup>Eugene Zaleski, *Planning for Economic Growth in the Soviet Union, 1918-1932*, trans. by Marie-Christine Andrew and G. Warren Nutter, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. 164.