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Perestroyka, Social Justice and Soviet Public Opinion

David S. Mason and Svetlana Sydorenko

In its formulation of plans to reform the economy of the USSR, the Soviet communist leadership has faced a major dilemma: how to reconcile economic efficiency with social justice. *Perestroyka* proposes to accord an increased role to market mechanisms and even private enterprise. However, a market economy tends to create inequalities, and economic inequalities collide with a strong sense of egalitarianism imbued in the population as part of communist ideology.

The issue of social justice, wielded by Mikhail Gorbachev himself as a tool against sloth and underemployment, has stimulated a lively debate among Soviet intellectuals. At the same time, broader public sensitivity regarding the issue is becoming increasingly visible with the widespread use of survey research and the publication of its results. This creates a kind of spiral of discontent: the economy deteriorates and inequalities increase; journalists and academics openly discuss these problems; because of this publicity ("*glasnost*'"), the sense of injustice is heightened; and the regime's legitimacy is further eroded. The whole phenomenon suggests the emergence of the sense of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations that is characteristic of revolutionary situations. The way in which this issue is resolved, or not resolved, will have a major bearing on the fate of *perestroyka*.

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Justice in Communist Ideology

The concept of justice is an elusive one both in Marxist theory and in Soviet interpretations of that theory. Marx's prolific writings are surprisingly devoid of references to justice, and his followers have been reluctant to employ the concept. Under capitalism, they believe, justice is an illusion, unattainable without structural changes that would sweep away the entire system. In a communist society, on the other hand, justice has no meaning for Marxists, because the capitalist sources of injustice have disappeared. According to Robert Tucker, "the ideal of distributive justice is a complete stranger in the moral universe of Marxism."[1] This may overstate the case. Others have argued that despite the lack of explicit references to justice, Marx and Marxists "do have strong beliefs about justice."[2] Roy Medvedev, at one time a dissident Soviet historian and now a member of the Supreme Soviet, who considers himself a Marxist, has said that "the idea of justice and a just society was the basic stimulus for the founders of Marxism and their first followers."[3]

For several years after seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks displayed a radical egalitarianism in both rhetoric and policy. In 1918, Lenin stressed that "the foun-

[1]Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961, pp. 18–19.

[2]G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 12, cited in Kai Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1989, p. 243.

[3]Roy Medvedev, "Socialism, Justice, and Democracy," in Ken Coates and Fred Singleton, Eds., *The Just Society*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 1977, p. 16.

Chief engineer Tamara Soboleva prepares to test a new fragrance at Moscow's New Dawn factory, which produces perfume and eau de cologne.

—AP/Wide World Photos.

dations of socialism lay in the ability to distribute evenly."[4] He opposed excessively high wages for anyone and favored limits on income to prohibit unlimited advantages in consumption or accumulation. As a result, there was a substantial reduction of income differentials.[5] However, by 1921, with the retreat from "war communism" and the beginning of the "New Economic Policy," Lenin was enunciating a diluted concept of egalitarianism:

[W]hen we deal with distribution, to think that we must distribute only fairly is wrong; we must think that distribution is only the method, the means to raise productivity.[6]

Although Marx had written in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* that the formula for the constitution of a communist society was "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," he had also written (in that same work) that in the first stage of communism, i.e., socialism, people would be rewarded according to their labor rather than their needs. Lenin emphasized this latter formula. This utilitarian approach, rejecting utopian notions of justice, dominated official Soviet thinking thereafter.

Through the Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev years, the concept of justice was rarely discussed. When it was, it was treated as a fait accompli. A 1987 booklet on *Socialist Society: Its Social Justice*, for example, argued that the "key factor in understanding the social justice of socialist society" was the transfer of the ownership of the means of production to the working people.[7] To the extent that anyone questioned whether justice had been achieved, the discussion was hidden behind the issue of wages and wage distribution. Even the seemingly central communist concept of "social equality" was rarely mentioned during this period.[8] And when the issue of equality was addressed, the focus was on equality of opportunity rather than on equality of result. The persistence of social and economic inequalities was explained by resorting to the Leninist formula that differentiation was based on the quantity and quality of labor. The adverse effects of such differences were, however, to be mitigated by "social consumption funds" in the form of free education and medical care, student stipends, pensions, subsidized holidays, and other allowances.[9]

Reconsideration of Social Justice

The concept of social justice was reintroduced by the two reformist leaders Yuriy Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev. Under Andropov, and in Gorbachev's first year as party leader, the concept was used as an instrument against official corruption and privileges. It also came to have broader targets—lazy and inefficient workers who received the same wages as good workers, and those who receive "non-labor income." In all three cases, people were seen as being rewarded by criteria that were based neither on need (the communist formula) nor on work (the socialist one). To the extent that justice was based on the socialist formula of reward for labor, people that received benefits other than from labor were perpetrators of "injustice."

As Gorbachev and his advisers grappled with economic stagnation and living standards that had, according to one source, fallen to the point where they

[4]Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy* (Complete Collected Works), Vol 36 Moscow, Po 'zdat, 1967–70, p. 488.

[5]V. G Rogovin, "Social Justice and the Socialist Distribution of Vital Goods," *Voprosy Filosofii* (Moscow), No 9, 1986, pp. 3–20, translated in *Soviet Sociology* (Armonk, NY), Winter 1987, p. 48

[6]Op cit., Vol. 43, p. 359

[7]M. P. Mchedlov, Moscow Progress Publishers, 1987, p 13.

[8]Ideological reference books such as the 1984 *Fundamental Concepts of Communist Morality* did not mention it See Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology*, New York, Praeger, 1986, p. 55.

[9]Mchedlov, op cit., p 23

reached between 50th and 60th among the world's countries,[10] they increasingly focused on the need to create greater financial and material incentives for efficient and productive labor—in the words of one sociologist, to stimulate "the development of talents."[11] Such an approach was bound to increase social inequality and to thrust the issue of social justice into the forefront. Gorbachev tried to harness the concept as a tool against egalitarianism and "leveling." At the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he devoted a whole section of his report on behalf of the Central Committee to social justice. He observed:

[W]hen equal payments are fixed for the work of a good employee and that of a negligent one, this is a gross violation of our principles. And first of all it is an intolerable distortion of socialism's basic principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work," which expresses the substance of social justice under the new social system.[12]

However, although Gorbachev's report to the congress asserted that "the unity of socialist society is by no means a leveling of social life," and stressed the necessity of "overcoming egalitarianism in pay, etc.," it also committed the party to overcoming *unjustifiable* differences by expanding public consumption funds, curtailing unearned incomes "and attempts to use public property for selfish ends," and eliminating "*unjustified* differences" in pay.[13]

The concept of social justice is thus two-edged. The tension inherent in the concept reflects a broader tension within the whole structure of reforms in the Soviet Union: Gorbachev wants to achieve a more efficient, market-based economy; but this will lead to inequality in the form of wider income differentials and even unemployment, which tend to undermine the already fragile legitimacy of the communist regime.

Aspects of the Debate

Once the issue of social justice had been aired by political leaders, academics began to develop the concept more fully, often in important philosophical and party journals, including *Voprosy Filosofii* (Problems of Philosophy) and *Kommunist* (the party Central Committee's theoretical journal). There has been no consensus among academics, however, either in defining social justice or in deciding how to achieve it. Some people challenge the reforms because of their apparent retreat from the egalitarian principles of socialism. Other prominent theoreticians have argued that inequality is necessary in the short term if there is to be greater equality in the long term.[14]

Despite the differences, commentators do seem to share three common views. First, all writers stress that the present stage of socialism is not able to deliver full social and economic equality. Second, there is an effort to put distance between the concepts of social justice and social equality. And third, it is agreed that although socialist societies will have to put up with inequality in the short run, these inequalities can be mitigated by social consumption funds. This is the extent of the consensus.

Wealth and privilege. One of the features of the reforms was to encourage individuals to earn more money and to permit them to spend it for personal needs. In 1988, Gorbachev stated:

We also must think about why a person in our country who has earned money honestly is sometimes unable to build the kind of house he wants, to buy a cooperative apartment, or to spend his wages in some other way. The principle of socialism is violated in this instance, too. A good toiler and his family should feel that honestly earned money enables them to live better.[15]

This sort of encouragement for people to accumulate wealth seemed to be in conflict with socialist principles. It occasioned a lively debate in the Soviet press, in which the dominant position seemed to say that wealth is justified if it is earned "honestly" and by hard work. One point in the debate revolved around a study from Latvia showing that more than half of the total bank deposits in the republic were concentrated in just 3 percent of the accounts. To the argument by sociologist V. G. Rogovin that such a disparity "should not exist in a

[10] *Moskovskiye Novosti* (Moscow), Aug 21, 1988, p. 12, trans. in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (Columbus, OH—hereafter *CDSP*), Oct 26, 1988, p. 27. The article also observed that the share of government expenditures going to human needs is higher in the United States than in the Soviet Union.

American estimates show annual average growth in Soviet consumption declining from 5 percent in the late 1960's to just 0.8 percent in the early 1980's. See US Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *The Soviet Economy in 1988. Gorbachev Changes Course*, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 41.

[11] A. G. Zdravomyslov, "The New Socio-Political Thinking," *Rabochiy Klass i Sovremennyy Mir* (Moscow), No. 6, 1987, pp. 3–15, trans. in *Soviet Sociology*, Vol 27, No. 3, p 41.

[12] *Pravda*, Feb. 26, 1986.

[13] Ibid (emphasis added).

[14] See, for example, M. N Rutkevich, "Social Justice," *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya* (Moscow), No. 3, 1986, pp 13–25, translated in *Soviet Sociology*, Winter 1987, pp. 56–57.

[15] In a speech to the CPSU Central Committee, *Pravda* (Moscow), Jan. 13, 1988, pp. 1–3, trans. in *CDSP*, Feb. 10, 1988, pp. 1ff.

Customers at the window of a savings bank in Vilnius, Lithuania.

—AP/Wide World Photos.

socialist society," Gennadiy Lisichkin, an economist, responded that it was all right, and suggested that it might well be due to honesty, hard work, and thrift. Lisichkin spoke of the need to "teach [people] how to make money" and praised "those healthy people who want not merely to receive more but to earn more."[16] Another sociologist has expressed the issue in language reminiscent of Adam Smith: "Might we not hypothesize that rational calculation, material interests, and the striving for well-being are by no means alternatives to virtue?"[17]

Soviet sociologists have pointed out that income differentiation in the Soviet Union is not large. They cite data showing that, on average, the most highly paid 10 percent of the population earns three times as much as the most poorly paid 10 percent. Other data show the ratio between the minimum and maximum wages to be about 10 to 1.[18] While some see such differences as contradicting the principle of social justice, others defend them as inevitable when profit and cost accounting are introduced. As political scientist Fedor Burlatskiy put it: "You have to choose: either an active society with some kinds of differentiation, or a stagnant society with equality."[19]

While arguing for greater differentiation, most advocates of reform do argue for placing restrictions at the "top," by reducing privileges and restricting non-labor incomes, and for cushioning the impact on the "bottom," by increasing social benefits and minimum wages. Both undertakings are difficult and complex, and they often run counter to the dynamics and imperatives of the market mechanisms that are central to the economic reforms.

Non-labor income. The concept "non-labor income" raises numerous political and economic issues. The struggle against such incomes—earned outside the official economy—has been a prominent issue for those campaigning for social justice. Restricting these incomes is seen as a way to temper the accumulation of wealth that could occur with the greater differentiation allowed in official incomes. One voice in this debate has been that of Tat'yana Zaslavskaya, a reform-minded sociologist who moved from Novosibirsk to Moscow after Gorbachev assumed the party leadership.

Initially, Zaslavskaya and others equated "non-labor" income with "illegal" income. But even before many of the reforms were implemented, it was evident that the distinction between legal and illegal incomes, or labor and non-labor incomes, was not always clear. For example, the press raised questions regarding sales of goods in the farmers' markets, or the peddling of handiworks.[20] Gorbachev touched on the issue at the 27th CPSU Congress, when he warned that "while combating unearned incomes, we must not permit any shadow to fall on those who do honest work to earn a supplementary income."[21] The line between labor and non-labor incomes faded even further with the adoption of new laws concerning cooperatives and "individual labor activity."[22]

The issue of non-labor incomes becomes more complicated yet when social scientists such as Zaslavskaya argue that anyone who benefits from subsidized prices is, in effect, receiving unearned income. She and others propose to eliminate such "income" by raising rents for state-owned housing and reducing subsidies (i.e., raising prices) on meat, dairy products, and other items in short supply.[23] This proposal does, of course, coincide with another central element of the

[16] *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), Feb. 19, 1986, cited in Aaron Trehub, "Social Justice and Economic Progress," Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (hereafter, RFE-RL), *Radio Liberty Research* (Munich), RL 382/86, Oct. 7, 1986, pp. 8–9.

[17] G. S. Batygin, "Virtue Against Interest," *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya*, No. 3, 1987, pp. 24–36, trans. in *Soviet Review* (Armonk, NY), January-February, 1989, p. 36.

[18] Rogovin, loc. cit., p. 38.

[19] In a lecture at Stanford University, May 2, 1989. See also Rutkevich, loc. cit., p. 59.

[20] Trehub, loc. cit., pp. 7–8.

[21] *Pravda*, Feb. 26, 1986.

[22] The "Law on Individual Labor Activity" is reported in ibid., Nov. 29, 1986; the "Law on Cooperatives," in ibid., June 6, 1988.

[23] Janet Chapman, "Income Distribution and Social Justice in the Soviet Union," *Comparative Economic Studies* (Lake Forest, IL), Spring 1989, pp. 36–39.

economic reform—price rationalization. But benefiting from subsidies on the price of meat is a far cry from profiting from black market operations.

Concern for those less well off. The debate over social justice in the popular and academic literature has also touched on issues of unemployment and of poverty among working-age and retired citizens. Burlatskiy, for example, has expressed concern over managers who talk of reducing their workforces by a quarter or more, when "guaranteed labor and social security constitute the chief gains of the socialist system."[24] With the official poverty level at 75 rubles a month (some Soviet economists say a more realistic figure would be near 100 rubles a month), the press has shown concern for the country's 58 million older citizens (more than a third of whom live on pensions of less than 58 rubles a month) and for some 40 million people earning less than 75 rubles a month.[25] The issue of poverty also surfaced in the miners' strikes in Siberia and Ukraine in the summer of 1989, and was one of the factors that led the government to increase pensions in 1990.[26]

Such issues will become increasingly visible and acrimonious as the economic reforms lead to price increases, a reduction in state subsidies, and layoffs of workers. As a 1988 Novosibirsk seminar on *perestroyka* concluded, "the practice of carrying out transformations here in our country and in other socialist countries has shown that reform cannot be both deep and 'gentle' at the same time."[27] Already, Soviet citizens are feeling the bite of such changes. Unemployment is now estimated at 6 percent of the able-bodied population—some 8 million people—and is expected to double within the next five years.[28] Among other things, the Novosibirsk report recommended "an entire system of socio-economic compensations, equalizers, and shock absorbers" to cope with such problems.

The impoverished state of large segments of the Soviet population has raised new concerns over the system of social consumption funds, which purportedly exist to satisfy basic needs and equalize living standards. Increasingly, however, there are criticisms both of the effectiveness of these resources and the fairness of their distribution. Some argue that they heavily favor the elite, and in fact do not guarantee much to the ordinary citizen. Sociologist Yuriy Levada, for example, states that,

> *in comparison with other developed countries and, more important, as a measure of the growth of our own social needs, we do have not too much, but rather too little real social and economic guarantees. There are no guarantees of a minimum hourly wage, a minimum standard of living, necessary medical services, kindergarten facilities, and so on.*[29]

Levada also sees the constitutional guarantee of employment as empty verbiage in the absence of a system of institutional guarantees such as job retraining programs, dissemination of information about job vacancies, and credits or subsidies for the unemployed.

Others argue that society pays too high a price for the guarantees offered, and that welfare payments should go only to the truly needy. For example, Ludmilla Piyasheva, an economist who openly calls for shifting the Soviet economy toward capitalism, argues that the present system "makes every citizen a petitioner for his share of social benefits that are not given automatically" and forces citizens to depend, therefore, on the benevolence of officials. The social consumption funds, she argues, lead to an excessive concentration and centralization of power, demand enormous expenditures by the state, and give to the state functions "that can and should be accomplished by the citizens themselves." In this sphere, she continues, "the state must radically limit its power and participation, for its services are too expensive, of low quality and, as long experience has shown, contradict the principles of social justice."[30]

Class conflict and social justice. Philosopher Brian Barry has written that "the problem of distributive justice arises only when there is a conflict of interest; it is moot when there is a harmony of interest."[31] With the Soviet economic reforms, we are likely to see increasing tension and conflict as some become wealthy under the new system, and others remain poor. In effect, class conflict looms on the Soviet scene. This will be most pronounced in the Russian republic, although in

[24]"Learn Democracy," *Pravda*, July 18, 1987, p. 3, trans. in *CDSP*, Aug. 19, 1987, p. 8.

[25]Esther Fein, "In Lenin's Classless Society," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1989; and *Izvestiya* (Moscow), Aug. 8, 1990, pp. 1–2.

[26]A new "Law on Pensions" increases most pensions and indexes them to prices. See *Izvestiya*, May 15, 1990, translated in *CDSP*, June 20, 1990, p. 18.

[27]*Nedelya* (Moscow), May 2–8, 1988, trans. in *CDSP*, June 22, 1988, pp. 18–19

[28]*Izvestiya*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 1, trans. in *CDSP*, May 9, 1990, p. 5.

[29]Yuriy Levada, "Which Resources Are Exhausted?" in F. M. Borodkin et al., Eds., *Postizheniye* (Understanding), Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1989, p. 81.

[30]L. I. Piyasheva, "Outlines of a Radical Economic Reform," in ibid., pp. 270–275.

[31]Cited in Robert E. Lane, "Market Justice, Political Justice," *American Political Science Review* (Washington, DC), June 1986, p. 393.

Social worker Katya Pavlova brings food to pensioner Lyudmilla Kuzmina and notes what she has to buy next.

—I. Zotin/TASS from Sovfoto.

other republics, where ethnic issues predominate, class divisions may actually reinforce the ethnic ones.

Already in the late 1960's and early 1970's, some Soviet writers were modifying their treatment of classes and social stratification and admitting that inequality of social groups afflicted socialist as well as capitalist societies.[32] They were also recognizing that such contradictions in a socialist society could be antagonistic rather than harmonious.[33] In the 1980's, sociologist Tat'yana Zaslavskaya led the way in exploring more deeply the bases for conflict among different social groups. She wrote in 1985 that "[t]he driving force of behavior is personal and group interest," and that although Soviet society may be one of "moral and political unity . . . , every social group has its own special interests, which may come into contradiction with the interests of other groups."[34] A colleague of hers, V. G. Rogovin, has even said that these "contradictions" may in some cases become a "conflict between social interests."[35] Radical change of the economy will only exacerbate such conflicts, as Zaslavskaya acknowledged in a 1987 interview.[36] In short, the reforms are sacrificing harmony for efficiency.

Public Opinion and Social Justice

So far we have discussed only the views and positions of Soviet officials and scholars. But, of course, one needs also to explore the attitude regarding social justice of the general Soviet public, which has become increasingly vocal and feisty. The Gorbachev leadership has invited the public to speak out, and has encouraged new public opinion research to allow the regime to gauge popular attitudes. In some cases, however, especially on the issue of social justice, the public mood runs counter to the interests of the reformers.

The role of public opinion research, like so much else in the Soviet Union, is undergoing dramatic change in the Gorbachev era. During most of the years of the Soviet regime, public opinion polling was seen as "a useful and auxiliary instrument of social management,"[37] and the leadership consistently resisted research that might reveal hostility to the system. During the "thaw" of the Khrushchev era, public opinion studies were permitted to explore a wider range of topics. But even then, according to Boris Grushin, a prominent public opinion researcher, social scientists were like "a scientific council for Genghis Khan"—public opinion research did not much influence the authorities, and in-depth, probing research was a dangerous enterprise.[38] After Nikita Khrushchev's removal in autumn 1964, scientific public opinion research generally withered away.

Things have changed radically in recent years. Émigré Soviet sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh has argued that "popular attitudes in the USSR can have an important impact in a period of crisis, when there is no unity at the apex of power, or when the leadership desperately needs the cooperation of the population,"[39] All three conditions now pertain, and consequently, public opinion research has been given a stronger role than ever

[32]See Murray Yanowitch, *Social and Economic Inequality in the Soviet Union: Six Studies*, White Plains, NY, M. E. Sharpe, 1977, p. 6.

[33]See Ernst Kux, "Contradictions in Soviet Socialism," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), November-December 1984, pp. 1–27.

[34]T. I. Zaslavskaya, "The Social Mechanism of the Economy," *Znaniye-sila* (Moscow), No. 10, 1985, pp. 3–5, trans. in *Soviet Sociology*, Fall 1987, pp. 35–36

A group of economists and sociologists led by Zaslavskaya concluded that the well-known Marxist-Leninist criterion for identifying class and social groups—their relationship to the means of production—needed to be refined with the use of such factors as "the extent of their executive authority and prerogatives, the economic sector in which a group operates, the volume and structure of the means of production that a group puts into circulation, and the opportunity to use them for personal ends or to own them." See *Nedelya*, May 2–8, 1988, p. 11, trans. in *CDSP*, June 22, 1988.

[35]Rogovin, loc. cit., p. 30

[36]"If we want . . . radical changes . . . there will be a relative change in the situation of classes, groups, and strata of society," Zaslavskaya observed, with "advantage for some, . . . disadvantage for others." Cited in Walter Connor, *Socialism's Dilemmas: State and Society in the Soviet Bloc*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 127.

[37]Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology*, New York, Praeger, 1986, p. 115.

[38]Boris Grushin, "Scientific Council for Ghengis Khan," *Novoye Vremya* (Moscow), No. 43, October 1988, pp. 30–32.

[39]Shlapentokh, op. cit., p. 131.

before in Soviet history. A number of public opinion research centers have appeared, including the All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion, headed by the liberal and iconoclastic Tat'yana Zaslavskaya.[40]

Zaslavskaya has argued both for more honest and sophisticated sociological research and for greater attention by the authorities to the needs and voices of the public. She sees public opinion research as a tool that is both informational and political: one that is necessary for the development and implementation of new policies. Management organs, she wrote in *Pravda*,

greatly need full, accurate, and truthful information about the real state of affairs in any sphere of social life and the requirements, interests, values, and behavior of social groups. . . . the light of sociological research must penetrate the remotest corners of public life, expose the accumulated dust, and stimulate the speediest possible cleaning up of our common house.[41]

What the public opinion surveys reveal, however, is not always pleasing to the reformers. Although Gorbachev and his advisers appear to have won out in the policy and academic debate with "conservatives" on the need to temper commitment to social justice in the interest of economic reform and efficiency, the leadership finds opposition on such matters from the general public.

In particular, "the strong strand of economic egalitarianism" detected by Western scholars of Soviet political culture[42] has proven to have great staying power The Gorbachev leadership may have considered that such egalitarianism was part of the old system of inculcated values and would be dissipated in the new atmosphere of openness and democratization. Public opinion surveys reveal that this has not happened.

A 1988 survey of Moscow residents, in asking how incomes should be distributed, found fully 38 percent of those questioned agreeing with the proposition that "Society should strictly control incomes so that all its members live in approximately equal material conditions"—a radically egalitarian point of view. A larger share of the sample (48 percent), felt that incomes should be distributed based on the quantity and quality of labor, but should not be "excessive." In identifying various "types of political consciousness," the same survey found the proportion of the sample favoring a system that promoted social justice to be much higher (41) percent than that of those who favored a more pragmatic orientation (14 percent).[43] Reformers intent on introducing Western-style pragmatism to the Soviet economy could find little comfort in these results.

More surprising, a 1989 survey of the Soviet urban population found only 2.5 percent who viewed the current distribution of incomes in Soviet society to be "just." Almost two-thirds of the sample believed that differences in income had increased in the past two to three years. And when asked "do you expect that *perestroyka* will make the distribution of incomes in society more just?" only 31 percent answered "yes"; 25 percent thought "no"; and 44 percent were not sure.[44]

The "conservative" cast of public opinion is also evident in attitudes regarding diverse forms of enterprise ownership. A national survey found that a majority of respondents (71–72 percent) supported collective ownership and joint ventures, but only 31 percent favored private ownership.[45] Even the new cooperatives (which are not based on private property) are widely distrusted. The 1989 urban sample mentioned above found only 25 percent approving of cooperatives, and 50 percent disapproving.[46]

[40]Up to now, Zaslavskaya's group is the only organization conducting nationwide surveys in the USSR. The Center has conducted about two surveys per month through some 23 regional centers in all of the 15 republics. Because of growing ethnic tension in the Soviet republics over the last year some of these regional centers are no longer operating, and the scope of the "national" surveys has been reduced; they no longer include all of the republics.

This raises the question of whether the Center's surveys genuinely represent the whole country, and in particular whether they obscure important differences among republics and nationalities. Researchers at the Center have responded that on most of the Center's survey questions discussed in this article, there were not significant differences among republics. Nevertheless, these issues have not been systematically explored.

[41]*Pravda*, Feb 6, 1987, trans. as "Perestroika and Sociology," *Social Research* (New York), Spring/Summer 1988, pp. 268 and 276

[42]Archie Brown, "Ideology and Political Culture," in Seweryn Bialer, Ed., *Politics, Society and Nationally Inside Gorbachev's Russia*, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1989, pp. 31–32.

As the USSR divides and disintegrates, a "Soviet political culture" ceases to exist. But elements of that culture, particularly economic egalitarianism, remain in much of the country, and especially among Russians. See, for example, Hedrick Smith's discussion of "The Russian Character," *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 28, 1990.

[43]Leontiy Byzov and Nikolay L'vov, "*Perestroyka*. Political Consciousness and Social Relations," *Vek XX i Mir* (Moscow), March 1989, p. 15–16, and 12. Byzov is the director of the scientific research center of the Soviet Sociological Association, another new organization, affiliated with the Academy of Sciences. The poll was conducted in November-December 1988 among 1,231 residents of Moscow—half by a random telephone sample and half by in-person interviews.

[44]All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research, "Attitudes of the Population Toward Radical Economic Reform," *Obshchestvennoye Mneniye v Tsifrakh* (Public Opinion in Figures), October 1989, Moscow, based on a sample of 1,148 residents of 19 cities in the RSFSR and six other republics.

[45]*Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Moscow), Dec. 12, 1989. This antipathy to private ownership was expressed, it might be noted, primarily in connection with ownership of heavy industry.

[46]See fn. 44. The public is agitated about the high prices that cooperatives charge and the high incomes enjoyed by their proprietors. See Anthony Jones and William Moskoff, "New Cooperatives in the USSR," *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1989, pp. 32–35.

Gorbachev and other leaders are fully aware of these popular perceptions, and frequently voice frustration at "leveling" attitudes and the persistence of a "non-market psychology" in the population. Speaking to the Central Committee in early 1988, Gorbachev complained that "our understanding of social justice has been deformed." If the leadership were to implement certain notions advocated in the press, he said, "we would have to take up a big iron and iron out all of our society. Everyone would have to fit the same pattern: the gifted person and the untalented, the conscientious worker and the loafer, the honest man and the thief." He mentioned cases of productive workers who increased output by several hundred percent, but whose wages had grown by "only 50–100 percent." But even such increases, too small from his point of view, cause people to complain and worry that they might lead to a "private-ownership mentality."[47]

Although displeased by these popular attitudes, Gorbachev recognizes their power. At a Central Committee meeting in late 1989, one participant repeated the argument of economist Vasiliy Selyunin that "in a month, the market would put everything in order." Gorbachev interrupted:

I know but one thing. In two weeks this "market" would draw all the people into the streets and sweep away any government, however much it might vow fidelity to its people.[48]

A closer look at the egalitarianism of at least some members of the Soviet public, however, reveals that the prospects for reform are not totally hopeless. There is some evidence that public concern with social justice issues is instrumental in nature, i.e., social justice is seen as a means of achieving a higher personal standard of living. For example, a survey conducted in Leningrad city to determine how the populace evaluated various periods of Soviet history revealed that "the degree of improvement of the material situation" was given much greater weight than "the degree of justice in the differences in the material well-being of various strata" (see Table 1).

The public is also ambivalent, even schizophrenic, about the role of the state in insuring social justice. In an urban survey on economic reform conducted in autumn 1989, 63 percent of the respondents agreed that the state should interfere "as little as possible" in the distribution of incomes. At the same time, 85 percent thought that the state should "give more privileges to people with low incomes," and 84 percent agreed that the state should guarantee to each person a minimum income. Almost half (48.9 percent) also felt that the state "should not allow excessive differences between low and high incomes." Sixty percent supported the rationing of scarce commodities, and only 5 percent favored flexible pricing.[49]

If Soviet citizens feel some ambivalence about the economic reforms and the tension between egalitarianism and efficiency, they are categorically opposed to another element of inequality: elite privileges. Although Gorbachev and his advisers have addressed the issue, many feel that they have not moved forcefully enough. This issue may account in part for the popularity of Boris Yel'tsin, recently elected President of the Russian Republic. Yel'tsin's populism plays on the popular sense of egalitarianism, which is manifested both in concern for the poor and resentment against the rich. At the 27th Party Congress in 1986, Yel'tsin voiced complaints about privileges and "special goods for leaders" and asserted that "the criterion of social justice must always be the interests of the working class above all."[50] He revived these themes at the Congress of People's Deputies in May 1989, wondering aloud "why are tens of millions living below the poverty line while others are wallowing in luxury?"[51]

These powerful themes find a sympathetic hearing among many citizens. After the May session of the legislature, the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research conducted a poll containing questions about Yel'tsin's proposal to transform the Fourth Division of the Ministry of Health (a special division for high party and state officials) into medical facilities for maternal and child care. Almost everyone agreed with this (75 percent, in full; and 16 percent, mainly); only 2 percent disagreed.[52]

The popular sense of egalitarianism is linked to an underlying support for socialism, and considerable distrust of both capitalism and the entrepreneurial spirit. This basic support for socialism has been noted by sociologists and other observers both in the Soviet Union and in the West. It is due in part to the semi-successful propaganda that has led many Soviet citizens to support "the key official values and beliefs."[53] But it is also

[47]*Pravda*, Jan. 13, 1988, trans. in *CDSP*, Feb. 10, 1988, p. 3.

[48]*Pravda*, Nov. 6, 1989.

[49]All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research, "Attitude of the Population Toward Radical Economic Reform," loc. cit.

[50]Cited in Rogovin, loc. cit., pp. 34–35.

[51]Quoted in Aaron Trehub, "The Congress of People's Deputies on Poverty," Radio Liberty, *Report on the USSR* (Munich), June 16, 1989, p. 6.

[52]*Ogonek* (Moscow), No. 34, August 1989, pp. 2–3. The survey reported in *Ogonek* was based on a sample of 2,100 people randomly selected from 47 cities in most of the republics.

[53]See, for example, Connor, op. cit., esp. pp. 71–75 and 134–135; Gail Lapidus, "State and Society: Toward the Emergence of Civil Society in the Soviet Union," in Bialer, op. cit., pp. 143–34; Shlapentokh, op. cit., esp. p. 4, 124; and Medvedev, loc. cit., esp. pp. 11–12 and 16–17.

Table 1: Criteria Used by Soviet Citizens to Evaluate Historical Periods

Criterion	Percentage of respondents citing criterion, by educational level		
	Higher education	Secondary education	Less than secondary
The degree of improvement in the material situation	73	56	38
The development of the economy of the country	60	36	23
Degree of support for the personal incentive of the worker	52	38	31
Degree of justice in the differences in the material well-being of various strata	27	28	23
The character of sacrifices required for development	26	20	21
Rate of economic growth	25	25	21
Degree of order, labor discipline in the country	16	19	33
Hard to say	5	25	32

SOURCE: A March-June 1989 survey of Leningrad citizens by the Institute of Sociology. See B. Z. Doktorov, "Materials for A Summary Account on the Theme. Social and Economic Problems of Development of Large Cities," presented at a Soviet-American Colloquium on Public Opinion, Moscow, December 1989. The survey was based on a mail canvass of 900 randomly selected Leningrad residents. They were asked to evaluate a range of historical periods from the New Economic Policy of the mid-1920's on through collectivization to *perestroyka*

a result of the real success of the Soviet state in raising the standard of living and assuring most citizens a basic level of security, at least up to the 1970's. As Roy Medvedev has put it, "our country has achieved no mean progress in the area of individual economic, cultural, and social rights that to all intents and purposes did not exist in tsarist Russia."[54] From the point of view of many Soviet citizens, capitalism may produce wealth, but it also requires hard work, brings uncertainty and insecurity, and fosters inequality. Such perceptions pose a real obstacle to efforts of the reformers to move the economy toward competition, market pricing, and greater economic and social differentiation.

Ironically, the tendency of the public to look to the state to ensure social justice carries within it the seeds of a solution to some of the reformers' dilemmas. In the past, Soviet citizens largely accepted the centralized role of the state and conceded politics to the authorities. The official ideology postulated equality and social welfare, and the citizens supported that. Now, however, Gorbachev is reshaping the ideology, demanding hard work, legitimizing competition and differentiation, and giving credence to the market. If Soviet citizens (or, at least, Russian ones) continue past patterns of accepting the vision of the world proffered by their leaders, then eventually they might come around to Gorbachev's point of view, and be more accepting of these new concepts and ways of life. If they do not, the reforms will fail.

These social and political obstacles to reform are, of course, increasingly compounded and complicated by the growing nationalities disputes and the step-by-step fragmentation of the Union. The task of bringing the population over to the market will be no less difficult in an environment of national conflict, political instability, and the decay of central authority.

But even without the nationalities problem, Gorbachev's task is a big one. He must, essentially, reshape the political culture of the population. As Samuel Barnes points out in a comparative study of politics and culture, "culture suggests the 'easy' behavior. . . . cultural patterns provide the routine, largely unexamined options followed by most people most of the time."[55] For most Soviet citizens, it was "easy" to accept the Soviet welfare state, its centralized political structure, and the system's undemanding work ethic. In trying to alter these patterns, the Gorbachev leadership will have to disrupt the easy behavior of citizen compliance with them. The end result may be attractive, with more citizen participation and a higher standard of living, but the transition period will be a difficult and wrenching one for both the society and the leadership.

For now, Gorbachev's economic and political reforms do not attract a broad constituency. The only clear "winners," to borrow from Peter Hauslohner's analysis, are the professionals.[56] In the working class, there may

[54]Medvedev, loc. cit., pp. 11–12. Although popular trust in the party has been declining steadily over the last two years, in August 1990, some 38 percent of a group surveyed expressed full or partial confidence in the organization (compared to 42 percent who did not). Data based on national samples, and from the archives of the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research. For a report of even higher levels of trust in the party, see Lev Gudkov and Yuriy Levada, "Who Is Ahead?" *Ogonek*, No. 25, June 1990, p. 1. Given the events of the last year, it is difficult to know whether to be surprised more by the decline or by the persistence of any support at all.

[55]"Politics and Culture," a paper presented at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, March 1989, p. 28.

[56]Peter Hauslohner, "Gorbachev's Social Contract," *Soviet Economy* (Washington, DC), January-March 1987, p. 83. That support for reform only comes from those engaged in creative work, highly skilled specialists, and high-level managers was confirmed by the 1988 Novosibirsk seminar on restructuring. See Aleksey Ulyukayev, "Restructuring: Who's For It and Who's Against It?" *Nedelya*, May 2–8, 1988, trans. in *CDSP*, June 22, 1988, pp. 18–19.

also be a new stratum of winners in those who capitalize on the new economic incentives and entrepreneurial possibilities, but probably not many workers see themselves fitting into that category just yet. These constituencies are much too small to sustain the reforms over a long period, especially given the regime's encouragement of democratization and grass-roots political activity. Unless the state or the economy can generate some positive material benefits for the workers, the Kremlin is likely to confront many more of the kinds of strikes staged by miners in Siberia and Ukraine. Gorbachev has recognized this problem, telling the Central Committee in January 1988 that "just two or three years will decide where restructuring is going."[57]

Political Justice or Market Justice?

Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership face multiple dilemmas in the next two or three years. With democratization, *perestroyka,* and *glasnost',* they have unleashed social forces that will not be easy to control. Perhaps the most important problem is in managing, or satisfying, popular expectations. Since 1985, Gorbachev has been pledging "radical reform" and even "revolutionary" changes in the Soviet Union. The reforms he promotes are meant to move the Soviet Union to a higher plane of development. For most Soviet citizens, however, little has changed; indeed, in many cases, the situation has worsened.

The basic problem for the Gorbachev leadership, then, becomes one of shifting popular expectations of justice from the political system to the marketplace, and then in getting the market to work. In a discussion of perceptions of justice in the United States, Robert Lane has argued that Americans prefer "market justice" to "political justice"; "they prefer the market's criteria of earned deserts to the polity's criteria of equality and need, and believe that market procedures are more fair than political procedures."[58] If Gorbachev is going to succeed in the Soviet Union, it would seem that he would need to nudge the Soviet population, or a good part of it, toward such a preference for market justice.

In the process, the Soviet state will reduce its commitment to satisfying the norms of social justice, by cutting back on its distributive role. This will put it in a dangerous position. The population as a whole has become increasingly dissatisfied with the political system, and with the heretofore meager results of economic *perestroyka*. Groups that profited from the old arrangements—unskilled workers, bureaucrats, and collective-farm workers—are especially unhappy with the government. Meanwhile, the regime is also under fire from groups—skilled workers, the creative intelligentsia, some high-level managers, and industrious farmers—that want more radical reforms in respect to property and politics. Hence, it is in danger of losing all of its constituencies, and therefore its legitimacy.

Under Gorbachev's reforms, "justice" is increasingly to be achieved through hard work and commitment to quality. The burden will be more on the individual. This, of course, begins to sound like the free enterprise system that both Gorbachev and most Soviet citizens profess not to want. The Gorbachev leadership remains committed to socialism, and the population remains somewhat egalitarian and supportive of the welfare state. This constitutes, then, the central dilemma facing the Soviet Union: how to create a more efficient society without sacrificing too much of the commitment to social justice. The ideology of communism, the achievements of the Soviet state, and the legitimacy of the regime have been based in large measure on the commitment to justice. The future of the regime, however, depends on making the country more efficient, in terms of satisfying the material needs of its population and being competitive in the world market.

[57]M. Gorbachev, "Democratization Is the Essence of Restructuring and the Essence of Socialism," *Pravda*, Jan. 13, 1988, trans. in *CDSP*, Feb. 10, 1988, p. 4

[58]Lane, loc. cit., p. 387.