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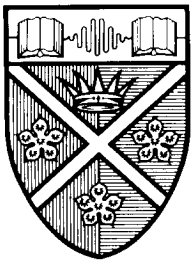

PRESSURE GROUP DEVELOPMENTS IN SOVIET POLITICS

by

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PRESSURE GROUPS IN SOVIET POLITICS

Among the many momentous political changes that have taken place in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, a particularly significant development has been the changed circumstances for the operation of pressure groups. The nature of any group influence on Soviet politics, and the extent to which it was possible to talk of interest groups in Soviet society, were the subjects of research and academic debate in the 1960s and 1970s. The debate encompassed a wide range of opinions, and although most writers came to accept that the political group approach had revealed some interesting aspects of the Soviet political process, wide divisions remained on the question of what conclusions should be drawn about the nature of the Soviet political system.

By 1988 however, it had become apparent to observers of various different opinions that unofficial groups were not only forming to represent particular interests and viewpoints, but they were also having a growing influence on official political debates and policy outcomes. The nature of politics in the Soviet Union is clearly undergoing radical change, but what is the nature of that change? Is the Soviet Union becoming a more open society? To what extent can groups within society exert influence over policy-making and the nature of the political system? New research is now needed, but in order to understand the changes taking place, and especially the new role of pressure groups politics, it is necessary to locate recent developments in the context of the previous situation and the original debate on it.

PRESSURE GROUPS IN SOVIET POLITICS

THE DEBATE ON SOVIET INTEREST GROUPS

The original debate on the relevance of a group approach to Soviet politics was initiated in the mid-1960s by Gordon Skilling [1966]. His ideas can be seen as a response to contemporary changes both in Soviet politics, and in the climate of opinion within American political science. On the one hand, changes in Soviet politics under Khrushchev had revealed a greater degree of debate and differences of opinion than had been apparent under Stalin, and this cast increasing doubt on the validity of the hitherto predominant totalitarian theory of Soviet politics. On the other hand, it seemed increasingly desirable to western students of Soviet politics to integrate their studies into the mainstream of comparative politics, both by testing the applicability of concepts and methods used in the study of western politics, and by introducing data on Soviet politics into wider comparative debates.

Drawing on the ideas of western political scientists such as Bentley [1949], Truman [1951], and Latham [1952], Skilling argued that although Soviet politics was different from that of western democracies, a focus on groups would reveal aspects of policy-making obscured by totalitarian theory. "The group approach", he argued, "sensitises the observer to a realm of political activity that has gone almost unnoticed.....in particular in the stages before and after the formal making of decisions by the topmost leaders" [Skilling and Griffiths (eds.), 1971: 23.].

Adopting the term "political interest group", Skilling drew again

on Truman in defining it as an "aggregate of persons who possess certain common characteristics and share certain attitudes on public issues, and who adopt distinct positions on these issues and make definite claims on those in authority" [Skilling and Griffiths (eds.) 1971:24]:. It was accepted that groups might often be overlapping and in a state of flux, and that in Soviet conditions, few groups would have any formal organisation. Skilling even allowed that an interest group might comprise individuals acting spontaneously, in parallel, and merely aware of each others' actions without any direct interaction between them [Skilling and Griffiths (eds.) 1971:31]. Such informal groups would be found especially at lower levels of society, outside the formal institutions of politics, while greater degrees of interaction and organisation would be found among interest groups within the elites and state institutions.

Skilling's work prompted several studies, either of particular groups, or of policy areas where group influences could be examined. The whole body of research was the subject of much debate, especially around the issues of the extent to which groups could be clearly identified in the context of Soviet politics, and of the significance of group pressures for the character of the Soviet political system. Curiously, unlike their colleagues studying western political systems, little discussion was devoted to questions of terminology. Although, as is noted below, more sceptical commentators preferred to identify opinion groups rather than interest groups, there was hardly any discussion of whether, for example, distinctions should be made between pressure groups and interest groups, or whether "pressure group" was a more suitable generic term with sub-categories of

interest and attitude groups [Castles 1967:21], or sectional and promotional groups [Richardson and Jordan 1979: 17]. For most contributors to the debate, the generic term 'interest group' seemed to be acceptable for all Soviet political groupings.

In their edited collection, Skilling and Griffiths [1971] included a range of studies of specific groups either from within the formal institutions of the state, or from less powerful expert professional groups. In the former were party officials, security police, and the military [Hough 1971; Barghoorn 1971; Kolkowicz 1971], and in the latter were industrial managers, economists, creative writers, and jurists [Hardt and Frankel 1971; Judy 1971; Simmons 1971; Barry and Berman 1971]. All the contributors were able to provide some evidence that their chosen group did qualify as an interest group according to Skilling's definition. However, while the military and security police were presented as largely homogeneous groups, in which most members shared common attitudes and goals, party officials and the various professional and expert groups were shown to be more internally heterogeneous, containing different opinion groups within them. For example, Hough found differences between party officials in Moscow and those in the regions, as well as between officials with different policy specialisms [1971:87]. Judy found economists divided on their attitudes to reform depending on their age, institutional affiliation and extent of mathematical training [1971:250].

Other studies along similar lines also appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s, with particular emphasis on the investigation of various groups of professionals as examples of interest groups. Work on

industrial managers was carried out by Azrael [1966], and by Andrle [1976].[1] while aspects of group influence on education policy were explored by Stewart [1969], and by Schwartz and Keech [1968]. A problem shared by much of the above-mentioned work was the extent to which the evidence gathered clearly established the operation of interest groups in Soviet politics, as opposed to the existence of common interests. While all the studies found evidence to fulfill Skilling's criteria, for example, of signs of groups sharing common interests and a common consciousness of them, and of activities by group members aimed at pursuing or defending their interests, it proved more difficult to go beyond this and establish patterns of interaction between group members, or to show the existence of any formal organisation of groups.

Probably the most clear-cut evidence of concerted group action was produced by Peter Solomon in his study of criminologists and their role in various reforms in criminal policy. By studying the debates on legislation on hooliganism, and sentencing policy, Solomon was able to show how criminologists influenced official opinion by successfully introducing more liberal ideas in opposition to more punitive measures originally proposed by politicians and officials [Solomon, 1978]. Again however, although the evidence showed the existence of a group with shared professional interests and attitudes, and it was possible to trace the way in which members of such a group, in using their professional contacts and their authority as experts, were able to affect the passage of legislation or the implementation of policy, it was still not established that criminologists formed a distinct pressure group of the kind to be

found in the West.

Apart from the above-mentioned studies of particular gorups, other researchers approached the question in a different way through the study of particular policy issues or reforms as a means of identifying and examining the role of interest groups. For example Friedgut [1976] produced a study of the 1958 agricultural reforms involving the abolition of the machine tractor stations, the state bodies from which collective farms had been obliged to lease equipment and technical inputs.[2]

Perhaps the policy area providing the clearest example of the influence of pressure group activity on policy outcomes was environmental policy. This was investigated in separate studies by Gustafson [1981] and Kelley [1976], especially in relation to the politics of pollution controls in Lake Baikal. According to Kelley, alongside the governmental institutions concerned on the one hand with industrial management and planning interests, and on the other hand, with environmental protection, a significant influence was exerted by informal "opinion groups", especially among writers, journalists and scientists. In a situation where official bureaucratic interests were split between their industrial management and environmental protection responsibilities, "top-level Soviet officials were being urged on by an *ad hoc* environmental coalition to override the decisions of their ministerial subordinates" [Kelley, 1976:589]. Again however, no formal group organisation was possible in Soviet conditions, and it was unclear how far the opinion groups concerned were actually able to act in concert.

Before 1985 the only clear examples of organised unofficial political groups in Soviet politics were the dissidents, and, ironically, they were made up of the people with least influence over the formal channels of policy making. Dissident groups in the 1960s and 1970s took up a wide range of political causes, and were specially active on questions of nationality rights, religious freedoms, and more generally in pressing for democratic freedoms of expression and movement.

According to Tokes, dissident groups could be categorised into three types depending on their attitudes to the Soviet system and their preferred tactics for dealing with it in pressing their demands. First, he identified "moral absolutists" who took a principled stand of outright opposition to the Soviet regime, and who, as a result could have no direct influence on policy. Second were "instrumental pragmatists" who, although they had gone beyond the rules of the existing system in order to put forward their demands, nevertheless sought reforms of that system. This gave them some common grounds in dialogue with representatives of the system, which, in combination with shared personal contacts and social background with members of the elite, provided potential ways of influencing policy discussions. Third there were "anomic militants" whose lifestyle led them into militant opposition to the system and withdrawal from it, so that no clear ideology or tactics were developed. The political impact of this category was therefore minimal.

Unlike the other groups studied, the dissident groups clearly had group consciousness and organisation, shared values, and made definitive demands on those in authority. However, even the

"instrumental pragmatist" groups did not clearly articulate a particular wider social interest, and for this reason, Tokes, perhaps using a more stringent definition than some other researchers mentioned above, thought they could not be regarded as fully fledged interest groups [Tokes 1974:30].

By the end of the 1970s, an impressive body of research had been accumulated. Among its achievements were the provision of a great deal of information about informal processes of Soviet politics and the nature of policy inputs from society at large. Much of the research was also able to show the existence of interest groups in terms of the components of Skilling's definition, that is, of recognisable groups sharing common beliefs and attitudes about public issues, and making claims on authority. However, many questions remained about what exactly the research was able to show about Soviet politics. For some, interest group research established the validity of a pluralist interpretation of the Soviet state. The leading proponent of this view was Jerry Hough [1979:547] who put forward the characterisation of the Soviet Union as a form of "institutionalised pluralism". By this he meant that, unlike in the West, groups could articulate interests and seek to influence policy only if they operated through official institutions.

Since this kind of interest representation seems to require a higher degree of centralised direction and coordination than is usually associated with pluralism, other writers have preferred to characterise the Soviet system as a kind of corporatism. Drawing on the work of Schmitter [1974], Bunce and Echols have argued that the Soviet

system, as it had developed by the Brezhnev period, involved the incorporation of key interests into the system of state management. In contrast to the Khrushchev period, when the central party leadership was often in conflict with major interests, such as industrial managers, the government bureaucracy, scientists, and farm managers, the Brezhnev leadership had adopted a deliberate policy of compromise, placating these interests at the same time as ensuring their cooperation in the overall conduct of policy [Bunce and Echolls, 1980].

In contrast to Hough, and Bunce and Echolls, other writers have cast doubts on the idea that pressure groups can operate with the degree of either independence or organisation that the terms pluralism and corporatism imply. For example, in reviewing a wide range of studies dealing with the question of Soviet interest groups, Lowenhardt could not find any "clear-cut evidence". He concluded that "certain groups or institutions may perhaps be said to behave as interest groups.....but often the common interests of their members will be quite limited in number and will be overshadowed by their different and conflicting interests". Instead of interest groups, Lowenhardt suggested it was preferable to discuss interest representation in terms of "policy coalitions" which emerge around a given issue from time to time, drawing on members of different institutions or opinion groups, but then collapse when the issue is resolved or becomes less important [Lowenhardt 1981:86-7].[3]

Another problem has been raised by Brown [1983:65], who sees the use of pluralist terminology in the Soviet context as "conceptual

stretching", where relatively insignificant similarities between the Soviet and western political systems are accentuated, and significant differences are played down. He felt able to accept the existence of what he preferred to describe as "opinion groupings", and to recognise it may be possible to detect "elements of pluralism" in Soviet politics, but the key question, he argued, was that of autonomy, and compared with western political systems, groups in the Soviet Union had very little of it. "The control which Soviet leaders have over the political agenda, their control over the flow of information, their capacity to make potential issues non-issues, while not complete, are beyond the dreams even of a Richard Nixon" [Brown, 1983:69].

In raising such matters as control over the political agenda, and the power to turn issues into non-issues, Brown was extending the discussion into areas which imply fundamental criticisms of the whole methodology of interest group research. The point was made more explicitly by McAuley [1977:163] who argued that the interest group approach "tends to concentrate on *what* happens, *how* things are done, rather than asking, in some broader sense, *why* political activities and relationships take the form that they do". As a result, although the research of the 1960s and 1970s was able to produce a new kind of evidence on the informal processes of Soviet politics, it could only attempt to reveal that which was the result of peoples' positive actions. It did not attempt to investigate moves behind the scenes to control agendas, or power of the kind that went unchallenged because it was unrecognised, or taken for granted. Therefore, following Brown's point, the research could not discern between situations where interest representation could take place with relatively little constraint, and therefore with the potential to

influence significantly policy-making, and situations where it was severely constrained by powerful interests that were beyond and immune from the kind of political dialogue the interest group research was able to reveal.

The idea that such overbearing power did exist and constrain the information of informal interest groups was, of course, always accepted in most western work on Soviet politics in the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed, was accepted by Skilling and most other contributors to the debate. Only a minority of scholars were prepared to go as far as Hough in portraying the Soviet political system as a form of pluralism. However, in the light of recent changes in the nature of that system under Gorbachev, it must be asked whether on the one hand, the reform process itself revealed a greater role for pressure group influence over policy than had been possible before, and on the other hand, whether the reforms have created a new situation allowing a greater scope for interest group politics. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

POLITICAL INTERESTS AND PERESTROIKA

In the late 1970s two different reformist tendencies can be identified in Soviet politics. On the one hand, there were the dissidents who had been forced to challenge the conventional rules of politics, and who had been forced into illegality by official reaction to their views. Groups of this kind, such as those involving civil rights campaigners Andrei Sakharov or Roy Medvedev, correspond to the instrumental pragmatists of Tokes' classification. On the other hand, there were

professional groups and liberal reformist academics remaining within the system. Examples include those associated with the sociologist Tat'yana Zaslavskaya, the economist Avel Aganbegyan or the political scientist Fyodor Burlatskii. These, of course, are the kind of groupings most closely conforming to the concept of interest group used in the western studies of Soviet politics reviewed above. Although the two groups were separate insofar as they operated within or outside the rules of the system, in many ways they shared common outlooks and experience, having similar social and educational backgrounds, and in some cases, moving in the same social circles. Sakharov, for example had been a physicist, and Medvedev a historian.

In retrospect, it can be seen that such groups had some effect on policy change in the 1980s. The more immediate influence was exerted by reformist academics, especially economists and other social scientists. They had provided most of the reformist ideas of the early and mid-1960s, but as the political climate became more hostile to them in the 1970s, they had either been subjected to increased political control, or they had retreated to posts away from the centre where the politicians interferred with them less, as for example, with Aganbegyen and Zaslavskaya who had moved to institutes of the Academy of Sciences in Siberia.

While the Party leadership presented a united front against reform, there was little the reformers could do beyond keeping their ideas alive through academic research. By the early 1980s however, new political opportunities were emerging. Just below the top Party leadership a new group of younger politicians were becoming more

influential. Gorbachev, Ryzhkov, Yakovlev and others showed themselves interested in new ideas to overcome problems such as falling growth rates, poor labour morale, and the growing corruption that they saw around them. Also, more than previous generations of political leaders, they had received higher education and therefore shared similar social and educational backgrounds to the liberal intelligentsia. In the early 1980s a regular dialogue was established between academic reformers and the rising generation of politicians. Informal discussion meetings were held to which academics were invited to present papers outlining criticisms of the existing system and proposals for reform. One such paper was the new famous "Novosibirsk Report", leaked anonymously to the West at the time, and later revealed to have been the work of Tat'yana Zaslavskaya.[4]

Among the ideas proposed by Zaslavskaya and other reformers were the devolution of economic decision-making to local leaders and enterprise managements, the removal of arbitrary Party rule and the establishment of a "law-governed state", and generally a greater stress on "the human factor", in other words, on encouraging open discussion in order to allow people to use their initiative rather than simply obeying directives from the top. In essence these ideas were similar to those expressed by the more reformist dissidents such as Sakharov, although they were couched in more cautious language. At the time, in the Soviet context they seemed very radical, but now they have become part of the stock ideas of perestroika.[5]

After 1985, with Gorbachev in power, the reformist academics were brought closer to the centre of power as policy advisors to Gorbachev and other leading Party figures. Some took an active part

in drafting new legislation and joined in debates behind the scenes.[6] Then, as the policy of glasnost' was implemented, and growing numbers of political prisoners were released, the voices of former dissident reformers began to be heard in public debates and in the media. Symbolic of the changing nature of Soviet politics was the personal invitation of Gorbachev for Sakharov to return from his internal exile in Gorky. Sakharov and other dissidents contributed in turn to the ever quickening pace of reforms, adding their voices to those pressing for greater freedoms of speech and movement, and reforms of the electoral system to allow greater choice of candidates. It became increasingly noticeable that the views of the more liberal Party and government leaders differed little if at all, from those of many former dissidents and reformers.

In the long run therefore, it can be argued, both dissident and academic opinion groups active in the 1970s did have a profound effect on policy in that, eventually, their ideas were largely embodied in the government's reforms in the late 1980s. In a sense, this would seem to be a vindication of the interest group approach to the study of Soviet politics since its supporters always claimed such influence would be possible. On closer examination, however, the vindication is at best, conditional. Bearing in mind the objections discussed above, concerning the limitations on the scope of interest group activity and influence, it is necessary to ask what specific changes took place to remove the severe constraint experienced by reformist interests up to the mid-1980s. In other words, it is necessary to ask questions about changes in the deeper structure of power in Soviet society, 'behind the scenes' from the kind of activities revealed by the interest group

research.

An answer to such questions may be found, not simply by examining the relations between the Party elite and emerging interest groups, but by examining wider social and economic factors affecting the power of the elite, the extent of their cohesion, and the capacity of non-elite groups to mobilise around particular issues. As long as the top Party leadership had been relatively united in its consensus against the reformers, group pressure had little effect, except in a few exceptional cases where the top policy makers were undecided themselves. However, by the mid-1980s there had been a breakdown of the conditions supporting the atmosphere of consensus, and compromise based on inactivity in policy making which had typified the Brezhnev years. In the years since World War Two Soviet society had become more complex and differentiated as a result of increased industrialisation and urbanisation. The population had become more educated with higher expectations, and more sophisticated demands than in the past. Faced with such a situation, the centralised command economy became less and less able to cope. It proved increasingly difficult for a centralised bureaucracy either to administer a complex industrial economy, or to gather and assess information on an increasingly differentiated population.

The changing social context prompted two important political developments. First, a new generation of politicians were joining the elite and bringing new and more critical ideas with them [Brown, 1989]. Second, and at the same time, Soviet society was increasingly seen by its political leaders to be in crisis.[7] In such circumstances,

access to policy makers became increasingly open for outside pressure groups. Divisions in the leadership, and then outright sponsorship by the faction that was to be victorious assured unprecedented influence for reformist opinion.

THE EMERGENCE OF GROUP POLITICS UNDER GORBACHEV

Once in power, awareness of the severity of the crisis was heightened by such factors as the Chernobyl disaster, the worsening situation in the supply of consumer goods, and growing public criticism enabled by the policy of glasnost'. These developments created a new situation for the activities of pressure groups in Soviet politics. In response to each stage in the growth of the crisis, the Gorbachev leadership adopted more and more radical policy solutions. In each case, the inspiration for these can be found in ideas originally put forward by academics or activists from outside the Party leadership. At the same time reformists and other activists gradually found restrictions on their ability to express political ideas and to organise politically were being lifted.

During the years 1987 to 1989 a series of developments took place whose combined effect has been radically to change the terms on which politics is conducted in the Soviet Union. These included:

(i) the abolition of the office of censor and its replacement by self-censorship by editors;

(ii) the removal of restrictions on discussion groups and clubs operating entirely outside the Party or other approved public organisations - while most of these new "informal groups" had non-political aims, some were formed to pursue discussion, or

even grass-roots action in relation to social, political or ecological issues, and as a result, took on an increasingly political role;

(iii) a change in official attitudes to political meetings and demonstrations – it became possible to hire rooms in public buildings for meetings, and even to hold outdoor demonstrations without encountering arrest or police harrassment;

(iv) changes in the electoral system facilitating multi-candidate elections and the nomination of non-Communist candidates;

(v) increased official tolerance of unofficial strikes – whereas strikes had previously been broken up and the leaders arrested, now various groups of workers became able to use this weapon and actually pursue labour disputes with their management bosses.

As a result of these developments, a space was created for the emergence of legal, open organisation in the pursuit of particular social group interests or with the aim of pressuring government to make particular changes or allocations. The process took place in a number of stages.

Even before Gorbachev came to power some unofficial groups were formed, especially self-help groups of veterans of the war in Afghanistan, and groups of young people concerned with ecological issues. By the mid-1980s, a number of branches of "Pamyat'" (Memory) had been formed in cities around the country. This began as an organisation concerned with the preservation of Russian culture generally, including Russian literature, architecture, and the countryside. Over time however, it has become a more overtly nationalist and anti-semitic organisation, given to disrupting the meetings of its opponents, and attempting to explain the ills of Russia

as the result of a Bolshevik-Zionist conspiracy.

During 1986 and 1987, as the restrictions were eased on groups forming without official registration, many other groups were formed. They included specific local campaigns to defend or preserve historical buildings, various local voluntary groups offering support and advice to the elderly and the disabled, cultural and hobbies groups, and political discussion groups. Many had a short life span, an overlapping membership, and little formal organisation. However, others survived and grew, became more organised, and sometimes affiliated with like-minded groups around the country. For example in the field of environmental and architectural concerns, a number of groups have affiliated to form an organisation known as "Epitsentr" (Epicentre) which publishes its own journal, "Merkurii" from its base in Leningrad. In the social welfare field, the "Miloserdie" (Charity) organisation has branches in several cities, offering help to disabled and elderly people living on their own, and putting those in need of help in touch with volunteer helpers [White A., 1989:28-9].

The political discussion groups have experienced a similar pattern of development. Various socialist clubs, independent from and critical of the Communist Party, were formed from 1986 onwards, including the "Perestroika" Club, and the KSI [Club of Social Initiatives in Moscow]. On the initiative of the KSI a nationwide conference of left clubs was held in August 1987, and out of it, emerged a new umbrella organisation, the Federation of Socialist Clubs [Severukhin 1987]. Members of more liberal and pro-market clubs met later, in May 1988, to form the Democratic Union [Brovkin, 1990:242-4]. While both organisations are critical of the Communist Party, and both

supported the introduction of a market economy, free elections, a multi-party system, and the abolition of the special position of the Communist Party in the constitution, they also had significant differences.

On the one hand, the Conference of Socialist Clubs favoured the retention of some state intervention in the economy, and the introduction of special safeguards to protect the social welfare of vulnerable groups in the transition to a market economy. Ideologically they drew their inspiration from the more democratic socialist traditions which had been suppressed in the Soviet Union after the revolution. Tactically, they saw some possibility of cooperating with the reformist wing of the Communist Party, and to this end, took part in various Popular Front organisations set up during 1988 in a number of Russian cities. These comprised members of socialist clubs, reformist Communists, and members of some other organisations, including ones with primarily environmental concerns. There was even an attempt, which failed, to set up an all-Russian Popular Front. The various local Fronts were particularly active in nominating the supporting reformist candidates in elections for the Congress of Peoples' Deputies in early 1989. The Moscow Popular Front played a large part in Boris Yeltsin's successful campaign as well as in support of several less well known candidates around the country [Kagarlitsky, 1990].

The Democratic Union, on the other hand, was always more entrenched in its opposition to the Communist Party, and could see no hope of cooperation with it. Ideologically, they are opposed to

socialism and favour the full introduction of a capitalist market economy along with a pluralist political system. They trace the problems of Soviet society back to the "October coup" of the Bolsheviks rather than to any degeneration after the revolution. Some groups within the Democratic Union favour the re-establishment of the old Kadet (Constitutional Democratic) Party which was suppressed after the revolution. Tactically, they have tended to remain aloof from attempts to set up Popular Fronts although they have sent delegates to conferences aimed at discussing such front organisations.

Outside the Russian Republic the situation was further complicated by the national independence question. At a different pace in each republic first national identity, and then national independence have become major political issues which the reforms have brought to a new prominence. Indeed, such concerns have been so strong that, although the same diversity of groups has emerged in many of the Soviet republics, the national question has served to overcome divisions and create a more united opposition movement sooner than was possible in Russia. Thus, although the various local Russian Popular Front organisations failed to produce a republican level organisation, in the Baltic republics, Moldavia, Azerbaidjan and elsewhere, such a development was achieved.

The 1989 elections for the Congress of Peoples' Deputies and the 1990 elections for republic parliaments and city councils had a number of different effects on the unofficial political groups. First they provided a stimulus for the groups to organise and work together, to project their ideas to the general public in an unprecedented way.

Despite all sorts of official constraints, opposition speakers did appear on television, their speeches were reported to some extent in the press, and, perhaps most important, the dirty tricks and obstacles created by Party officials won much sympathy for opposition candidates. Second the prestige of the Communist Party was badly dented and their political programme was found wanting.

Third, in several of the Soviet republics popular front organisations won large majorities, fuelling nationalist sentiments among the local populations, and bringing about significant realignments in the group structures of republic level politics. In the context of perestroika reforms aimed at devolving some decision-making away from the centre, and requiring local governments and enterprises to balance their own accounts, many local republic Communist party leaderships have responded to the growing popularity of the popular fronts by breaking into factions, some of which have then formed new alliances with popular front groups. As a result of the 1990 elections, popular front governments have come to power, and in varying degrees declared their independence from Moscow, not only in the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics, but even in Russia itself with the election of Yeltsin to the presidency of Russia, and popular front candidates to head Moscow and Leningrad city councils.

Apart from the above-mentioned political groups, the growing crisis in Soviet society has also prompted the emergence of independent trades unions. No longer content to be represented by the incorporated official unions, Soviet workers increasingly resorted to the weapon of the unofficial strike, culminating in the miners'

strikes during the summer of 1989. During the strikes, not only mines, but in some cases, whole mining towns were taken over and efficiently run by strike committees. After the end of the strikes, some committees stayed in existence to monitor the implementation of the strike agreements and formed the basis for local unofficial unions such as the Union of Kuzbass Workers. Separate unions have also emerged in other industries, and even within the army [Galeotti 1990]. Several independent union branches have affiliated to new independent federations of unions, the largest of which, with a claimed membership of 60,000 is "Sotsprof" (Federation of Socialist Trades Unions). Other smaller organisations have also been formed however, including two in Leningrad [Filzer, 1990].

The account provided above is by no means exhaustive and many other significant unofficial pressure groups have emerged in the Soviet Union in recent years. While the political groups such as the Democratic Union or the various socialist groups are best categorised as pressure groups, seeking to influence policy and change the structure of power in accordance with the attitudes and ideology of their membership, other groups, such as Miloserdie or the unofficial trades unions represent more specifically the interests of their members as a distinct section of society, and are best seen as sectional or interest groups. In all, the numbers of unofficial groups have grown dramatically in the last few years so that by early 1989 it was estimated that there were over 60,000 [*Pravda* 10:2:1989]. Most accounts suggest their membership is mainly young, with the majority in the twenty-five to thirty-five age group, and, with the exception of the trades unions, and possibly the Afghan veterans' groups, mainly

drawn from professional and intelligentsia groups.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW GROUPS

In the absence of any detailed research so far on the political influence or role in policy-making of any of the new groups, it is difficult to judge how great their political impact has been. However, there are grounds for thinking the influence of at least some groups has been considerable. Among the most influential have been the groups associated with the popular fronts in the Baltic republics. For example, ideas that have now passed into law at republic level, concerning republican language rights, and economic autonomy, originated as proposals from the popular fronts. Indeed, since the popular fronts, such as "Sajudis" in Lithuania, rapidly made the transition from pressure group, to de facto opposition party, to governing party, they would seem to have been spectacularly successful. At the level of the Soviet Union as a whole, a case can also be made that the influence of opposition political groups has been strong. Most of the increasingly radical reforms introduced by the Party leadership under Gorbachev, including the growth of the private sector of the economy, the reforms of the legislatures and electoral law, and the abolition of the Party's constitutional right to a "leading role" in society all began as proposals from groups outside official Party or government circles, whether among reformist academic specialists, or among unofficial political groups (Tolz, 1989:4-5).

Superficially, it would seem that whatever judgement is made of the findings of the earlier academic debate on Soviet 'interest groups', the current situation is one where such groups have a very strong

influence. It is to be hoped that the recent explosion of what is undoubtedly pressure group activity in the Soviet Union attracts extensive and detailed research. It would be desirable if some of it were of a comparative nature since, much more than in the 1960s and 1970s, there is now clearly something to compare with pressure group politics in the West even if the political systems are still different in significant ways. It would seem very likely that any such research would provide valuable details on the processes of politics and policy making to the benefit both of the study of Soviet politics and comparative politics.

However, as suggested above in relation to the earlier debate, group influence only occurs because the prevailing conditions enable it to do so to some extent or other. There is a danger that if current developments are examined solely in the conceptual framework of the earlier interest group debate, too many important questions about the nature of Soviet politics will remain unanswered. Research which is confined to examining the influence of pressure groups on political outcomes is likely to ignore the power that sets agendas in the first place, or the power that influences ideological assumptions so that some options are not even considered feasible. It is important that as well as drawing on the earlier Soviet interest group research for insights into how to study current developments, lessons are also learned about the shortcomings of that research.

As suggested above, in the account of the development of new political groups in the Soviet Union, their emergence has taken place in the wider context of a growing economic and social crisis in Soviet

society. Not only have previous constraints on political activity been removed, but the grievances and claims of many different sections of the population have become more pressing. A useful starting point therefore, for renewed research on Soviet pressure group politics, would seem to be an investigation of the relation between the crisis of Soviet society and the emergence of pressure group politics. This would entail questions about changes in the distribution of power in Soviet society, and changes in its class, ethnic, and social group structures. An improved understanding of such inter-relations would help on the one hand, to explain how the existing political system "opened up" to allow the emergence of pressure groups, and on the other hand, to analyse the competing sources of social power which will constrain and shape the scope and character of pressure politics as it continues to develop.

FOOTNOTES

1. Azrael argued that it was justified to treat them "as a political group rather than as an aggregate of discrete political actors". This was because managers were conscious of shared interests, and furthermore, could occasionally be seen to act in a concerted political fashion, for example in opposition to Khrushchev's reorganisation of industrial ministries in the 1950s [1966:8]. On the other hand, managers never developed as an organised faction in Soviet industrial policy making, largely because they were pulled in different directions by loyalties to the Party and to their separate ministries. This latter point was further accentuated in a later study by Andrle who examined how both formal and informal ties with Party, governmental and trade union officials both gave managers scope to exercise some power and, at the same time, created limitations on the coherence of a managerial interest in Soviet politics [1976:141].

2. Friedgut identified two occupational groups in particular, collective farm chairmen, and the skilled drivers and mechanics employed by the machine tractor stations. While noting that there were significant constraints on group influence from the nature of the political system, and a number of issues on which the groups were internally divided, Friedgut nevertheless noted that both groups shared elements of common interests and consciousness, and some ability to articulate their interests, for example through official channels, journal articles, and conferences.

3. Lowenhardt used the criteria for identifying groups suggested by Lodge [1969], which, in turn, were similar to those suggested by Skilling, i.e. that group members had self-consciousness of themselves as a group, that they were recognised as a group by others, and that they shared values and beliefs.

4. After excerpts had appeared in the western press, a full translation appeared in *Survey*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1984.

5. A number of works by the reformist academics have now been translated into English. See, for example, Zaslavskaya [1989], Aganbegyan [1988], Yanowitch (ed.) [1989].

6. For example, a number of academics, especially lawyers and economists, were consulted in the drafting of legislation aimed at a growth in private sector economic activity. See Cox [1989].

7. Gorbachev's justification for adopting 'perestroika' was precisely the economic and social crisis that he saw approaching if the system were maintained in its existing form. He provides an outline of his reasoning in his book *Perestroika*, chapter 1 [Gorbachev, 1988].

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