

## 1985 ALCOHOL REFORM IN THE USSR

THE 1985 ALCOHOL REFORM IN THE USSR:  
A CASE OF REJECTED MORAL REFORM

By

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## A B S T R A C T

The dissertation is a study of the 1985 alcohol policy reform in the Soviet Union. The task is to explain the making and failure of the policy, and to examine the policy as a case in rule creation in society. More specifically, I analyze the policy-making in terms of symbolic politics, moral entrepreneurship, and the prohibitive measures it led to as a reaction to alcohol abuse. Each of these concepts offers a partial explanation of rule creation. Yet, none adequately explains the policy repeal, much less the creation of informal social definitions of right and wrong. Similar to alcohol prohibitions in the USA, Finland and Canada, the Soviet alcohol reform effort attempted but ultimately did not succeed in changing the social definition of alcohol and drinking. This is in contrast to cannabis, opium and cocaine prohibitions that aimed to preserve existing definitions and have been largely successful around the world. The relationship between formal and informal definitions is addressed as a key element in any understanding of variations in the fate of moral reforms. From this standpoint, the post-reform period comes to be viewed as a distinct stage wherein the viability of a proposed definition is tested. Presently dominant approaches to the definitional process appear to limit their own potential in that they refuse to reconsider assumptions that can be shown erroneous, do not differentiate between dissimilar processes and settings, do not ask more pointed research questions and do not stimulate empirically grounded and verifiable explanations. To redress these limitations, I offer a critical reexamination of both the moral entrepreneur and claims-making approaches to social definition-making.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CC - Central Committee

CPSU - the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

FBN - the US Federal Bureau of Narcotics

Goskomcen - the (USSR) State Committee of Prices

Goskomstat - the (USSR) State Committee of Statistics

Gosplan - the (USSR) State Planning Committee

LCBO - the Liquor Control Board of Ontario

NIAAA - the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

MTA - the 1937 US Marijuana Tax Act

SNK - the Soviet of People's Komissars

SOS - the Society of Sobriety (informal name for the All-Union Voluntary Society for the Struggle for Sobriety)

## GLOSSARY

Apparat - the Party apparatus

Apparatchik - professional Party functionary

Braga - low alcohol content home-made drink (water, yeast, sugar); a traditional Russian drink

Braga-for-samogon- half-way processed braga used since the late 1910s as raw material for moonshining (see samogon)

Gensek - the Secretary-General of the CC CPSU

Kabak - the Russian drinking house

Kvas (kvass) - authentic Russian drink (water, rye, sugar), non-alcoholic in modern times

Narkotik - addictive drug

Nomenklatura - "list of names" of those in charge of Party, Soviet, industrial, military, trade-union and other organizations; the Soviet ruling class

Otkup - the farming-out of a trade in a territory to the highest bidder, e.g. the farming-out of vodka trade

Samogon - Russian moonshine

Sivukha (colloq.) - alcohol rich in poisonous fusel oils (e.g. samogon); substandard liquor

Spaivanie - enticement of people to drinking

Spirit - a near-pure ethanol; usually, stolen industrial ethanol

Trezvost - sobriety; sometimes, temperance

Trezvennik - abstainer; prohibitionist

Vino - wine; sometimes, alcohol

## INTRODUCTION

### The Subject

The subject of research for this thesis will be the alcohol reform that commenced in the Soviet Union in May 1985<sup>1</sup>. It drew much public attention both in that country and outside. The reform, however, does not appear to have been widely addressed or investigated in detail by social scientists, even less so by sociologists. The only exception, speaking of social sciences, is the book by Stephen White, a political scientist, published in 1996<sup>2</sup>. The author himself describes his study as follows:

...I have sought to examine the campaign from its origins, considering the social issues it sought to address, the manner in which it was devised, the success it appeared initially to enjoy, and the disappointment and recrimination that accompanied its demise in the late 1980s. A final chapter considers the legacy of the campaign, and goes on to relate it to a wider literature on Soviet campaigns and to 'implementation studies' and the policy process more generally<sup>3</sup>.

In the same book we find, I think, the best succinct description of the reform:

...the campaign to reduce or even eliminate alcohol abuse..., one of the most determined that has ever been seen, comparable with Prohibition in the USA and Finland in the 1920s; it was promoted by a government that had an unusually wide range of powers, with little to fear from the press, or the courts, or the ballot box; and it was promoted with more consistency than had been usual for Soviet campaigns<sup>4</sup>.

...The policy was ambiguous. Did it... mean total abstention, or simply an undertaking to reduce consumption...?<sup>5</sup>

The main emphasis... was in practice upon purely administrative methods<sup>6</sup>.

There could be no legitimate opposition..., and the authorities could ensure compliance by their use of the army and police. They controlled the mass media and law courts, and... they were in practice the only employer, placing all the working population in a position of direct material dependence<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a depiction of the reform in its major aspects, see Chapter 2 of this thesis. An Economist (23 December 1989) article, in the genre of analytical journalism, can serve as a good introduction reading. The Current Digest of the Soviet Press has done an excellent job presenting pertinent official documents, public statements, major events and pieces of debate.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephen White, Russia Goes Dry: Alcohol, state and society, Cambridge U., 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. p.XII.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. p.XII.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. p.182.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. p.186.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. p.177-178.



The focus of White's analysis is on how the campaign was meant to work and how and why it, in the end, did not work. The key statement by the author about his study, in my view, is this: "The study of policy implementation helps us to explain the persistent failure of central government to achieve its objectives in late Soviet Russia...". In a non-sociological study, naturally, he does not seek to explore the relevance of sociological theories to his subject matter.

One noticeable publication, which does approach the 1985 reform from a sociological standpoint, is an article written by Juha Partanen at the time when the reform was in the middle of its life-course<sup>8</sup>. The author, at the time, characterized the Party's decision to combat alcoholism as a symbolic act of the then new Soviet leadership - symbolic in the sense that it was meant to demonstrate the moral superiority of the new leadership over the old<sup>9</sup>. The article parallels Joseph Gusfield's interpretation of Prohibition in the USA<sup>10</sup>.

The article by Partanen is, to my knowledge, the only publication which seeks to relate the 1985 reform to contemporary sociological theories. There are, however, two theoretically oriented publications by sociologists on broader issues of drinking or deviant behavior and its control in the USSR and Eastern Europe<sup>11</sup>. In papers that address other issues, the reform in question gets mentioned or briefly discussed in a sociological context<sup>12</sup>. Further, there have been a few other papers by either Western or Soviet authors published in the West, analytical or descriptive-and-analytical in nature though not sociologically theoretical, most of them in English<sup>13</sup>. In Russian, in the post-reform Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, a number of publications, including some rather detailed ones, have come to light where the anti-alcohol campaign and

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<sup>8</sup> Juha Partanen, "Serious drinking, serious alcohol policy: the case of the Soviet Union", Contemporary Drug Problems, Winter 1987, 14:507-538.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. p.511.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph R. Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade. Status politics and the American Temperance movement, Urbana, U. of Illinois, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> See Rouse & Unnithan 1993, and Shapiro 1978.

<sup>12</sup> H. Levine 1992 seems to me particularly provocative.

<sup>13</sup> They include Morawski 1986, Knabe 1986, Treml 1989 and 1991, Segal 1990, Levine & Levine 1990, M. Levine 1990a and 1992, Tarschys 1993, Ryan 1995.

policy options have been addressed<sup>14</sup>. However, with respect to the experience of the campaign, outside of demographic studies that aim to show a positive statistical correlation between the dynamics of consumption of alcohol and mortality<sup>15</sup>, these publications mostly analyze the campaign's failure as the result of irrational decision-making.

In the USSR, the matters that the alcohol reform was designed to resolve were subject of heated debate and vigorous, by Soviet standards, political campaigning<sup>16</sup>. It clearly was a much politicized debate rather than a theoretical analysis.

The principal questions that I seek to address in this thesis are these. First, what was the nature of the problem of alcoholism that Soviet society faced on the eve of the alcohol reform? This includes (a) a consideration of the specific pattern of alcohol use and abuse that historically evolved in Russia and did not radically change in the USSR; (b) the extent and major trends of alcohol consumption and its consequences in the period prior to the reform; and (c) the public perception of drinking and its excesses.

Second, how were drinking and alcohol abuse dealt with in the Soviet system? This includes a consideration of (a) the guiding principles of Soviet alcohol policies; (b) the practical ways of containing drinking; and (c) an examination of what made alcohol abuse by the population a problem for Soviet leadership.

Third, how was the alcohol problem approached and processed in the Soviet system of political decision-making?

The general questions of why that reform occurred and why it was so extreme have been addressed

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<sup>14</sup> The more noticeable of them include Zaigraev 1986 and 1992, Nemtsov 1995, Sheverdin 1985, Antonov-Romanovsky 1986, Levine & Levine 1988 and 1989, Ugllov 1986a, 1986b, 1987 and 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir M. Shkol'nikov appears to be the primary author on that. The publication that caught attention in Russia and abroad was brought out by *Izvestia*, one of the most read and respectable Russia's newspapers - see Nemtsov & Shkol'nikov 1994. Other publications include Shkol'nikov & Nemtsov 1997, Leon et al. 1997, Ryan 1995, Mesle & Shkol'nikov 1995. See Trembl 1989 and 1991 for a critical response to the argument that the close statistical correlation between alcohol consumption and mortality reflects a cause and effect relationship.

<sup>16</sup> The debate and writings that were part of it are discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

many times in the Russian and foreign press. However, these questions have not been addressed in any thorough way by sociologists. Had this sort of alcohol reform taken place in the contemporary United States, sociologists examining it would, no doubt, have made reference to Gusfield's analysis of US Prohibition from 1920 to 1933. To what extent, however, is the theoretical perspective which draws on Gusfield's explanation of American Prohibition relevant to an explanation of Soviet alcohol reform? One has to take into account that, along at least three dimensions, the American and Soviet cases drastically differ. These dimensions are: historical time, cultural space, and social order. The latter certainly includes the differences in political and economic systems<sup>17</sup> between the United States and the Soviet Union, and, in particular, the complete control, in the Soviet Union, among other things, of the media, public initiatives, policy- and law-making by the Party. The central fact which has to be taken into account here is that the USSR was a country innocent of democracy.

This thesis attempts, therefore, to combine the use of theories and research methods that have been developed primarily in the USA with the inside knowledge of Soviet reality as it relates to alcohol problems and policies. This is one of the most difficult aspects of this study. The task, as I see it, is to use American theories to analyze Soviet reality without carelessly treating either but with an understanding that reality has supremacy.

#### Methods and Data

In this thesis, a variety of methods are used, according to the research task at hand. Using secondary analyses, particular questions are investigated and arguments are advanced about the topics under study. To depict the alcohol reform, its goals, design and materialization, I use the corresponding official government documents, the Soviet press of the time, testimonies published later in memoir-type accounts by certain decision-makers, including Gorbachev, and other related materials. The analysis of the Soviet crusade for sobriety, for the most part, utilizes the writings of prohibitionists published in the Soviet Union, as well as some

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<sup>17</sup> Alford & Friedland 1985 name "three fundamental dimensions of society: cultural, political, and economic" (p.25). These, therefore, are identical to the dimensions I consider, with the only addition of the time dimension which is not important for their analysis but is for mine.

unpublished materials and materials published abroad; this is an analysis of claims-making activities, not different in essence or techniques from those employed by North American authors. I also draw on my own observations made as a Soviet citizen, consumer and participant in the events under review.

Reading the Soviet language of the time, especially in politically and ideologically sensitive areas, is an art in its own right; it requires special interpretation. The essence of that language has been best presented, in my view, by George Orwell in his dystopian work 1984. His "Newspeak" is an easily recognizable English equivalent of the Soviet Russian:

In the year 1984 there was not as yet anyone who used Newspeak as his sole means of communication.... The leading articles in the Times were written in it, but this was a tour de force which could only be carried out by a specialist. ...

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible.

...

Some of the B words had highly subtilized meanings, barely intelligible to anyone who had not mastered the language as a whole. Consider, for example, such a typical sentence from a Times leading article as Oldthinkers unbellyfeel Ingsoc. The shortest rendering that one could make of this in Oldspeak would be: "Those whose ideas were formed before the Revolution cannot have a full emotional understanding of the principles of English Socialism". But this is not an adequate translation<sup>18</sup>.

The analysis undertaken in the present thesis focuses on what now is history. Several chapters are based heavily on the study of historical materials, a considerable part of these dating back to pre-Soviet times<sup>19</sup>. As Gusfield remarks, "The sociologist picks up where the historian closes"<sup>20</sup>. These historical sources are used to trace the origin and development of major aspects of drinking behavior and the approaches used to deal with the drinking problem in Russian and Soviet society. Among other things, I sought to discover the origins of the Bolsheviks' approach to the alcohol question, starting from some of Engels' early musings.

Statistical analysis and estimates of the pre-reform dynamics of the alcohol situation in the USSR are

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<sup>18</sup> George Orwell [1949], 1984, NY, New American Library, 1989, p.246, 250.

<sup>19</sup> See Snow 1988 and 1992 on the progress in historical research on Russian and Soviet drinking. A major advance past 1992 was the David Christian paper on Russian/Soviet prohibition, 1914-1925 (see Christian 1995). When this thesis was already presented for the defense, I learned about the excellent work by W. Arthur McKee (1997); I wish it happened earlier, for my work would have definitely benefit from it.

<sup>20</sup> Gusfield 1963 p.2.

my own, or draw in part on publications by other authors, in particular, Vladimir Treml.

The use of official statistics, however, requires a brief comment. Making sense of any Soviet sources of data, whether official statements, articles or factual reports, requires insight and special skills. Deciphering Soviet official statistics is a particularly tedious task. There are specific problems with official Soviet statistics that can result in extreme misrepresentations. The latter are not limited to the alcohol field. Rather, this special field exemplifies the tendencies that were common for all Soviet statistical practice. Gorbachev remarks that he had not realized the scale of those distortions until he became Secretary-General<sup>21</sup>. If that is so, what could be said about the ordinary Soviet citizen? In Gorbachev's testimony,

Virtually all the statistics were tightly censored. Data on the economy, social issues, culture, demography were published invariably only after a special resolution of the Central Committee, with big omissions and 'clean-ups'.... Not only the military budget but also the state budget in its real dimensions was a secret.... Hardly anybody knew that the pace of growth of the expenditure on defense was for many years 50 to 100% higher than the planned and actual national income growth<sup>22</sup>.

One specific problem arises from the fact that some of the data were not published, at other times, were published but untrue, and still other times, published and true; the unpublished data too, however, could be grossly inaccurate. One had to somehow figure out which was which. Some twists of Soviet statistics were so bizarre that one could really believe they came from Orwell's world:

Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie. Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version. ... All one knew was that every quarter astronomical numbers of boots were produced on paper, while perhaps half the population... went barefoot. And so it was with every class of recorded fact, great or small<sup>23</sup>.

...

Day and night the telescreens bruised your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations - that they lived longer, worked shorter hours, were bigger, healthier, stronger, happier.... Not a word of it could ever be proved or disproved<sup>24</sup>.

Gorbachev takes examples from the military sphere:

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<sup>21</sup> Gorbachev 1995, book 1, p.334.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. p.319.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. p.37.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. p.64.

...The military spending amounted not to 16 but 40 per cent of the state budget; the output of the military and industrial complex was not 6 but 20% of the gross national product. Out of 25 billion for science, close to 20 billion was channeled to the military technology research<sup>25</sup>.

Similarly, to take an example from the field of drinking, one of the most important indicators, expenditure on alcohol in the family budget, was regularly given by the official statistical yearbook at a level several times lower than the actual ratio<sup>26</sup>. Even as late as 1991, the last year of the existence of the USSR, when the Party had already lost its power and the policy of conscious abuse of the system of statistics was no longer maintained, the Goskomstat of the USSR still published a laughable statistic of 3.3% as the 1990 ratio of the average family (with the exclusion of a certain portion of rural population where it was just slightly different) expenditure on alcoholic beverages<sup>27</sup>. The methodology of obtaining this ratio was so designed that, indeed, it could not yield credible estimates. Specifically, the statistical agency had a panel of families who answered questions about their budgets. Among other blunders, the wives were the respondents - that is, the member of the family likely to be least informed on the subject of alcohol expenditure. Even more importantly, the sample was totally non-representative (misrepresentative, one could say) of the population because it was a panel of those selected over the years who were the easiest to find, talk to and get answers from, that is, those who were the least likely to spend much on alcohol<sup>28</sup>.

Tremel, who may know more than anyone else about the difficult business of recalculations on the basis of incomplete and often deceiving Soviet data, states that

any description and analysis of the alcohol problem in the USSR is greatly handicapped by the absence of comprehensive and reliable data. ... [Even in 1990/91] the Soviet public and Western analysts are still very

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<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. p.334.

<sup>26</sup> See Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v ... g. For details, see Chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> Vestnik statistiki, 1991, no.9, p.64.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Room has pointed out to me that this is actually not so different from how "household budget" studies are traditionally done elsewhere, and these methods result in much underreporting elsewhere, too. He also mentions a sociologically telling fact that the economists using these data talk of a puritan factor in the alcohol and tobacco data from these studies. The actual difference, therefore, is that in the Soviet Union these family budget data on alcohol expenditure were the only data available while in the West, unlike the USSR, the amounts of sales of alcoholic beverages, as well as the sum total of incomes, are regularly published.

much in the dark concerning most basic data on drinking...<sup>29</sup>.

Distortions produced by official Soviet statistics arise in a number of ways. First, self-manufactured alcohol appears to be far more common in the Russian and Soviet experience than elsewhere. Most of it is illegal and almost none of it was represented in Soviet official statistics. In Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, most of the self-produced alcohol is a specific brand of moonshine, in Russian samogon, a low-tech version of vodka. In other republics, much of the self-supply is either samogon or other spirits, some of them considerably stronger than regular vodka, e.g. for chacha, a 60 to 70% alcohol content is normal. Samogon, too, is usually stronger than regular 40 percent vodka; it often contains about 50% alcohol, or close to that. Some home wine-making was allowed, under specific but not particularly liberal conditions. Almost all home wine-making was limited to the traditional wine-making republics of Georgia, Armenia and Moldavia. However, most of this is believed to never have been included in the official statistics on alcohol production and consumption.

Another underground brand of alcohol in use and not represented in the official statistics on alcohol consumption was the ethanol produced for technical needs in industry and science. Only a minute part of it is believed to have been utilized in the way it was meant to be.

It has never been possible to compute the precise ratio of these self-produced products to overall alcohol consumption. Further, this ratio has varied considerably over time. However, it is safe to claim that, during the post-war time, this ratio has been comparable to, and was at times greater than, the intake of vodka.

Second, statistics on sales of hard liquor in a number of countries outside the borders of the former Soviet Union may falsely produce an impression that those countries have alcohol consumption patterns similar to Russia's. In fact, in Western countries, what is purchased/sold as whisky or gin, or even vodka, will be, to a considerable extent, consumed as whisky with soda, gin with tonic, vodka with orange juice, or in other combinations, while in Russia vodka is drunk undiluted as a rule, and in cocktails only as an exception.

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<sup>29</sup> Treml 1991 p.119-120.

Coupled with the tradition to drink with the purpose of getting drunk, this leads to excessive consumption of vodka with a resulting level of intoxication not normally seen in North America and most of Western Europe.

The consequences of the vodka drinking is not, of course, merely a matter of mixing or not mixing cocktails but that of drinking safely or overdrinking. Cognac is not a less potent drink than vodka but normally it is not drunk the way vodka is, and this is why cognac is associated with safe drinking. On the other hand, wine or beer can be and in certain instances are consumed in a manner which leads to extreme intoxication. Vodka in itself also does not necessarily make one drink to excess. The point is the traditional way of vodka consumption - rather than vodka *per se* - makes excesses considerably more likely.

Third, the ratio of vodka in overall alcohol consumption in the USSR and Russia has fluctuated on the official scale around the 50% mark of all consumption of absolute alcohol for decades. This statistic fails to represent the real proportion of the beverages associated with the pattern of drinking which leads to heavy intoxication. These beverages include vodka, vodka-based beverages, samogon, industrial ethanol and, not to be overlooked in the Soviet case, cheap strong wine, fortified with up to 20% alcohol content. This so-called "fruit-and-berry" fortified wine has a reputation for being "the beverage of the alcoholics", and, indeed, it is chiefly consumed for the direct and often sole purpose of getting drunk - more so than is vodka proper.

Fourth, the distribution of alcohol consumption in the USSR and Russia has been extremely uneven, with some large groups drinking much and others drinking little or nothing. The per capita consumption and other major indicators are particularly confusing. For example, there were in the USSR many millions of people of the Muslim culture opposed to alcohol use.

It is important to note that my research is also partially based on participant observation. Perhaps, "observational participation" may be a more precise name for it in English<sup>30</sup>. At the time of the reform, I was among several Soviet authors who wrote on the subject on a regular basis. Of course, I did not partake in that exchange of claims-making for the purpose of gathering notes for my future dissertation; rather, I lived it. This

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<sup>30</sup> I am borrowing here the term - in the original, *nabludaushchee uchastie* - introduced by the Leningrad sociologist Andrei Alekseev.



"modification" of the role of the observer, in my view and experience, has consequences but they are not grave; it does not alter the essence of what participation does for the researcher. As a participant in the debate, I believe I bring a first-hand insider knowledge of the situation to the analysis. This knowledge is further reinforced by the experience of my father, Boris M. Levin(e), who has been involved in alcohol research for more than three decades and an active participant in the debate on alcohol policies. On one occasion, the leading Western expert in Soviet alcohol use locates us among "the group of prominent Soviet sociologists and legal and medical specialists in alcoholism who rejected total abstinence and called for 'civilized drinking', such as Boris and Mikhail Levin, G.Zaigraev, E.Babayan, and Yu.Lisitsyn"<sup>31</sup>.

From 1980 to 1988, I worked in a "central" (i.e. all-Union) journal, where I was in charge of its "Science & Society" section. Hence, I had rare access to much of the political, social and economic information unavailable otherwise, and the opportunity to observe the workings of official propaganda. Further, it put me, even though quite marginally, in a position to observe the social psychology of the people who were close, or aspired to get close, to power. Working there helped to put the above mentioned inside knowledge of the alcohol situation into a broader perspective, and added to the ability to decipher political realities, the Party parlance and ways of dealing with social problems.

In many cases, what I know from personal experience can now be confirmed by published materials; I make use of these wherever possible. In other instances, however, there are no documents, or they are not available. On those occasions, I use my memory as the sole available source of information.

One last relevant fact from my Soviet past that is that I was not a detached, non-partisan observer. I fought for some ideas against others. I seized every opportunity to push my agenda, whether related to drinking or not; I used the journal where I worked as a medium for publicizing my personal views as best I could. On the question "To drink or not to drink?", the polemics then oftentimes got heated and personal, escalating to yelling, stopping just short of a fistfight. I was among the main targets of the prohibitionists attacks that ranged

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<sup>31</sup> Treml 1991 p.130.

from routine criticism in the pro-sobriety press and gatherings, to attempts to open a criminal case (on the grounds of luring youths into drinking), to accusations of being part of the world-wide Zionist conspiracy, to reporting to the authorities about my alleged role as a saboteur on the imperialist payroll, to threatening letters and phone calls. All of this did not help my impartiality then and, I realize, may affect my present analysis. There are two known ways to counter this potential bias: a) to be aware of one's own limitations, and b) to tell the reader about them.

#### Overview

The dissertation is structured in the following way. The theoretical assumptions that guided this work are presented in Chapter 1. This is taken up further in the concluding part of the thesis, where I suggest theoretical revisions (with regard to both Soviet-type and pluralist societies) that follow from and are supported by the substantive analysis in Chapters 2 through 9. The focus is on the question first introduced to sociology by Howard Becker in *Outsiders*: How does society create deviance? Or: How are rules made or changed? In these pages, considerable attention is devoted to the aspect of this question not previously addressed by sociologists in detail: Why do some new rules stand while others are rejected?

As in any empirical sociological investigation, it is essential to present the factual aspects of the story. In Chapter 2, I describe the 1985 anti-alcohol reform in the USSR in terms of policy formation and its actual materialization. This provides empirical grounds for my interpretation of the reform as an attempt to re-define the status of alcohol in Soviet society, that is, as an effort to promote a definition of drinking as deviant, though not illegal, behavior.

Political decision-making involved, in my view, the following major dimensions. It had to deal with an old and powerful tradition of drinking which, for centuries, had been a sensitive part of life, state finance and politics in Russia and the USSR. The problem-causing aspects of drinking are universal, but they are considerably modified by drinking patterns and societal reactions in a particular culture. On the other hand, one must not overlook the fact that many other aspects of social life in Russia were drastically altered by the October Revolution, Marxist thinking and the actual social order created by the Bolsheviks. In Chapters 3

and 4, I consider how the unique Russian tradition of drinking evolved and was later interpreted in a specifically Soviet fashion.

In Chapter 5, I present the most important facts in the dynamics of the alcohol situation in the Soviet Union, between the 1950s and mid-'80s, with broad international comparisons. The emphasis is on the situation on the eve of the 1985 reform as well as the peculiarity of the 1980-84 dynamics and its reflection in official statistics.

The last relevant dimension is what some "concerned citizens", on the one hand, and the ultimate decision-makers, on the other, made of the above mentioned dynamics. In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I examine the Russian and Soviet sobriety movements, with a focus on the crusade for prohibition which started to gather momentum in the late 1970s.

The making of the policy reform decision in the Politburo is examined in Chapter 9. A number of revisions of the rule-making process follow from this analysis. The most immediate of them are presented in this chapter, the more complicated in the concluding part. There, I summarize my findings and discuss the theoretical implications.

A comment is in order with regard to the two theoretical pieces that conclude the dissertation - on the moral entrepreneur model and on the claims-making approach to social problems. Initially, both were divided between preliminary statements (in Chapter 1) that reflected my dissatisfaction with the current social definitional literature, and on the other hand, concluding remarks that presented generalizations from this study. Later on, however, both acquired a life and logic of their own. Both grew far larger and more critical than would be reasonable for a preliminary analysis, and a clear-cut distinction between preliminary and concluding components was in both cases lost. Now both do double service. I view them as the most valuable products of this study in terms of theory; at the same time they are necessary for preliminary analysis. Thus, I present them as conclusions and, on the other hand, I make references to them in Chapter 1 the way one makes reference to publications.

## CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

### General Considerations and Assumptions

In this chapter, my task is to place the 1985 alcohol reform in the USSR into a sociological framework. My analysis is guided largely by a tradition in sociology that is known as the interactionist approach to deviance and social problems.

In order to explain the case, the basic research question to address is simply this: Why and how did the reform occur? With respect to theory, first, there is the question: What are the theories, or aspects thereof, that can best explain the case? This question is followed with: How can the findings of this study help further advance our theory?

This is different from the approach which presupposes that the researcher first examines theories in order to establish some front-line questions or hypotheses which deserve further investigation. Ideally, this directs the choice of a case which helps to answer those questions. It is this logic: theory - the study - refined theory.

The approach used in this study can be called a modification of the field research, more narrowly, the participant observation rationale. Namely: go to the field (case) first, think what questions are to be investigated, think of theories that address those questions, find out where the theories are inadequate. Nothing precludes an employment of this strategy in a case study of a moral reform.

Either of these two ways of doing sociology has disadvantages but both are legitimate. The problem with the other approach is that it does not stimulate close attention to the case in its wholeness. Rather, it encourages more attention to some preselected dimensions. It does not necessarily address the question: How do we explain this case? This is the approach to avoid if we need a genuine, multi-dimensional empirical test for theories.

The problem with my approach is that it does not focus on the advancement of the given perspective.

Being recent or belonging to the perspective has no special value since it may or may not be relevant to the case; as a result, front-line questions may be left out. But there is an upside to it. This approach is likely to direct the researcher to important issues that for some reason or other have been overlooked in the literature. Indeed, the Soviet alcohol policy reform case helped me realize that some key points of the moral entrepreneur hypothesis - not discussed in the literature for two decades - have never been clarified. Likewise, my case indicates that the formulation of social problems in terms of claims-making activities needs to be revisited. An extra advantage of this approach is that it undermines theoretical commitments.

It is not quite accurate to claim that I use theories to explain the case. Theories are used only as a frame, useful not so much in the answers they offer as in the questions they pose. To explain why and how the reform occurred, I use methods, techniques, data and inside knowledge of both the case and the setting. I prefer to think that I test theories.

The most general assumptions I accept are as follows:

1. No one single theory or perspective explains "how the world works". Every perspective has some limitations. The analytical power of a perspective must be demonstrated in research; a speculation, no matter how thoroughly presented, that a certain weakness can be overcome within the perspective is not sufficient.

2. This thesis employs, foremost, what is known as an interactionist perspective. However, it is compatible, in my view, with structural considerations. In this sense, I do not view it as an alternative to the so-called objectivist sociology; rather, the two should complement each other.

3. Methodologically, the first ground rule is to bring to the field/research as little pre-judgement as possible. Facts (data) must always come first; if they are in conflict with theory, theory ought to give way. A pre-theoretical factual description is a necessary initial stage of research.

4. The research tasks of a case study, such as this one, are two-fold: to explain the case and to propose theoretical elaborations or revisions. Generalizations from a case study have given rise to new theoretical ideas or perspectives, such as Howard Becker's study of the case of the US Marijuana Tax Act passage in 1937<sup>1</sup> or

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<sup>1</sup> See Becker 1963.

Joseph Gusfield's study of the case of American Prohibition<sup>2</sup>. Generalizations from one case are inevitably hypothetical and should be treated as such.

My assumptions with regard to deviance and social problems are these:

1. The view taken here is primarily that of the interactionist approach.
2. Deviance and social problems are identified, actualized, dealt with, revised and deactualized through a process of social interaction between two or more parties negotiating about definitions and re-definitions of behavior or conditions with respect to a present moral order of society. This is often referred to as definitional process. This is a two-way dynamic interrelationship. Statements like "the deviant breaks rules", on the one hand, and "definitions are applied to certain acts", on the other, reflect the process and are both one-sided. The process is an exchange of actions, or actions and counter-actions, or reactions and counter-reactions - which are all different ways of expressing the same thing. The question "what comes first" belongs to the egg-and-chicken variety.
3. Social order and structure (of society or a group) greatly modify and pattern interaction. So too does the institutional order.
4. Culture is another major variable. Accepted ways of interaction and doing things affect every aspect of the definitional process: behavior, its perception, and mutual adjustment.
5. Historical time is not to be overlooked. Every epoch brings new elements to social life, including moral order. A society exists both in a world time and, simultaneously, in its own "national" time. The former tends to gain greater importance over time, while the latter tends to lose its rigidity.
6. By "Conscience" of society I mean the body of ideas and beliefs that govern or influence moral perception, which, in turn, affects, among other things, political decisions. This is a dependent variable from (3), (4) and (5). It is the current subjective condition of society, that is, the system of perceptions in which actual or potential innovations in the moral constitution are judged.

This study must be situated with respect to: a) the making of social definitions of right and wrong,

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<sup>2</sup> See Gusfield 1963.

in particular, the making of formal rules and state policies; b) substance use, particularly, the use of alcohol, and its control, particularly, by the means of prohibition; c) the late Soviet setting; and d) American sociological theories. The obvious task is to bring all four together.

#### The Definitional Approach to Deviance and Social Problems

"...The central fact about deviance: it is created by society"<sup>3</sup>. This statement opened a new dimension in the study of deviance, for it indicated a shift in focus away from the question why some people commit acts of deviance, to the question concerning how the lines between norms and deviance are drawn in society.

Fuller and Myers appear to be the first to address in earnest the issue of social problems in the spirit of social definitions and meaning production. They draw attention to the fact that social definitions, especially in the area they called "moral problems", may be problematic, reflecting the values of one group but not of another. As they stated,

Traditionally, sociologists have dealt with social problems as 'givens', rather than as phenomena to be demonstrated....Sociologists...have been content to take deviations for granted, without bothering to consult the definitions of conditions which laymen make<sup>4</sup>.

In another article, Fuller and Myers describe how a trailer camp in Detroit in the 1930s became a problem, was defined, handled and resolved as such in the process of interaction between two groups with conflicting values. One group is stronger than the other, which permits it to impose its definition on the other, i.e. to make its rules the rules for all. This places outsiders in a position of rule-breaking. The authors make a pivotal statement for the definitional approach:

Social problems are what people think they are and if conditions are not defined as social problems by the people involved in them, they are not problems to those people, although they may be problems to outsiders or to scientists...<sup>5</sup>.

Fuller and Myers also introduce the notion of natural history as a sequence of stages common to the development of social problems: awareness, policy formation, and reform.

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<sup>3</sup> Becker 1963 p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Richard C. Fuller and Richard Myers, "Some Aspects of a Theory of Social Problems", American Sociological Review, 6, Feb. 1941, p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Fuller & Myers, "The Natural History of a Social Problem", ASR, 6, June 1941, p.321. Everywhere in this work, emphasis and everything else in quoted passages strictly follow the original.

Becker's understanding of the definitional process, and the perspective's approach as a whole, emphasizes that rules for distinguishing between right and wrong are human-made and society-made. The question is: How do some kinds of conduct come to be so labeled? This is generally the same question one has to address when investigating the Soviet alcohol reform.

Becker's answer is that, first, rules are made by social groups according to their interests, where the power differential is key; and, second and foremost, this occurs in the process of moral enterprise that involves a number of parameters.

He argues that in the 1930s the Federal Bureau of Narcotics became the entrepreneur which undertook to make the ban on Indian hemp a federal law, even if in the shape of revenue regulation. The Bureau changed its approach drastically, from that of playing down the marijuana problem to that of pressing for "vigorous measures for the extinction of this lethal weed" (cited by Becker). However, no considerable change could be observed in weed smoking as such; that is, as Becker's account suggests, the country faced no actual problem with marijuana at the time.

In other words, the Bureau manufactured a social problem to help itself create a social definition which served its own interests. This is the key point in Becker's explanation of the outlawing of cannabis in the USA and of the definitional process in general. The moral entrepreneur model, by and large, remains the last word of the perspective with regard to the making of definitions of deviant behavior<sup>6</sup> (though not of social problems). The model is of very special importance to this study; a detailed reexamination and vast revisions of it are presented in the concluding part.

The book Symbolic Crusade by Joseph Gusfield interprets the temperance movement as a group's struggle for prestige and law-making as one mechanism for distribution of social prestige of status groups in American politics. He introduces his study of American Temperance as follows:

We see it as a reflection of clashes and conflicts between rival social systems, cultures and status groups.... Temperance has been both a protest against a changing status system and a mechanism for influencing the

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Pfuhl & Henry 1993, and Goode 1997.



distribution of prestige<sup>7</sup>.

In a later article, Gusfield (1967) argues that Prohibition was a case of symbolic rule-making as opposed to instrumental rule-making which is aimed at utilitarian gain<sup>8</sup>.

In the framework of Gusfield's status politics a new law comes from the drive to symbolically affirm a group's status. A large, influential status group develops a perception that the drinking of alcohol is inappropriate. Non-drinking becomes an accepted norm for this group and at the same time a symbol of either belonging to this group or a sincere effort to live one's life the right way. On the other hand, for the outsiders, and especially for a particular other large group hostile to the first one, drinking remains acceptable and, again, a symbol of belonging. A conflict develops over the "drinking vs. non-drinking" issue; the first group wins a legislative decision to prohibit alcohol and abstinence becomes the law of the land. The state is a legitimate authority, so its laws reinforce the legitimacy of the claims made by group A, strengthen its status and prestige in society which is now being told by its highest authority that this group's definition of the right must be accepted by everyone. Thus, the new law symbolizes moral superiority of one group over another, with prohibition being the net result for society.

Gusfield's model depicts an unusually neat configuration of historical circumstances, social and status structure, values and norms held by these particular groups at this particular time in this particular country. It allows for an unusually elegant theoretical explanation of Prohibition. Both the neatness and the explanation have been questioned by other researchers. American historians have argued that the actual configuration differed from Gusfield's rendition<sup>9</sup>. But even assuming that it is not historically flawed, Gusfield's explanation cannot be viewed as universal or, at least, applicable to a large variety of cases<sup>10</sup> for the obvious reason that

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<sup>7</sup> Gusfield 1963 p.11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Gusfield 1967 p.175-178.

<sup>9</sup> See, in particular, Clark 1976 and Blocker 1989. The former claims that temperance and Prohibition were largely accepted by the majority of both Protestants and Catholics, of both rural and urban populations, of both native and foreign-born. The latter insists that the 1928 US elections proved that Prohibition, after almost a full decade of experience with it, was still supported by a majority of the American people.

<sup>10</sup> Gusfield himself, of course, never claimed to have designed a model with an explanatory power for all alcohol control or the making of social definitions of deviance/social problems; for him, his work was

it is too time-specific and too country-specific. These circumstances cannot be repeated in a country which is not an immigrant one shaped by large groups divided by religious affiliation, ethnic background and seniority. More to the point, these circumstances are not going to be repeated in any foreseeable future even in America where the perception of drinking as a symbol of belonging to the old middle class has long gone.

It is not impossible to think of what can be called modified versions of this model. For example, the former USSR, even though not an immigrant country, was a country of great cultural and ethnic diversity. Specifically, it had a vast, multi-million population of Muslim origin where alcohol is not culturally accepted. Potentially, this sets stage for the conflict over drinking and non-drinking. In reality, however, there never was a hint of such a conflict in the Soviet Union; and given the nature of Soviet society, an attempt by the Muslims to push for an all-Union prohibition is a laughable proposition.

What is universal in Gusfield's model, in my view, is the notion that laws (policies, public political acts) have a symbolic dimension<sup>11</sup>.

There are implications shared by Fuller and Myers, Becker and Gusfield. In all three sources two important interrelated conclusions can be drawn: a) definitions of right and wrong are variable in that they depend on whose definitions they are, and b) powerful groups can impose their definitions on others and on society.

The first point is very abstract and universally true: definitions of deviance are variable, they vary from culture to culture, from country to country, from group to group, from epoch to epoch. What is not said but is implied is that the variability of definitions is, or may in some cases provide, an opportunity to work on them. This creates possibilities for moving the definitional process in different directions.

The second point is far more concrete: Different groups can fight for their definitions, i.e. definitions that either reflect their values or serve their interests. The group with more power or influence can force the definition-making in the direction which suits this group, thus, imposing its definition on other parties. The

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about status politics and, most importantly, about what he called the symbolic function of the law.

<sup>11</sup> I think it is important to distinguish between having a symbolic dimension and the extreme claim that Prohibition in the US was symbolic rather than instrumental, a claim which I find incomprehensible.

question is whether this happens in some or in all cases. Gusfield seems to be careful not to discuss all cases. Becker leaves an impression that it must happen in all cases<sup>12</sup>.

These ideas have been incorporated, advanced and strongly maintained by various students of deviant behavior. As for studies of social problems, this is true only of some authors. Others have not objected to the power considerations but have advanced formulations that, in my reading, render them irrelevant<sup>13</sup>, since their focus is not on whose definitions win but how definitions are constructed, perhaps, even by a sole individual irrespective of any endorsement from the rest of society.

According to Spector and Kitsuse<sup>14</sup>, social problems are constructed by members of a society. This is done regardless of the so-called objective conditions in the process of claims-making activities, and those activities, not conditions, constitute social problems. The starting point of the positive part of their analysis is the definition of social problems as "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions"<sup>15</sup>.

The key point is:

...It is definitions that are socially processed. In this sense, we can say that definitions have careers....

In contention throughout the social problems-producing process (as in the deviance producing process) are the definitions of reality that groups and organizations assert, sponsor, impose, reject, or subvert<sup>16</sup>.

This clearly draws on Outsiders. The authors, however, go beyond that: they dispose, on the one end, of any reference to the objective nature of the conditions, and of the reference to values and interests on the other. What remains is the refined process of definition-making. The study of that process, they state repeatedly, is the proper subject matter for a sociology of social problems.

It is this work which starts the tradition of separating the question of how people construct their social definitions from the question of whose definitions they are and why and how they become accepted as rules

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<sup>12</sup> See Becker 1963 p.15-18.

<sup>13</sup> See Schur 1980, Lauderdale 1980, Merton 1970 and 1976, Pfohl and Henry 1993, Best 1989 and 1995, Holstein and Miller 1989 and 1993, Reinerman and H.Levine 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Spector and John I. Kitsuse, Constructing Social Problems. Menlo Park, CA, etc.: Cumming Publishing Co., 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. p.75.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. p.72.

for all.

### Advances, Critiques and Unresolved Issues of Rule-Making

The review above briefly recasts the seminal works relevant to this study. The purpose of this section is to establish what progress has been made in terms of finding ways to approach the question of how social definitions are made. The discussion is guided by the requirement for theory to be empirically grounded.

First, I will address the subsequent literature on Becker's major formulations in his analysis of the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act (thereafter, MTA).

#### The MTA case: What does it illustrate?

Outsiders is the single most important presentation of the interactionist approach to deviance. Labeling is one side of it, rule-making is the other. Far more and better research has been done on labeling, starting with Becker's "Becoming a Marijuana User". The making of social definitions is a less fortunate area, with some major claims, it appears, supported not so much by research and data as by opinions of greatly influential authors, starting with Becker's "An Illustrative Case: The Marijuana Tax Act".

The main findings presented in more recent literature<sup>17</sup>, I believe, can be summarized as follows: (1) The alleged enterprise of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics for a federal prohibition of marijuana never took place; (2) The concept of moral enterprise does not explain the passage of the Act, and (3) The passage of the Act does not explain the definition of marijuana use as unacceptable behavior.

Musto argues that the FBN Commissioner Anslinger, as a matter of fact, "did not believe" in a federal ban on marijuana and acted only under pressure from his superiors in the Treasury Department<sup>18</sup>. More to the point, Musto and some other authors state that the federal narcotics agents were instructed, after the passage of the Act, to ignore marijuana and to devote all resources to heroin and cocaine; and the Bureau received no new funding to support the enforcement of the Act<sup>19</sup>. No author has been able to identify a moral entrepreneur

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<sup>17</sup> The most relevant publications are Dickson 1968, Musto 1973, Bonnie & Whitebread 1974, and Galliher & Walker 1977 and 1978. The most thorough critique is presented in Galliher & Walker 1977. It appears that the MTA case has not been discussed in detail since.

<sup>18</sup> See Musto 1973, Chapter 9.

<sup>19</sup> See Galliher & Walker 1977 (stated on several occasions). See also Dickson 1968.

in this case.

Further, it appears that there never was a public campaign for a federal prohibition of marijuana. The first article by Galliher and Walker, which traces conflicting claims about that Act and examines them, one after another, against data, concludes that

the evidence used by Becker, Lindesmith, Reasons... [and others] does not support their claim of an FBN propaganda effort.... A total of three articles and one radio speech hardly constitutes a national propaganda effort. It appears that this role of the FBN has become an article of faith for many studying federal marijuana legislation<sup>20</sup>.

Moreover, according to Dickson<sup>21</sup> and Galliher & Walker<sup>22</sup>, marijuana had been banned in all states prior to the passage of the Act<sup>23</sup>. This indicates that the "new rule" had already existed as a formal rule throughout the land. Overall, therefore, the new federal law did not amount even to a minor change in policy and certainly gave no reason to generalize about "a new fragment of the moral constitution of society". Most telling is, in my view, the comment by Lindesmith: "I was engaged in studying drugs when the marijuana law was passed but I didn't even know it nor did I notice any national furor"<sup>24</sup>. Had the new law changed the world of drug use, people like Lindesmith could not have been unaware of it. Galliher and Walker argue that there was, indeed, no change to speak of, and conclude with a very interesting Gusfieldian remark:

...The symbolic properties of the Marijuana Tax Act are of great importance.... It was largely a technical adjustment in federal law, duplicating existing state laws - not the important legal change implied by Becker.... The bill... was purely symbolic legislation<sup>25</sup>.

I happen to see this assessment as insufficient (see Appendix A for details), and I would omit the

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<sup>20</sup> Op. cit. p.373.

<sup>21</sup> See Dickson 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. p.367-376.

<sup>23</sup> This fact receives a puzzling reflection in Outsiders. In his discussion of the case, Becker mentions a state-level prohibition in "only sixteen states" "as late as 1930" (p.135). On the other hand, he quotes Anslinger's brief reference to the fact that a uniform state anti-marijuana legislation was in place prior to the passage of the Act (see p.144). But this information - which is of crucial significance - has no consequences for Becker's analysis. The latter would lose meaning as an analysis of rule-making without an assumption that rules about marijuana had previously not existed or, at least, had been incomplete. The mentioning of the prior uniform state ban in Outsiders is so indirect, fleeting and so disconnected from the flow of the author's thought it is likely to go unnoticed by the reader. It was not noticed by Dickson, Galliher & Walker or other writers, and Becker discusses the case as if he did not notice it himself.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Galliher & Walker 1977 p.374.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. p.375-376.

adjective "purely". But the important fact which cannot be denied is that instrumental qualities of the Act are hard to discern, and, most importantly, the significance of the Act in terms of creating or changing rules is negligibly small. The focus on the passage of the Act as a key point of rule-making is, therefore, entirely misleading.

Becker assumes that a new law automatically means a new rule, while, in fact, it does not; in the MTA case at any rate it did not. The relation between laws, policies and corresponding informal rules is in itself problematic. Becker never addressed it, and those who detected flaws in his depiction of the MTA case did not either. There is another, and even more important, assumption involved here which has been overlooked, namely, the assumption that the making of formal rules can be equated with the making of informal rules and thus with rule-making in general. This has to be addressed. Policy-making is but one aspect of the process, more important in some cases and less important in others.

Conclusions and questions that have not been posed.

Matters have rested here, with a whole host of issues left unresolved. No supportable alternative explanations of the passage have been offered, and virtually no implications for theory have been drawn. It remains unclear whether the moral entrepreneur model, despite Becker's factual mistakes, retains its explanatory power, or whether it has to be revised, or dismissed altogether.

The starting point must be a clarification of this very question: What exactly do we mean by rule-making? There are a number of related terms, such as definition-making, deviance creation, law-making, policy-making, meaning production, social construction - but how are they related?

The question concerning how rules are made generates sequences of sub-questions. These are not the same in all cases. The most immediate distinctions that have to be made in the MTA case, as a minimum, include the following: a federal ban, uniform state legislation, and informal perception of marijuana. And each has to be addressed in relation to other two.

The Marijuana Tax Act was a new federal law but the change it caused in actual policy appears to be imperceptible; what, if anything, it meant for informal rules, is unclear from the literature. State-level

prohibitions meant a creation of a new formal rule. It is important to note, however, that we still cannot assume that these state prohibitions produced a new social definition and a new class of deviants - this depends on how marijuana use had been viewed prior to the first formal rule against it. And the answer is, marijuana smoking had been viewed as deviant not only long before 1937 when the federal Act was passed but also long before states began adopting their bans<sup>26</sup>. There was a time in US history when there were no anti-marijuana laws, federal or otherwise, but there was an informal cultural rule<sup>27</sup> against it. This effectively means that an overwhelming majority of people, when and if the substance were available, were unlikely to use it and were likely to disapprove of and often prevent its use by others at home, at school and other public and private places. Marijuana was defined in most negative terms, and those who used it were labeled deviant, law or no law. In other words, the new formal rule could not create what had been already there (though it could reinforce it). In this case, formal rules followed informal ones; banning marijuana had nothing to do with creating new perceptions.

The case of US alcohol prohibition would raise somewhat different questions. One task is to explain the making of the 18th Amendment, but it is a mistake to take this as the only one. Beyond that, how could, in a Christian society, the definition of alcohol use emerge as unacceptable? How did this definition win out over the more traditional one?

Every known case of alcohol prohibition in a Christian society, however, exhibits a case of not one but two changes in formal definitions: one is "the usual", i.e. the ban, and the other - never examined by sociologists - is the lifting of the ban. Why were all such prohibitions short-lived? The fact that they were lifted invites a comparison with drug prohibitions: Why have these, by contrast, lasted? There are a host of further questions: How are Prohibition and Repeal related, how did Prohibition affect informal perceptions of drinking, how did the traditional perception affect the fate of Prohibition, how similar or different were the making of Prohibition and that of Repeal, in particular, with respect to moral enterprise, and so on.

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>27</sup> Called in Outsiders "actual operating rules" (p.16).

A more specific comparison between the two cases in view of Becker's model is also helpful in finding important questions. Major aspects that Becker addresses - moral enterprise, enlisting public support, pressuring the bureaucracy and law-makers - are easy to identify in the case of Prohibition but not in the case he depicted<sup>28</sup>. How can we explain that? We cannot if we do not take notice of the fact that drinking is a central issue for a Christian society while marijuana use was a very peripheral one until the 1960s and for that reason was quietly processed within bureaucracy<sup>29</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the Prohibition case does not presuppose the question of how European cultural norms about alcohol were "created".

A case of alcohol prohibition in a Muslim country will pose questions similar to, but not exactly the same as, those about marijuana prohibitions in Christian societies. A case of marijuana prohibition in a Muslim country, however, would not be similar to any of the above. Each case bring its own set of questions.

So when we ask how rules are made, what do we have to investigate? How a behavior was banned or how this behavior came to be viewed as unacceptable in a culture? Or are we concerned with the relationship between the two? Or should we examine the rhetoric which was employed in claims-making against this behavior?

The general question of how cultural definitions of right and wrong come into existence may never be answered in a more than hypothetical-and-speculative way. It is hard, for example, to imagine a complete explanation of the fact that alcohol use is acceptable among cultural Europeans while the use of marijuana or opium is not; any attempt to produce one would not be a matter of proof but only of being more or less convincing. What is far more feasible, however, is answering the question of how formal and informal definitions are related to and affect each other, and how change in either can be explained.

This brings up another important issue. There is, at any given moment, a body of previously produced and presently effective moral beliefs and social definitions which constitutes the space in which laws, policies

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix A.



and definitions are produced. This represents considerable constraint on the process in which we are interested. We never have a blank sheet at the start; production of meaning, strictly speaking, can only be a process of reproduction; this includes reduplication of most of yesterday's definitions with some, usually limited change in them. Few new rules are unrelated to old ones, and the process of making rules is not itself without rules.

The substantive and the theoretical are related in some very intimate ways. Prohibition of alcohol, for example, runs against existing perception of acceptable behavior in this culture while marijuana prohibition goes along with it. US Prohibition was a matter of sizable significance for most Americans while the significance of Marijuana Tax Act was microscopic. Students of rule creation - Becker, those who followed him and those who criticized him - have not paid any attention to this sort of detail. This granted, lack of theoretical clarity is guaranteed. Since in both cases we have a prohibition of a substance, it is assumed that both cases represent essentially the same process; specifically, law- or policy-making are assumed to have the same meaning in both cases, and both cases are assumed to illustrate essentially the same parameters of rule creation. All these assumptions are wrong, and this becomes obvious as soon as we ask ourselves what is behind those superficial similarities. The purpose of alcohol prohibitions in Christian societies is to change rules about drinking. By contrast, the purpose of drug prohibitions - as well as that of alcohol prohibitions in Muslim societies - is to prevent change. Besides, prohibition of alcohol is a mainstream issue while drug prohibitions are marginal, and this makes a huge difference in the context in which respective cases develop. But sociologists approach every ban as an instance of rule and meaning creation, and then they try to identify parameters of the process whereas there is no single process<sup>30</sup>.

#### Social Construction: Rule-Making and Meaning Creation

One conceivable reason why the debate about the Marijuana Tax Act was discontinued in the late 1970s might be that in 1977 the book by Spector and Kitsuse was published and this signified a sharp change in the studies of the definitional process. The constructionist approach to social problems adds important

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix A for a detailed analysis of the issue.

dimensions to the project started by Becker<sup>31</sup>. More than that, the radical version of social constructionism, in my view, suggests a whole new interpretation of the very question about rule creation.

Two-way progression and one-way analyses.

Here is a paradox: labeling theory, an extension of symbolic interactionism, puts a major emphasis on the analysis of conditions of denial of the individual's freedom - while the symbolic interactionist perspective "gives more weight to the active, creative individual" than other sociological theories<sup>32</sup>. Mead states that "the organism determines the environment as fully as the environment determines the organs"<sup>33</sup>. Some labeling theorists, notably Schur<sup>34</sup>, have tried to describe major modes of counter-action on the part of outsiders; however, these efforts have not overcome the tendency to present labeling largely as a one-way street.

Much of the claims-making literature, by contrast, tends to focus on how some initial claims are made by people and how those claims later progress. Here, the underdogs are active but institutions are passive.

Some works help to redress this imbalance. Chauncey (1980) states explicitly that there is a two-way progression of social problems: the state may be just as active in claims-making. In his case, a government agency, the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (hereafter, NIAAA), claims that teenage drinking is a problem. The author argues that the case suggests

...the ability of agencies to create a controversy over a behavior.... In this role as actor or creator, government agencies will be shown as dependent upon other interest groups and the public at large for the legitimation of their efforts. Thus, a two-way progression of social problems will be offered to amend the partial perceptionist formulation. The possibility that social problems may be created in government towers and legitimated in public squares will be added to the more familiar likelihood that some problems are also created in squares and legitimated in towers<sup>35</sup>.

According to Chauncey, "Views of the creation and maintenance of social problems have largely

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<sup>31</sup> See Schneider 1985, Pawluch 1995, Best 1989 and 1995, Holstein and Miller 1989 and 1993, Gusfield 1975, 1981 and 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Giddens, Anthony, Sociology, Polity Press, 1989, p. 700.

<sup>33</sup> Mead 1959/1934 p.129.

<sup>34</sup> See Schur 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Chauncey 1980 p.47.

omitted the influence of government agencies<sup>36</sup>. This is true about the constructionist literature on social problems, but not about the literature on definitions of deviance, starting with Outsiders. In either, however, the exchange of activities and counter-activities has never received proper attention. When an author started with a bureaucratic enterprise, he never seriously considered the reaction in squares (e.g. Becker 1963). And vice versa, when an author started with a popular crusade, he never paid much attention to how the matter was perceived and acted upon by others, including those in towers (e.g. Gusfield 1963).

Chauncey pays considerable attention to the possibility that claims made by some (in his case, by the NIAAA) may not be endorsed by others - what he calls the legitimation of a problem. New social definitions may come from any quarters and may or may not be well received by the rest of society. This is an important issue. Some constructionists seem to be unconcerned about what happens after initial claims have been made<sup>37</sup>. For them, whether these claims get legitimized or, more generally, whether definitions receive a social endorsement<sup>38</sup>, does not have to be part of analysis. In this approach, the focus has to be on how definitions are constructed, perhaps, by one person, irrespective of whether or not these constructions become accepted. This is another research question, divorced from the question of how rules are made, especially formal rules - which is, of course, central to cases like mine.

Pieces that have to come together.

The thrust of social constructionism is the search for meaning and its creation, not necessarily related to policy-making. The focus of the moral entrepreneur approach to deviance, in my reading, is effectively on policy-making, mistakenly equated with definition-making as a whole. These are two somewhat autonomous, though closely related, aspects of definition-making, and either approach has been more inclined to examine one of these aspects but not the other. Social constructionism tends to be more a study of mind, while the Becker-initiated analysis of deviance-making is more concerned with understanding of the social world in a

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<sup>36</sup> Op. cit. p.45.

<sup>37</sup> See Spector and Kitsuse 1977, Schneider 1985, Schneider and Kitsuse 1989, Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, Richardson 1993.

<sup>38</sup> See Blumer 1970 on social endorsement of social problems.

more traditional sense.

A comparison between certain cases can help to clarify both the question of how social definitions are made and the question how constructionism and the moral entrepreneur model can contribute to the search for answers.

In Chauncey's case, the agency does not have the winning conditions for the success of its enterprise; the public and co-owners of the teenage drinking problem<sup>39</sup>, such as social workers, do not endorse the NIAAA's claims. No change in rules about this behavior and no perceptible change in public perceptions followed.

In the case of Prohibition, we have a moral enterprise and claims that represent a new perception of behavior. A broad public and political support for temperance represent winning conditions. A new formal rule is successfully adopted; it symbolizes and supports the emerging meaning of drinking and non-drinking. However, the "noble experiment" can itself be viewed as another enterprise - not for winning a legal decision but for overcoming the traditional informal definition of drinking; in this enterprise, the formal ban is no longer a goal but becomes an instrument in the next stage of the struggle for sobriety. One can notice that in this case the conditions of survival of the new rule are not there. Newly produced definitions of wrong may be viable or non-viable. An aspect of this is that a success in terms of law- or policy-making does not in itself guarantee viability.

It is curious that Chauncey uses the term moral entrepreneur in the title of his article but makes no reference to Outsiders where the influence of government agencies was addressed, generalized and even greatly exaggerated. In Becker's presentation, not only does the society adopt the new definition of marijuana manufactured for it by a zealous public servant, it appears to have never had any perception of marijuana on its own.

Marijuana and other drug prohibitions are hard to describe in terms of enterprise, but are not hard to relate to existing perceptions of drugs at the time they were banned, e.g. to the meaning of marijuana as evil

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<sup>39</sup> See Gusfield 1975 on ownership of social problems.

in the eyes of the public. This is the most important piece missing in Outsiders. The meaning of marijuana can be described in terms of claims-making, with the use of newspapers and other documents of the time. The winning conditions here are represented by the moral majority's definition of drugs. The latter also makes the post-reform enterprise irrelevant: the new formal rule has an overwhelming public support from day one and for that reason is viable.

Only the viability of innovations in formal rules has not been investigated by sociologists. All other issues have been examined but the various avenues of investigation have not been integrated as interrelated aspects of a single approach to the making of social definitions.

Becker has examined the making of formal rules, but his model has serious limitations. In "Becoming a Marijuana User", Becker has also examined - in the most convincing way - the construction and learning of the meaning of marijuana by its users. Unfortunately, he has not related this analysis to his theoretical statements about rule-making and has virtually ignored the production of meaning on the other side - the meaning of marijuana for those not engaged in the behavior. It is their definitions that, in this case, mattered most.

Gusfield, in his studies of temperance, has examined the development of the meaning of alcohol for what he calls the old rural middle class. But his focus is only on the symbolic meaning of drinking vs. non-drinking. And he, of course, does not address its significance for rule-making. In his writings on drinking-driving, he does relate it to social constructionism but, again, does not clarify the overall picture, particularly, how formal and informal definitions are related. Other authors, such as Norman Clark, Jack Blocker, Robin Room, Harry Levine, have made very noticeable contributions to studies of rules about alcohol but have not suggested an integrated model focused specifically on the question, "How are rules made?"

The special interest of social constructionism is in the process of constructing meaning and not in the making of formal rules. The *strict constructionists* especially emphasize that *outcomes of those activities*, such as policy-making, banning or ban-lifting, are not part of the subject matter of their studies. On the other hand, studies of deviance, even those that contain far-reaching constructionist statements, typically tend to be limited

to little more than banning<sup>40</sup>.

The case I examine in this dissertation requires attention to both sides. But it is more about the etiological issues of rule-making (i.e. the "outcomes") than about the strictly constructionist project. The case is about policy-making and policy failure. Put another way, it is about non-viable innovations in formal rules. I have to ask why and how formal rules are made, and what determines their fate. With regard to the constructionist agenda, in order to answer my questions, it is necessary to inquire what the meaning of behavior (drinking) is, how it varies for different groups, and how it may change - but not exactly how this meaning is constructed in the most general sense.

#### Social problems in and out of context.

The social constructionist literature on social problems has been dominated by two main characteristics. First, it continues to revolve around claims-making activities, as suggested by Spector & Kitsuse (1977). The social problems literature of today is almost identical to the literature on claims-making. The second feature, too, is a direct relation to Spector and Kitsuse (1977) - the on-going debate between the so-called strict and contextual constructionists<sup>41</sup>. I will have to be critical of both theses formulated by Spector and Kitsuse.

To explain a case, the only option is to look at how its development was caused by relevant circumstances. In other words, we have to see the process in context, in a set of social relations which result in actions, considerations, decisions and events. To focus strictly on how definitions of social problems or deviance are constructed is to abandon the questions why they were constructed and what the results of these definitional activities were, i.e. to forget about the task of explaining the case. This applies to any case study, but in this particular case, additionally, a focus on the claims that were being made by Soviet prohibitionists would be extremely deceiving in the sense that it would represent a focus on an aspect which, in itself, is a very poor guide as to why the reform occurred.

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<sup>40</sup> See Pfuhl and Henry 1993.

<sup>41</sup> See Best 1989, 1993 and 1995.

It is an old truth that without a context there is no meaning, and the same thing (word, act, physical object) changes its meaning as soon as the context changes. Gusfield challenges sociologists to approach social problems "not as an abstract tool of scientific analysis but as a way of interpreting experience"<sup>42</sup>. Gusfield draws attention to the dimensions of history, culture and social structure:

[Social problems] have to be seen in an historical context and in a structural dimension interacting with cultural interpretations of experience.

The idea of "social problems" is unique to modern societies....Modern societies, including the United States, display a culture of public problems. It is a part of how we think and how we interpret the world around us, that we perceive many conditions as not only deplorable but as capable of being relieved by and as requiring public action, most often by the state. The concept of "social problems" is... a way of seeing certain conditions as providing a claim to change through public actions<sup>43</sup>.

Gusfield identifies a long-run historical drift toward a broader and deeper involvement of the state and public institutions in what used to be private matters:

Much that in primitive and non-industrial societies has been either resignedly accepted or coped with in the confines of the family is now construed as the responsibility of public institutions. ...

Both as a feature of contemporary culture and as a matter of social structure, the conceptualization of situations as "social problems" is embedded in the development of the welfare state<sup>44</sup>.

The socialist state made it its business "to take care of the people" even to a greater degree than the welfare state. What the two have in common is the view of people, their welfare, behavior and attitudes in terms of their value for the common good, for Leviathan, even though definitions of the common good obviously differ. The state plays parent<sup>45</sup> in either system, and in either, "in the very definitions of situations as problems the social control elements emerge..."<sup>46</sup>.

Joel Best has been a spokesperson for what he himself termed contextual constructionism. According to him,

contextual constructionism seeks to locate claims-making within its context. Claims emerge at particular historical moments in particular societies; they are made by particular claimsmakers, who address particular audiences. Claimsmakers have particular reasons for choosing particular rhetoric to address particular problems. Such specific elements form claimsmaking's context, and contextual constructionists argue that

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<sup>42</sup> Gusfield 1989 p.431.

<sup>43</sup> Op. cit. p.431.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. p.431, 432.

<sup>45</sup> Op. cit. p.436.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. p.436. See also Gusfield 1975 and 1981.

understanding social problems claims often depends upon understanding their context<sup>47</sup>.

The above more or less represents my view of the context issue, except that the equating of claims-making activities with social problems seems to me a misconception<sup>48</sup>. Other than that, Best presents a view and approach very similar to mine. As he states,

...However far analysts distance themselves from their subject matter, they can never jettison all assumptions.... All analysts... can be attacked for ontological gerrymandering.

... Woolgar and Pawluch (1985b:12) call for sociologists to "move beyond constructivism"... although they concede that the new questions they raise "will not contribute... to our understanding of the world as we have traditionally conceived that pursuit"....

...It is neither necessary nor possible for analysts to avoid all assumptions.... Damage caused by an assumption must be demonstrated rather than presumed. This is, of course, the traditional standard for evaluating social scientific inquiry....

What might account for those claims? ... At a minimum, it seems reasonable to ask what the claims-makers used as the basis for their claims..., and an analyst might also ask what else could account for the timing of those claims<sup>49</sup>.

Without socio-historical context, social construction has no meaning. For the abolition movement to exist, a slavery system has to exist. For women's suffrage to exist, an exclusion of women from the electorate has to exist. A society has to be, so to speak, "backward enough" in order to have certain problems. On the other hand, however, the system of popular vote has to be in place in some form for some categories of the population before a problem of extending it to other groups can be conceived; the idea of suffrage did not exist and could not have a meaning in societies that knew no elections and no voting rights at all. A society has to be advanced enough in order to have certain problems.

#### The Soviet context.

The claims-making approach has been almost unanimously accepted by the interactionist community. However, any attempt to apply it to a closed society will raise difficult questions. Above all, there is no obvious application of this very notion to a society which shows little in terms of public discussion of its problems or visible conflicts between competing claims. These two aspects - being public and facing competition - are integral parts of both claims-making and moral enterprise. In the Soviet Union, most of claims-making was

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<sup>47</sup> Best 1995 p.345.

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>49</sup> Best 1995 p.344, 347.



done by the Party and was for the most part bogus, e.g. claims that people were concerned about how to increase the productivity of labor, how to improve the work of Party organizations, how to fight anti-communist ideology and so on and so forth. A less obvious but no less significant problem is that in those rare instances when people made public claims their claims were no explanation of policy-making.

In the Soviet Union, most problems did not become part of a public discussion; for example, many thought but hardly anybody claimed that the Party itself was the most undesirable condition of Soviet life. On the other hand, large numbers of non-problems were frequently aired in public. The Party created a split universe in which truth and reality as defined by the Party had to be accepted by everyone. But the Party could not avoid using another set of definitions, far more practical but never spelled out. For example, it knew it had to use the police apparatus and force in rather practical ways in order to maintain the ostensible acceptance of its make-belief world<sup>50</sup>. A study of claims-making in the Soviet setting would be radically different from a study of social problems.

A joke of the Brezhnev era reflects this difference. It gives a definition of the Soviet socialist democracy as a situation in which each citizen individually disapproves and all together vote in favor. The claims-making activities model can and effectively has been called a free market model:

Claims-makers operate within a social problems marketplace, bidding for public awareness, official recognition, program funding, and other scarce resources<sup>51</sup>.

This makes sense where there is a market but is not accurate where there is none. The exchange of claims can also be likened to a meeting at which a society gathers to discuss its problems. An atmosphere of encouragement will help people to come forward and speak out. It can even provoke claims that the claimants themselves do not believe. At a Soviet meeting, on the contrary, there were heavy penalties for deviations from the script - not only for speaking out but for not voting in favor or for not rising up to one's feet at certain moments. To say the least, it would be extremely naive to take this meeting's agenda for the agendas people had in their minds (but kept to themselves).

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<sup>50</sup> See Orwell 1949.

<sup>51</sup> Best 1989b p.260.

The Party was not particularly open about its agenda either. For example, homosexuality, drugs, prostitution, as part of Soviet life, were forbidden topics. They were never publicly mentioned until the late 1980s, no official claims about these were made, no unofficial claims were possible. The only official claim was that they were problems of the past and of the West (which itself was a remnant of the past) and virtually did not exist in the Soviet socialist society. How was the rule against drugs made? If there were entrepreneurs (which I doubt), chances are we will never learn anything about them. If any claims were made somewhere inside the bureaucracy, we will never know. The only thing we can be sure of is that neither moral enterprise nor claims-making activities can explain why drugs were illegal.

The sociologist has two basic options. The first would be an attempt to adjust the tool to a radically different setting, i.e. to find a way to discern Soviet equivalents of claims-making. For example, one might think about official decisions or propaganda as versions of claims-making and, on the other hand, about dissidents' activities as counter-claims. Similarly, suggestions presented by experts (e.g. those who did research on or handled alcohol-related issues) to decision-makers may be viewed as claims about the nature, scale and possible remedies for possible problems - not entirely unlike claims made by experts and examined by decision-makers in the West. Other classified information that circulated in the Soviet governing pyramid (e.g. the public mood reports gathered by the KGB, or letters from Soviet people to the so called directive organs) can be thought of as claims-making as well. And since opinions of experts or positions of agencies varied, one might conceive of competing claims.

Wherever possible, such data are used in this work. But overall, an adjustment of this sort would be counter-productive, and no degree of sophistication could save it. The above are examples where an application of the term claims-making makes far more sense than in most other instances. What regular people did about social problems presents few analogies with the processes observed in a pluralist society. To interpret not voting as claims-making would be both legitimate and reasonable, because silence at moments when one was supposed to yell was indeed the second-loudest statement one could make in the Soviet system. But such statements, as a rule, were not made either; participation in voting was above the 99% mark, and so was the

casting of the "yes" vote for a sole candidate. The rule was to hide one's disagreement.

What people thought and did in private (e.g. moonshining) often did not conform with what was displayed in public; this did have the meaning of disagreement (whether conscious or unconscious) with the government but such phenomena are far from what could be reasonably called claims-making (e.g. moonshining). To stay within the meaning of the word "claim", we would have to exclude most of the flow of social relations going both top-down and bottom-top, because the relations of direct or virtually direct subordination, which were dominant in the Soviet system, are not characterized by an exchange of claims but by giving orders and taking orders. To include all relevant phenomena, we would have to stretch the meaning of the term "claim" so far beyond its accepted meaning - whether in common usage or in sociological literature - that it would create an unmanageable terminology. The underlying problem is that claims-making is different from defining<sup>52</sup>.

The identification of social problems with claims-making activities is a mistake, I think, in that it inflexibly links one with the other. In other words, it is a matter of perception first, then a matter of definition (as something more conscious), and only after that a matter of claims-making - as an expression of definitions<sup>53</sup>. In a monolithic society, there are perceptions, definitions and "statements" made through action or absence of such - but they often result in no claims-making activities.

It is not quite correct to claim that in closed societies the state has the power to decide how conditions or behaviors will be defined. The state has the power to make any policies and to support them with any claims, but even the Soviet state's power to make people accept its perceptions and definitions was limited. The alcohol policy reform in question is one illustration of that: it was only ostensibly accepted.

The same meaning can be expressed by a variety of means. Mead states on the subject of non-verbal interaction that "the communication set up in this way... may be very perfect"<sup>54</sup>. One thing about communication being perfect has been well expressed by Becker: "I don't mean... to suggest an overly peaceful

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>54</sup> Mead 1959/1934 p.14.

view of social life.... The adjusting may consist of deciding that since the police will probably look here, I'll put the bomb there"<sup>55</sup>.

Even the planting of a bomb, however, can be viewed as claims-making. The resistance of the Soviet population to Party policies could not be; it was not even directed back at the state. It was ducking the effects of a policy rather than fighting back.

An exchange of gestures, as Mead called it, is more likely to take the shape of exchange of claims in some orders of communication, such as a middle-class neighborhood or a democratic society, and less likely in others, where definition-making is monopolized by one party. Examples may be a pizza restaurant (as working environment), a corporation, or, especially, Soviet society. In the latter, there could be perfect communication without ever making claims. The decision-makers, for example, having perceived a problem could, without making any public statements, gesture to the public: So you want less work and more drink (drugs, sex, etc.)? Well here's a new decree for you. And those concerned would gesture back without saying a word or taking any public action: So you want me to be a good boy? Well fuck you.

The other option for the sociologist of social problems and deviance in a closed society is to think about a better definition of social problems. The bottom line here must be a more abstract view of the definitional process as a process of developing meaning - which may take the shape of claims-making or may not. In Appendix B, I suggest a reexamination of the logic by which Spector and Kitsuse arrive at their definition of social problems.

#### Pluralist Theories Applied to Soviet Society

The core of this analytical problem is that we have, on the one hand, theories developed in and for the pluralist society, and, on the other hand, a social reality which has been called *monist*<sup>56</sup>.

The task here is to identify what, of American sociology, can be used in an analysis of social problems

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<sup>55</sup> Becker 1973 p.182.

<sup>56</sup> The term, it appears, was coined by Fischer (1968).

and definition-making in the USSR, to what areas of Soviet reality the theories can be applied, and what modifications of theories are called for by particular areas of reality to which they are applied.

A study of the 1985 alcohol policy reform in the Soviet Union involves two areas: deviance and making formal rules about deviance. Both areas are unique in the case of the Soviet Union. However, the degree to which American analytical tools can be applied to either is not the same. Making formal rules about deviance involves, in both American and Soviet systems, top political decision-making. Further - and this is the problematic area - in America, it also automatically involves, speaking of the central issues, public campaigning and observable political maneuvering for the decision.

Deviant behavior, outside of the political-and-ideological dimension<sup>57</sup>, is a far more universal phenomenon. In my view, most of what has been done by Becker and other labeling sociologists very much applies to Soviet "victimless crimes". In fact, the perceptions of illicit drug use, homosexuality, prostitution found by American sociologists in the 1960s are more true in the former Soviet Union than they are today in the USA<sup>58</sup>.

However, the further one moves from group interaction and "things people do", and the closer to the things institutions and structures do, the more Soviet specificity comes into play. For example, "Becoming a marijuana user" can serve as an accurate depiction of the Soviet setting, but the markets for illicit drugs in the USA and in the USSR have hardly anything in common, starting with the fact that there was almost no such market in the Soviet Union, though there were drugs<sup>59</sup>. The political decisions about right and wrong in Soviet society were affected by both universal and Soviet tendencies; this was an area somewhat less peculiar than the drug market but, on the other hand, far less universal than deviance as such.

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<sup>57</sup> There is a salient difference between the two systems in everything which is close to that dimension, e.g., in the USSR, critics of the ruling party or its ideology were treated as criminal offenders; practicing a religion was extremely deviant; unauthorized communication with foreigners was deviant and could turn criminal; possession of foreign currency was criminal; running a business, especially with hired labor, was criminal.

<sup>58</sup> A detailed analysis of this has been presented by this writer in M.Levine 1991.

<sup>59</sup> For details, see M.Levine 1990b, M.Levine 1991, Levine & Levine 1991a.

The analysis of deviance at the level of behavior.

On the subject of interpretation of deviance in the Soviet or Soviet-type society through the use of American sociological theories, there is one publication known to me: "Social deviance in Eastern Europe: On understanding the problem" by Paul H. Shapiro<sup>60</sup>. Definition-making is addressed there only marginally, since the subject of the book is behavior and the routine mechanics of its control. Even so, the starting point for the author is an acknowledgement that the applicability problem is crucial<sup>61</sup>. Further, having introduced relevant aspects of two American perspectives, anomie and labeling, the author poses this problem:

To what extent do these theories of social deviance speak to the East European setting? They were formulated in pluralist societies and reflect this. The attribution of individual deviant behavior to the pressures of contradictory rules of conduct promulgated by competing elite groups (definers), for example, ... makes sense in the pluralist context.... The attribution makes less sense, though, when speaking of monist societies<sup>62</sup> characterized by: (a) an identity of political, economic, social and cultural domination, (b) a single ruling group of definers, and (c) mass-society politics, as opposed to the individual or differentiated group autonomy<sup>63</sup>.

The author's discourse refers more to the analysis of behavior (its rates, etc.), considerably less to the sources of the behavior's definitions, and virtually does not touch upon how political decisions are made that constitute "moral reforms". The latter is exactly the area where an application of Western theories of deviance-making is, in my view, most problematic. For it is the area where the "monist" nature of Soviet society is most acutely felt.

The level of the state and political decision-making.

The most general aspects of political decision-making in the system defined by the triangle of democracy, capitalism and bureaucracy have been addressed by Alford and Friedland<sup>64</sup>. Their analysis and what it implies as to how the Soviet system should be differentiated from the West will be used here to address the problem of bridging the theories with Soviet reality.

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<sup>60</sup> In Volgyes 1978 p.1-21.

<sup>61</sup> See Shapiro 1978 p.1.

<sup>62</sup> A reference to Fischer 1968, who suggests two types of the modern society: pluralist, e.g. USA, and monist, e.g. USSR.

<sup>63</sup> Shapiro 1978 p.8.

<sup>64</sup> See Robert R. Alford & Roger Friedland, Powers of Theory. Capitalism, the state and democracy, Oxford U. Press, 1985.

Alford and Friedland address three major perspectives in the sociological study of the state: pluralist, managerial and class. The first one, they say, "dominates university research and public discourse in the United States today"<sup>65</sup>, while the other two have been more influential in Europe. Particularly, the managerial perspective is more developed there, as compared to America, "because of more centralized state intervention"<sup>66</sup>. In other words, the more centralized the state (and, therefore, the political decision-making), the more relevant becomes the managerial approach and what they call the logic of bureaucracy. By implication, Soviet society, with an all-embracing development of bureaucracy and hardly any signs of democratic participation, presents the case furthest from both American social organization and the American intellectual tradition.

In what is related more directly to the problem of applying American theories to the subject of this thesis, the authors state the following:

Because citizen participation and group contest for influence are not always possible and democratic institutions are not always effective, the pluralist perspective has serious analytic limits....

The pluralist perspective assumes, we think correctly, that democratic institutions maximize the possibilities for political participation and for all groups to influence state behavior. ...[It] is applicable to societies without such democratic institutions to the extent that political participation is possible at all<sup>67</sup>.

The above is important for my analysis in three respects. The principal one is, of course, the inapplicability of the most basic pluralist assumptions (underlying all work of American sociologists on the processing of definitions of deviance) to the domain in which the decisions were made in the Soviet Union by its political leaders.

Second, the notion of participation allows for more analytical precision with respect to why some aspects of rule-making in democracies look undemocratic and even somewhat similar to how it is done in the Soviet-type society. It happens when or where, in a democratic society, there is no actual participation and issues are processed by bureaucracies autonomously from the society. The passage of the US Marijuana Tax Act in 1937, in my opinion, is an instance of this.

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<sup>65</sup> Op. cit. p.2.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit. p.3.

<sup>67</sup> Op. cit. p.4-5.

Third, on the other hand, when or where, in the Soviet-type system, some pockets of participation are allowed to exist, then and there the processes develop that are in certain respects similar, or even identical in essence, to what is usual in democracies. The pertinent example of this is the Soviet crusade for sobriety in the early 1980s, in which many classic aspects of campaigning for a political decision can be identified<sup>68</sup>.

One, however, should be careful not to overlook where these similarities end. Whatever influence the Soviet crusade might have had on the decision-making, it should not be mistaken for a decisive factor. Most important is the fact that, in the Soviet-type system, the ultimate decision-makers still remain in full control of the situation, and the relationship between them and public campaigns remains very different from that assumed by the pluralist perspective. The interaction of visible actors is the focus of this perspective. But, in the closed Soviet-type system, it is exactly the invisible ones whose activities matter most.

Yet, it would also be a mistake to dismiss altogether considerations of the interaction among the actors and to completely replace them by the managerial focus on organizational structures. The managerial perspective assumes that organizations which are in charge of the state have "a significant degree of autonomy from society and the individual and group relations that compose them"<sup>69</sup>. In the Soviet Union, the degree of the political elite's autonomy from society was unprecedented. But on the other hand, it was affected by the individual traits of the supreme decision-makers far more than in the West. This was the other side of the extreme autonomy of higher levels of the governing pyramid from the lower ones. The interaction within the Politburo and personal inclinations of the Secretary-General were of paramount importance.

### Feasible Explanatory Concepts

One can think of at least five major approaches that have been developed to explain the alcohol prohibition. I believe, the following three<sup>70</sup> are of particular relevance to this case.

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>69</sup> Op. cit. p.5. See also p.161-183 and p.198-201.

<sup>70</sup> Marxist or quasi-Marxist explanations and what I call the self-righteous overreaction model (implicitly touched upon in H.Levine 1992 as well as in almost every major work on Prohibition, including Gusfield 1963 and Clark 1976) are only marginally pertinent to my case.



1: The symbolic dimension of policy-making (see above).

2: The moral entrepreneur model (see above). This can and should be complemented, as appropriate, with the analysis of claims-making (see above).

3: The disruption hypothesis.

Norman Clark pictures American Temperance as a reaction to "the drunkard, the liquor traffic, and the saloon"<sup>71</sup>, and Prohibition as a defense of society from the alcohol threat. This is the essence of the model.

Authors who have argued against this explanation have called it the disruption hypothesis<sup>72</sup>, and this term will be used in this work. This is also very much a practical model, in the sense that it is the common sense explanation of substance prohibitions and many other bans. It is often not well received by sociologists and intellectuals. It is not particularly exciting to discover that there is not much to add to the common perception. To find that it is what it appears to be - what kind of discovery is that? Appearances may be deceiving, according to the sophisticated sociologist, and true theoreticians are supposed to go beyond the common taken-for-granted assumptions about reality.

However, the erroneous nature of common perceptions cannot be assumed; rather, it has to be demonstrated in every particular instance. Sociologists who dismiss appearances by reflex run the risk of falling short of common sense and faking theoretical discoveries - a poor substitution for going beyond common sense. In any case, the disruption hypothesis, I believe, must be taken seriously; both reality and its common perception deserve close attention of the researcher. Appearances, of course, may be deceiving but, on the other hand, there is no law according to which they must in all cases be deceiving.

The heart of Clark's argument is that the prohibitionists' case was not overstated or misdirected. Alcoholism was a disaster for America in the 18th and 19th centuries; particularly, it was in conflict with the emerging "bourgeois interior" (bourgeois sensitivity, in Blocker's translation<sup>73</sup>). Temperance and Prohibition

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<sup>71</sup> Clark 1976 p.7 and elsewhere. "Liquor traffic" does not refer here to clandestine operations; it was a temperance labeling of the legal trade in alcohol in the last century America.

<sup>72</sup> See Harry Levine 1992, with a reference to Klaus Makela.

<sup>73</sup> See Blocker 1989.

were indeed ways to deal with this disaster and this conflict; and, in fact, they very much helped to protect society.

There are two particular moments in Clark's book which are of special importance to me. One is that his depiction of the old drunkenness ("toilets fouled with vomit and urine", "the blind idiocy of drunken violence", etc.) bear a strong resemblance to those by Gorky in Russia or by Engels in England, and, of course, by Jack London in America. It is noteworthy that essentially the same picture remains to this day true in Russia, yet, in today's North America, and probably in most Western societies today, it is unusual. Minor details aside, that old classic picture also resembles today's depictions of slums, anywhere, hit by heroin or crack epidemics. To me it looks more than a mere coincidence.

The other important aspect of Clark's argument is represented by his notion of "the liquor traffic" (of which the saloon, in my view, could be considered as part). Especially, his reference to it by the temperance people as "the drunkard-making business", and his remark that that was a business which "drew a... profit from the predictable failures of personal morality"<sup>74</sup>, provide important details of how it really was historically. The conscious use and abuse of predictable failures of humans, and I would also add, societies, by the liquor interests was - I believe, universally - a very serious charge against "the liquor traffic". Again, it looks much different from the alcohol economy in today's Western societies but much similar to today's preying on people by the illegal drug business, and much the same as in the history of the Russian otkup and kabak. Another parallel with Russian history is that in Russia, too, the first noticeable anti-alcohol protests, and the first oaths of sobriety, were against those who made money and fortunes on predictable failures of human nature (i.e. the otkup-runners; later, the government).

And again, it cannot be a mere coincidence. In my view, these parallels reflect the process of learning by cultures, societies and people how to deal with alcohol or other substances, and with the pro-alcohol or pro-drug forces. Today less than ever can such forces, though still powerful, influence the process of rule-making in society.

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<sup>74</sup> Clark 1976 p.3-4.

In Chapter 10, these three models are re-examined in light of the findings of this study.

#### The Anatomy of the Case and Relevant Theoretical Issues

A closer look at the Soviet case will reveal important aspects of what I see as an attempt to redefine alcohol use in Soviet society. At a more concrete level, we have a formal rule (a set of legal regulations combined with certain enforcement practices outside of the strictly legal system) the purpose of which was to suppress the then accepted attitudes towards alcohol and to promote a more restrictive (or more restrained) informal definition in their stead. That is, the new formal rule was meant to be instrumental not only in reducing the immediate alcohol-related problems but also in bringing down the old attitudes and in promoting a new, negative view of alcohol. The formal rule was conceived as a means to facilitate a new informal definition.

The essence of the 18th Amendment and Volstead Act in the USA can be defined in rather similar terms. However, there is a considerable difference in how the two formal rules were made. The American one emerged as the result of a popular crusade and it represented a perception of a large and influential segment of society. The Soviet one resulted, above all, from an inside-bureaucracy enterprise which represented no particular social group, no powerful interest or popular perception. Some elements that were crucial to the American case - and have been generalized as component parts of definition-making - were absent from the Soviet one, and yet, the results were comparable: in both cases a formal pro-sobriety rule was produced (and in both cases the innovation did not survive the clash with the cultural standard).

The Marijuana Tax Act case is not comparable with the Soviet one in any respect but one: it too was a case of prohibition made by a government bureaucracy which was in a position to follow its own vision of the issue and to make rules accordingly. In the American case, the condition of accomplishing this was that the new law reflected the moral majority's perception. In the Soviet case, the condition was that the Politburo had the monopoly to make political decisions irrespective of the opinion of the rest of society.

Other most general characteristics of Soviet society outline the system of coordinates in which the

case must be placed, i.e. the socio-economic structure, political system, ideology, mentality, and stage of development.

Further, if we want to explain the case, we have to investigate it in every relevant dimension we are aware of. One of them in the Soviet case was that the political decision was made in a change-of-guard moment. The very fact that there was a new Secretary-General and a new chapter was opening in Soviet history is important here.

An explanation of the Soviet case breaks down to a few sub-questions. Among the most important are, first, what was the process by which the formal rule was made? Second, in what relation was that formal rule to the dominant cultural perception of alcohol? Third, how did the relationship between the formal and informal definitions affect the fate of the reform?

The above does not include the question about how informal rules and cultural norms come into existence. If we knew the answer, it still would not help to explain the Soviet case.

On the other hand, the Soviet case does not in itself explain the origins of cultural norms (although it shows how important they are for the fate of moral reforms, and how resilient they are). For the purposes of this study, I have to accept the attitudes toward alcohol in Russia as a social fact without attempting to fully explain it. For me, it is a crucial circumstance under which the reform in question was launched, developed and failed.

## CHAPTER 2. THE REFORM AS A MATTER OF FACTS

The purpose of this chapter will be: first, to present in factual terms a description of the 1985 reform of alcohol policy in the USSR; second, to situate the reform as an alcohol policy in comparison to other historically known systems of alcohol control; third, to situate it within the context of Soviet mode of approaching social problems; and fourth, to establish the relationship of this reform to the reforming of the Soviet society under Gorbachev known as perestrojka.

The content of this chapter is also meant to support my understanding of the reform in sociological terms. The reform was an attempt to redefine drinking and its excesses in far less permissive terms; more specifically, it was an attempt to modify the definition of alcohol consumption from that of "acceptable" with some limitations to something which is "unacceptable" but cannot be completely eradicated in the present. With regard to its symbolism, I will define the 1985 offensive on drinking as a remnant of what has been loosely termed in that country as Stalinism, the last, as it were, sustained practical exhibit of Stalinist solutions in the history of the USSR.

To describe the alcohol reform of 1985 in the USSR is no small task. Looking at the list of new regulations one would probably find them familiar from international experiences with alcohol control. To be more precise, they look quite similar to those used in a number of countries around the world for the purpose of keeping alcohol consumption and its excesses within limits: they represent a combination of monetary and administrative barriers erected between the drinker and the drink. Indeed, it was nothing new or distinctively Soviet to make alcohol more expensive and not so readily available in terms of when and where, and also to whom, it could be sold. Yet, the reform was far more than just that.

Reading the Party Resolution one could start wondering if it were not laying the moral groundwork for a full-scale prohibition; however, it was not quite that. Nor was it similar to any other system known from

the previous history of alcohol control, no matter how loosely compared. And learning about the actual ways of carrying out the reform in question, one could still be at a loss for any definition of what was going on.

In the West, it was commonly referred to as "Gorbachev's" alcohol reform. This caption provides no clue to the nature of the reform and misallocates the credit which should go to other quarters. In essence, what was done was an alteration of a comparatively loose regulating system to much tighter forms; not a prohibition but not something totally unrelated to it. It would not be inaccurate to call it a war on alcohol without prohibition. A "semi-dry law", as it was sometimes jokingly called with an implied reference to semi-dry wines, may serve as another name for it.

Overall, the reform was an attempt to bring together a few major agendas, some quite usual for alcohol control policies, others unusual. As is usual for any noticeable innovation in the field of alcohol control, this Soviet one in 1985 aimed to limit, or rather, in this particular case, to considerably reduce the consumption of alcohol and its worst consequences. To this end, the classic instruments from the regular alcohol control toolbox were employed: higher prices for liquor, fewer places and shorter hours for liquor stores. The intensity of their use, however, was unusually extreme.

Not so usual was the planning (with a legal back-up) of a progressive reduction of alcohol production year by year. To make a regulating system with inflexible goals is a feature shared with prohibition. Also unusual, probably unheard-of, were the constrictions in supply: these drove down the availability of alcohol for most people to the point of its being nearly unavailable. The prices were driven up to the heights where they "bite" (as the Russian image goes - tseny kusayutsa - about the prices that scare the customers away). But the most prohibitive of all things was the waiting line, the main tool of the policy - which was to become to the Soviet people the symbol of the struggle for sobriety. Indeed, the perspective of queuing at the liquor store for several hours made it feel more like prohibition than like anything else.

Another similarity to a truly dry law was felt in the parlance of the Party Resolution, which set the tone for every paper, journal and TV station. The Resolution claimed that  
The overwhelming majority of Soviet people unanimously hold that the use of liquor causes great economic

and moral damage, that it is intolerable in the life of our society. They write letters to the central and local authorities to demand that effective measures be taken...<sup>1</sup>.

The Resolution addressed drinking problems often in terms of use rather than abuse. It pointedly dismissed the distinction between one and the other; moreover, it effectively outlawed what it characterized as

*facts of promoting... the so called cultured, moderate consumption of alcohol, of picturing attractively [in the media of mass information, in works of literature or cinema] all sorts of festive meals [zastol'ya] and drinking rituals<sup>2</sup>.*

One could point out that contrary to this statement the State continued to tolerate alcohol, to produce and to sell it, even though in reduced amounts. This contradiction will be addressed later in this work.

The reform *per se* covers a comparatively short period of time, that is, less than two and a half years on the upswing, from May of 1985 when it started to the fall of 1987 when it started to quietly lose momentum. At that point, official statements no longer displayed the earlier victorious intonation and every major indicator, including indicators of state-run production and sale of alcohol, changed from the down- to the up-trend. However, the waiting lines and anti-drinking rhetoric were preserved for another year or so, until October 1988, at which point the reform was effectively disavowed by another Party Resolution<sup>3</sup>. The strictly legal regulations of the reform were never reconsidered or revoked, but that does not alter the fact that no later than October 1988 the new anti-alcohol policy ceased to exist<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Pravda* (or any other Soviet newspaper), 17 May 1985. The texts of the major resolutions were published in *Trezvost' - zakon zhizni*, M., 1986. See p.4 for this quotation.

In English, for the Party and USSR Council of Ministers resolutions, see *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press [CDSP]*, 1985, vol.XXXVII, 20:1-5. For the decree of the Presidium of the Russian Republic Supreme Soviet, "which incorporates virtually the entire USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium decree and includes additional details", see *CDSP*, 1985 vol.XXXVII, 21:8-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Trezvost'...* [1985] p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Which is probably why White 1996, Tarschys 1993 and other sources cite 1985-88 as the time of the reform. This is well justified by the chronology and official documents, but I would like to stress the point that the offensive, moving-forward stretch of the campaign, with its original quintessence, was over already by fall 1987. The best informed inside participant, Ligachev, makes a similar distinction but speaks of an even shorter period of moving forward: "...It [i.e. the campaign] began in May 1985 and continued in its acute form less than two years...": Ligachev 1993 p.338.

<sup>4</sup> Technically speaking, the reform has never been officially pronounced null and void; its major legal regulations outlived the Soviet Union.

The new rules came down in three major All-Union documents and fifteen others at the level of the Union Republics. The three principal documents were: 1) the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union<sup>5</sup> "On the measures for overcoming of heavy drinking and alcoholism", 2) a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and 3) a Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. The legal details were largely presented in corresponding acts in the Soviet Socialist Republics. The Party Resolution and the USSR Council of Ministers' Resolution were officially passed on May 7, 1985. The Decree was issued on May 16, and the same day each of the fifteen Union Republics' Presidiums of their respective Supreme Soviets issued their decrees. These fifteen differed basically only in their titles; each of them consisted, first, of the reproduced text of the Decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and second, of the more detailed regulations which were becoming law in the particular republic, essentially identical in all fifteen.

All of the above were announced to the people and published on May 17. As was customary, they were published, with certain omissions, in central and local newspapers. Between the two dates, the texts were not disclosed. The Decree passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the corresponding decrees passed in the republics were technically put into effect on June 1. But the chronology spelled out explicitly would be incomplete without mentioning the fact that the principal decision was made by the Politburo more than a month earlier than the one of the CC CPSU. The fact of the Politburo decision, although with no details, was made public the next day<sup>6</sup>. This, of course, was a break with the time-honored tradition of the Party to take the people by surprise.

The day when the anti-alcohol warfare began, however, clearly falls on May 17, 1985. Nothing (except the news that something was on its way) had been brought out to the public before that date. On the

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<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, CC CPSU.

<sup>6</sup> See Pravda 5 April 1985. A brief release under the rubric "In the Politburo CC CPSU" stated that "the Politburo thoroughly discussed the question of combating alcohol abuse and alcoholism..., a social task of great political importance". The ending presented an extremely strong and unusual wording for the official lexicon. It had been unheard-of for decades to ascribe any political importance to so low matters as drinking and the like. The release also mentioned "a complex of measures aimed at eradicating drunkenness and alcoholism from Soviet life" approved at the meeting.



other hand, once the laws and regulations had been published, they were, for the most part, immediately put to work and vigorously enforced - before June 1, 1985, which was the date for them to be put legally into effect.

The reform can be broken down into three major dimensions. The first one is that of its ideology, or one can perhaps say its spirit. The second dimension contains regulations set for production, distribution and consumption of alcoholic beverages, that is, the legal/technical core of the reform. Finally, implementation, as it was practised, will comprise the third portion, or the reality dimension.

The chronology and major stages of the reform are as well of importance to this study, and they are briefly presented in the section on the campaign's progress and regress. Particularly, simultaneously with the implementation of the policy, a reality test for it began - the multi-dimensional social responses to it that were going to decide its fate. I argue later that this is a distinct and universal stage in the natural history of formal social definitions.

#### The Initial Spirit

At the outset, the Party Resolution made two things clear. One was the fact that "the previously drawn measures have been carried out unsatisfactorily"<sup>7</sup>. The other was the admission that "the problem of drunkenness and alcoholism in the country has in recent years grown more acute"<sup>8</sup>.

The Resolution expressed in no uncertain terms that the problem was serious and so were going to be the steps against it. It even called alcohol abuse a "socially threatening menace"<sup>9</sup>, which, if one thinks of it, amounts, at the very least, to calling it a social problem.

This marked the departure from the traditional approach to alcoholism as a minor nuisance. Abuse of alcohol had never before been officially recognised as a social problem. A social problem was interpreted by the orthodoxies as a problem rooted in the organization of society, in the social order, immanent to the given mode of production. In this sense, drinking was impossible to view as a social problem that was present, or

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<sup>7</sup> Trezvost'... p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. p.3.

even theoretically feasible, in the society of socialism.

The spirit initiated by the Party Resolution had something whole, a certain integrity, although not many liked it. One way or the other, it undeniably had a few major features that were all tightly interrelated and quite naturally strengthened one another.

Determination certainly was among them. Every word of the Party Resolution was said forcefully, as though yelled, every tune was trumpeted. The CC of the Party determined that there must be established in every labor collective [v kazhdom trudovom kollektive, those who work for a given enterprise - factory, kolkhoz, library, etc.] the atmosphere of intolerance towards drinking, towards any infraction of labor discipline and order. It shall be considered absolutely inadmissible to use alcoholic beverages in enterprises, organizations, agencies and educational facilities...<sup>10</sup>.

The message, in brief, was this: We are serious, this time we really and absolutely mean it, and we will be thorough and consistent in this war. To be sure, this determination was indeed shown in the actual struggle with the evil from its very first day.

The Party leadership appeared to be making a point of long-term commitment. On more than one occasion, the representatives of the Party stated that it was not a short-time campaign but a permanent policy of the Party, and, more to the point, there would be no retreat ever.

Approaching drinking matters as such, the Resolution consistently tended to simplify them - probably a necessary condition for the aforementioned extreme determination. The main simplification certainly was the denial of any gradations in drinking. In a resolution which had "drunkenness and alcoholism" in its name, in fact, these words or their equivalents were used 18 times, while upotreblenie alkogolya, which should be translated, probably, as "usage" or "utilization", or maybe even "employment" of alcohol, was used 12 times. This ratio, 3:2, seems unusual a document that introduced an alcohol policy which was not a prohibition.

The decision-makers, it seemed, used harsher words to condemn moderate use of alcohol than its abuse. The latter was used routinely, mechanically, while the former was used emotionally, with a gasp of indignation. Apparently, they had taken the view that the only way to avoid abuse of alcohol was to prevent

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<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. p.4.

the initiation of its use. Not a new idea, and, for some people or groups committed to overcoming their drinking problems, it has successfully been working. But in this case, it was not self-applied to an individual or a compact and highly selective group of recovering alcoholics who are willing to do what it takes to stay sober, but to the whole society. A rumor had it that Ligachev, one of the two top-ranking chief advocates of the new policy, had said semi-publicly (that is, explaining it to certain functionaries at a meeting at the CC CPSU): "There is a bottle, there is a problem; there is no bottle, there is no problem" (reminiscent of the fabled Stalin's "There is a man, there is a problem; there is no man, there is no problem").

Little thought was given to the possibility that the bottle as such might not be the true problem; that the problem could be the relationship between man and the bottle, a specific by-product of the relationship between man and society.

Open, even demonstrative intimidation and enemy-making were chosen as a means to convince the Soviet people that they ought to take the new order seriously. It certainly meant that they should cut down on drinking, but also there was a quite clear message to cut off the public discussion of possible alternatives to this policy, let alone questioning of it. This was time for action, not for talk, and clarity was needed (keep things simple), not endless discussions that always undermine determination, and breed hesitation and inaction.

The Party Resolution mercilessly condemned all possible opponents of sobriety, open and disguised, real and imaginary alike. Particularly, it blamed "the so called theory of cultured, moderate consumption of alcohol" and its proponents (who were lucky they were not mentioned in the Resolution by name). The idea of moderate drinking was said to be a harmful delusion: no such thing as moderation, according to the document, could possibly exist in drinking, and any consumption of alcohol was dangerous and anti-social: "Supporters of 'cultured drinking' were hounded out of their positions and denied a public platform as the campaign's proponents established a stranglehold on the mass media"<sup>11</sup>.

One memorable episode of the opening stage of the campaign was "the Babayan story". Babayan was a high-ranking official in the USSR Ministry of Public Health and, soon after the publication of the resolutions,

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<sup>11</sup> White 1996 p.180-181.

had the nerve to say that moderate drinking was possible<sup>12</sup>. At once, he was fired from the job, which was accompanied by a noisy verbal whipping in public - a practice that was usual in the USSR in the 1950s but not quite so common after<sup>13</sup>. The Party Control Committee launched a special investigation of the Ministry's fulfilment of the anti-alcohol resolutions which resulted in foregone conclusions:

Comrade Babayan... has taken an unprincipled and inconsistent position in assessing the consequences of alcoholism for people's health. Instead of taking a resolute stand against alcohol, he... has called for 'reasonable moderation'..., which has elicited numerous letters and complaints from working people to central agencies. ... The Party Organization of the USSR Ministry of Public Health has been instructed to step up its supervision... in fulfilling the CC CPSU demands concerning the struggle against drunkenness and alcoholism and the affirmation of the sober way of life<sup>14</sup>.

An important feature of the initial Party resolution was its accentuated appeal to the old Soviet values in their most vulgar interpretation, an attempt to capitalize on the worst instincts of the so-called Homo Sovieticus<sup>15</sup>.

Alexander Yakovlev, then Member of the Politburo and probably the closest man to Gorbachev, puts the whole atmosphere of the sobriety frenzy in the context of the lingering mass psychology of Stalinism. Those "ordinary people" who had been conditioned to go ballistic, as if by some special reflex, at a hint of a disagreement with the latest initiative of the Party, were strongly encouraged by the campaign to do so, and they did. When Yakovlev, on a semi-official non-public occasion expressed his doubts about its course, he triggered an intense reaction from volunteer informers:

Oh boy, did I ever get them started! Letters to the CC, exposing me as an opposer of the decisions of the CC and guilty of this and that and the other. It's unbelievable how many you still find among us who, back in the

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<sup>12</sup> This should not be mistaken for an open criticism of the policy. As soon as the Party decisions were out, Babayan promptly joined the propaganda efforts in support of them (see, for example, Trud, 22 May 1985: Interview with E.A. Babayan). Most likely, the seasoned bureaucrat let his guards down on this one occasion simply because he underestimated the determination of the decision-makers to ensure that there were literally no deviations from the course.

<sup>13</sup> See more on that in White 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Pravda 30 October 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Homo Sovieticus was the title of a book by Alexander Zinoviev (Paris, 1970) and one of his many noticeable contributions to the Soviet anti-Soviet folklore of the time. The underlying idea was that a new type of human race had emerged as a result of Soviet life conditions. The idea became rather popular with Soviet people, and so did the author's attitude: "I have a dual relationship with this new being: I love him and I hate him; I respect him and I despise him.... I myself am a Homosos" (Author's Foreword). For an English edition, see Homo Sovieticus, London, 1985.

Stalin period and later on, were taught and trained to rat on fellow citizens. It's a good thing these days they do not shoot you on a rap. ... [Some people] feel obliged to write reports on others, to accuse and seek punishment for them. ... As they say, it does not matter how you live, the important thing is thy neighbor should not live any better...<sup>16</sup>.

Yakovlev certainly was not the only one accused of the sin of leniency on drinking. Unfortunately, I shall admit, not everyone was protected by the armor of the Politburo membership. The infamous label "enemy of the people" was not used officially but the far too familiar atmosphere of the public enemy hunt was notably there. And since the very distinction between heavy and moderate drinkers was dismissed, most of the adult population of the country, since most adults did drink, could feel under suspicion as enablers of those enemies.

The language of the Resolution did not contain the palest hint of the glasnost style; it was even worse than the habitual intonation of Brezhnev's time. I would call it Khrushchev's at his worst, as in the aggressive Party resolutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s against writers or artists who did not serve the cause of socialism well enough. Definitely, it was a language of the past, sometimes almost that of the old Stalin days.

The Resolution invariably used the prohibitive-and-intimidating language. Some people were wrong, some ideas were unacceptable, some practices intolerable, and so on and so forth. In the text published in Pravda on 17 May 1985, which would probably occupy no more than seven to eight regular double-spaced pages, the critical inset took just over two pages. Within that space, the word neterpimo or its derivatives - the Russian for intolerable or insufferable, something that must cause indignation and an immediate crack-down - was used at least three times; the word nedopustimo (unacceptable, that which cannot be allowed no matter what) was used twice; the word iskorenit' (eradicate, root-out) was used twice; there were also words like "unjustifiable", "unsatisfactory", "insufficient" and the like, often preceded by strong adjectives to fortify the intonation: "totally", "entirely", etc. As for the "positive" part of the Resolution, the word trebovat' or trebovania (demand, insist) was used at least three times; the word neobkhodimo (necessary) or its equivalents were used more than a dozen times; the word reshitel'no (determined, vigorous) was used five times. Other

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<sup>16</sup> Yakovlev 1991 p.65.

characteristics of the way the Party line was to be implemented were neukosnitel'no (precisely in every detail with no exceptions), nepremenno (unconditionally), neuklonno (undeviatingly), and so forth. The Party plainly told its subjects, government bodies and public organizations: You people shall (or shall not) do this, that and the other - or else. The equivalents of "must" and "order", of "ban", "forbid", "not allowed", "prohibit", of "punish", "remove from the job", "penalize", "hold accountable", as well as other exhibits of the Party's angry language were used copiously in every paragraph.

This sort of language was instantly adopted at all levels of government and mass media, and, along with the action and energy of the implementation, was in effect for the duration of the campaign.

The principal spirit of the Resolution was this: Any drinking is equally wrong and is not going to be tolerated; if you ever have a drink, you offend our values, you are a moral, if not legal, criminal (the distinction between the two always blurred in Soviet mentality and practice); thus, you invite public treatment as such.

The initial, Politburo-induced spirit was picked up and made even stronger in the daily workings of the fulfilment of the decisions. The way it was practised "on-site" (na mestakh<sup>17</sup>) made the actuality of the policy much tougher than the decisions as such would appear to imply. With respect to talk, the anti-drinking propaganda, too, was mostly offered in an even more intimidating manner than in the Party Resolution itself (although, to say it one more time, the Resolution was unusually rough and extremist). To take one of the uncountable examples of that agitation, one could read a review of readers' letters in a central newspaper:

...People express passionate concern and anxiety over drunkenness.... They suggest that the most harsh measures be applied to the drunkards. "No leniency for alcoholics! We must create the atmosphere of intolerance for them everywhere", A. Borisova from Kaluga Region writes to us. "The addiction-treatment centers... spend a lot of time on them and waste expensive and scarce medications. The question arises: just what are they treated for? Undisciplined parasitism, absenteeism and hooliganism? But there is one sole remedy for those 'ailments' - punishment. They should receive treatment in the mines and logging camps, in strict conditions and on a semi-starvation ration...." And this is how the overwhelming majority of our readers pose the question<sup>18</sup>.

Another paper published a report on a characteristic sting operation. The scene is one of a line to a

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<sup>17</sup> Literally, "in the places". In English translations it normally goes as "in the provinces", slightly skewing the original meaning from matters of politics towards those of geography.

<sup>18</sup> Sel'skaya zhizn' 23 May 1985.

liquor store in Moscow, with a nearby parked bus which turns out to be a carrier of a joint team of militia-men and "people's brigadiers" (druzhinniki-pseudo-volunteers for public order). The team

took an interest in the customers in work clothes; inviting them into the bus, they got 10 people in 15 minutes. Each of them had not one but several bottles of bormotukha.... "Well, comrades, we'll give you a ride to your work place..." [the brigade's chief] said mockingly to his "guests".... The very next day... trade-union meetings were held in the places where the boozers work. Their unworthy behavior was subjected to sharp condemnation by their comrades. The culprits candidly admitted their guilt and gave their word that nothing of the sort would ever happen again. At the meetings, it was decided to deprive the violators of their bonuses for May and to change their vacations to the winter months<sup>19</sup>.

Not exactly in all instances the relationship between the documents published on 17 May 1985 and their actual implementation was that of making a stiff penalty stiffer, but such was the overall tendency. For example, one measure introduced in order to counter compulsive buying of alcoholic beverages was, in the words of the document, "to complete over a few years in the near future (v blizhajshie gody) an adoption of the sale of vodka... limited to special stores or separated special departments (sections) of food stores"<sup>20</sup>. In the actuality of its being carried out the measure took but a few days after the publication to put an end to the sale of any alcohol outside of the special liquor stores.

On the other hand, the documents themselves contained measures rarely included in legal or official documents. An example of this occurred soon after the commencement of the reform. It was more or less officially explained to the people that detaining and processing through the detox system those who were not "really drunk", or were not drunk at all, was just an unnecessary extremity of enforcement and not the policy as such. In fact, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation said everything to encourage militia's extreme eagerness: "Individuals present in the streets or other public places in a medium [!] or heavy degree of intoxication, shall be placed in medical sobering-up stations..."<sup>21</sup>. No definition of "medium intoxication" was provided, and actual interpretations could be and often were such that any degree of intoxication constituted an offense.

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<sup>19</sup> Vechernya Moskva 29 May 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Trezvost'... p.11.

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. p.24.

Generally speaking, in the Soviet Union, far more so than in the countries with developed legal and election systems, a policy could only be a mixture of what was said officially with what was said unofficially and with what was, correctly or incorrectly, understood without saying<sup>22</sup>. There is, of course, in all cases a gap between the law and enforcement, but the lack of democracy makes the gap much wider. It also becomes very hard to establish a particular relationship between the two.

### The Targets, Measures and Rules

#### Ambiguity of intentions

Targets were set to ensure that alcohol production and trade would be in steady decline. This was not linked to any conditions; no limits were set for how many years it had to go on, or for how low the consumption of liquor had to drop. Mathematically, of course, it meant that the rate of consumption would be approaching zero over time. The Party Resolution simply read as follows:

It has been decided as necessary that in the Plans of Economic and Social Development of the USSR for 1986 and thereafter a yearly decrease of volumes of production of vodka and liqueur-and-vodka beverages be ensured...<sup>23</sup>.

The Council of Ministers Resolution included a timetable for reducing alcohol production which was not published. According to Ryzhkov, the output of vodka and vodka-type beverages was to be reduced by 30 million decaliters a year (meaning it would reach zero in a decade), of grape wine ("good wine") by 20 million decaliters<sup>24</sup>, and - this was published - production of fruit-and-berry wine (ersatz wine) was to be discontinued by 1988.

One may speculate whether sobriety for the whole society was meant as the terminal goal of the new policy. It is not inconceivable that increasing restrictions over a long period of time were viewed by some policy-makers as a route to sobriety for the next generation - by which time drinking would be suppressed

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<sup>22</sup> An accurate depiction of this dimension of the system has been presented by Orwell: "A Party member is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the beliefs and attitudes demanded of him are never plainly stated..." (Op. cit. p.174).

<sup>23</sup> Trezvost'... p.7.

<sup>24</sup> See Ryzhkov 1995 p.99. See also p.95: plans were made "to reduce all production [of alcohol] virtually to naught". From what I heard, Ryzhkov's data refer to the 1986-90 five-year plan.



down to a level so low that prohibition could become enforceable. Ryzhkov labels the authors of the reform "fanatics of prohibition"<sup>25</sup>. In his assessment, the reasonable end goal of forcing alcohol abuse out of social life was effectively replaced by the goal of complete eradication of consumption of alcohol<sup>26</sup>.

On the other hand, it was and is possible to speculate otherwise. Gorbachev claims that a dry law was never considered<sup>27</sup>. The point was never explained officially or quasi-officially. The drinkers, opinion-makers and lower-level decision-makers were left at liberty to entertain any explanation of their own (as long as it was within the limits of positive, pro-sobriety thinking).

Some traces of alternative approaches and earlier versions of the official decision were left - inadvertently, one would think - in the final draft and became indirect evidence of the extreme haste of its preparation. For example, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ordered an increase in the use of smaller containers for vodka and vodka-based beverages<sup>28</sup>, probably on the assumption that smaller containers encourage the consumer to consume less. At the same time, and just a few paragraphs apart, the Resolution also ordered an increase in the use of smaller containers also for fruit juices, jams and other non-alcoholic alternatives<sup>29</sup>, with the apparent purpose of making them more available and easier to buy<sup>30</sup>.

The context of the decision.

The decision-makers, according to logic, must have had three principal options:

a) to design and put into effect a system of control which aims to keep the excesses of drinking low and leaves a reasonable space for moderate drinking; for want of a better term, I will call it "reasonable" regulation or control.

b) to try a prohibition;

c) to continue with the current system - laissez faire.

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<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. p.103.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. p.102.

<sup>27</sup> Gorbachev 1995, book 1, p.340.

<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. p.11.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. p.11.

<sup>30</sup> In reality, neither directive appears to have been ever fulfilled to an observable degree.

The decision had been in preparation for several years. Apparently, no later than 1980 (with Leonid Brezhnev still alive and in office), the third option had been, by and large, ruled out, meaning that the sense that "something should be done" was settling in. The dry law option (b) was what the most active crusaders were pressing for and, consequently, what the public debate (largely undocumented) was about<sup>31</sup>, but, according to Gorbachev, it "never was even considered, for it was plain unrealistic"<sup>32</sup>. This leaves (a) as the only possible course of action, that is, a reasonable control system. But that course too, it appears, could not be taken. At least, we know that it was not taken and, after a few more years of laissez faire as a practical result of indecision, the leadership eventually decided against reasonable regulation, as the May 1985 resolutions indicate. Most likely, the decision-makers accepted the argument that a system of regulation was already in place, and, in fact, some attempts to fix it had been made in the Resolution of 1972, that is, not so long ago, and even more recent attempts, in 1979 and 1980, were made to use to that end prices and mark-ups<sup>33</sup>. In other words, the option had been compromised. Besides, there always was a widely accepted belief that in Russia nothing could ever be solved by subtle, soft, sophisticated methods<sup>34</sup>. That made options (a) and (c), in the opinion of many, very nearly indistinguishable, which may explain, in part at any rate, why it took the Politburo several years to come up with a decision.

Even though they did not consider the dry law as a whole option, when trapped in a choice where none of the options looked acceptable, some thought was obviously given to devising a system which would be clearly more than just an improved version of the current regulation. The painful choice resulted, as a matter of fact, in a peculiar compromise between the dry law and reasonable regulation.

#### Major targets and related measures.

Presented in general terms, major targets of the reform do not appear to be in conflict with what is

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. p.340. This, by the way, is the only truly new (i.e. formerly unknown) fact one finds in his several-page account of the campaign.

<sup>33</sup> For details, see Chapter 4 and especially Chapter 5.

<sup>34</sup> Lenin's words on the reforms by Peter the Great, "He used barbaric methods to fight barbarism", were a popular quote and at the same time a popular explanation and excuse for the use of barbaric methods.

regarded these days by most experts and policy-makers as the core of a reasonable system of alcohol control (making at this point no distinction between soft, medium and hard versions). In 1985, they were, in fact, the following:

- to reduce consumption of alcohol (in terms of real, not just registered intake),
- to reduce public drunkenness,
- to reduce losses in terms of public health,
- to reduce losses in the economy, particularly through the elimination of drinking at work,
- to reduce alcohol-related crime,
- to prevent youth from becoming drinkers.

The accompanying implementation package, too, did not look in itself extremist.

The overall logic was to force the drinker to realise that drinking was not a good thing, especially heavy or out-of-place and at-the-wrong-time drinking. More specifically, he would have the following major reasons for so thinking: alcohol was made incomparably less available and far less affordable, and the consequences of drinking were made more costly.

There were two special areas, both badly hit by alcoholism and both particularly targeted in the campaign: public drunkenness and inebriation at work. In both cases, some new penalties for the offenses were introduced, but mainly more vigorous enforcement of laws and by-laws that had long before been in place were now used to combat and inhibit excesses. An aggressive campaign was launched against the "drunkenness of the captains". Lower- and mid-level bosses were closely watched and, when caught, severely punished for drinking or being drunk at work; usually, by demotion accompanied by a big demerit point on one's Party record as well as by the routine of character assassination. Quite a few shows of "public execution" followed at ground, local and all-Union levels. Superiors caught drinking were removed from their jobs, punished as Party members (po partiinoi linii - "along the Party line") and simultaneously censured at public gatherings and in press. The goal of "making the work place sober" was, on the whole, successfully achieved. Even sooner and more effectively was accomplished the task of "cleaning up the streets".

A special portion of the new regulations aimed to prevent compensation for the shrinking supply through illegal means. Samogonovarenie (moonshining) was mentioned in every document. Furthermore, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Decrees of the Presidiums of the Supreme Soviets of the Union republics had samogonovarenie even in their titles<sup>35</sup>. Obviously, pains had been taken to block out any foreseeable chance of the anti-alcohol work slipping off the track.

An important particular target were private stills, potentially the main stronghold of underground resistance to the Party-waged offensive upon the popular tradition of drinking. This reflected a special concern about the triangle of forces which had proven to be so difficult to balance: a large demand, an inadequate state-monopolized supply, and compensatory supplies from alternative sources. Since the drinking population had shown resentment at prices above a certain critical level, as well as the ability to do without a central-planned supply of alcohol, the reform designers tried to be thorough in shutting out those alternative opportunities for producing or buying illegal alcohol. This included much more severe penalties for self-run distillation, such as fines of up to 1000 rubles (for repeat offenses), equal to almost a half-year of average earnings. This was especially the case for underground distilleries, where charges of illegal operation "with the intent to sell" led to up to one year of incarceration. A more thorough enforcement was certainly meant, too.

There was no underground alcohol economy operating on any considerable scale for profit, no chains of distilleries or breweries, no distribution network of any sizable development, but the potential for moonshining for self-consumption was indeed enormous.

The reduction of supply was to be implemented not only by means of steeper prices but also through shorter hours and reducing the number of stores where alcohol was available. The rule was set that hard liquor should not be available before 2 o'clock in the afternoon; in reality, the outlets were never open before 2 p.m., effectively eliminating purchase of any drink, hard or soft, earlier in the day. This was, of course, particularly a problem for those with a hangover, and particularly instrumental in fighting drinking before or at work. After the first few weeks, it was also ruled that liquor stores were not to be open later than 7 p.m., since some of them

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<sup>35</sup> See Trezvost'... p.8, 16.

were "cheating": trying to make up for the morning loss, they stayed open until 9, 10 or even later in the evening. With respect to the number of outlets, the regulation was not about the numbers *per se*, but it did not allow the sale of alcohol in the vicinity of schools, factories, universities, hospitals, tourist and leisure facilities, railway stations and airports, parks and cultural establishments, and other locations where they would cause unnecessary temptation. In reality, this drastically affected the numbers of outlets available.

Thus, the main idea was to reduce the legal supply of alcohol and at the same time to make all the thinkable illegal alternatives costly enough to stop people from trying them.

Penalties were also increased for drinking or being drunk at work, for public drunkenness, for drinking with, or offering a drink to, the underage (the drinking age was raised from 18 to 21, in violation of the Constitution of the USSR), for impaired driving, etc.

One measure was meant to carry a particularly important moral message. The Party-given slogan was "for sober leadership", which, in this particular case, applied first and foremost to the highest echelons of leaders. Drinking among them was by no means unusual; it was, apparently, just barely possible to get and be up there without drinking. Many people would probably say that being a non-drinker was almost as much an impediment to one's career as being a Jew, a woman or a non-member of the Party. When Gorbachev in his memoirs tells the story of his promotion to the Politburo, the reader learns that he was not quite sober when was summoned to see Chernenko (who broke the news that Brezhnev had decided on Gorbachev). On that score, Gorbachev remarks: "...The ethics of that time was such that one had to drink, well, not infrequently"<sup>36</sup>. Now, especially in the first weeks of the campaign, it became deadly for any more or less high-profile functionary to be noticed at a drinking event or to be alleged to allow drinking in the domain of his power. There was, in fact, a "dry law" for public (not even necessarily official) events of all kinds and at all levels. This, it appears, impressed Westerners: "At Soviet receptions, proletarians and parliamentarians of all nations found themselves united by fruit juice and mineral water"<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Op. cit. p.16.

<sup>37</sup> Schmidt-Hauer, C. Gorbachev: The Path to Power, London: Tauris Publishers, 1986, p. 125.

On the other hand, plans to make various alternatives to alcohol more attractive and more available were made - such as offering to the people more non-alcoholic beverages, more sports and leisure facilities, more goods and services and healthy entertainment of every kind.

The Party Resolution "recommended" that a special body be established to run the routine of the struggle for sobriety, a public, non-governmental organization. As a measure of particular propagandist and educational importance, it would publish a monthly journal. The idea soon materialized with the start of the "Voluntary All-Union Society for the Struggle for Sobriety"<sup>38</sup>, informally called the "Society of Sobriety" (*Obshchestvo trezvosti*) by Russians, and "the Temperance Society" by English-speaking foreigners. That society (unlike the journal) did the greatest disservice to the cause of sobriety in the Soviet Union and quickly became known as the most notorious symbol of the disingenuous heart of the campaign (see more on that in the next section).

For the most part, the content of the "new anti-alcohol legislation" (a set of amendments to the Administrative and Criminal Codes) per se did not come close to comprising a dry law. In itself, it looked like a medium-grade reasonable regulation. The implementation, however, was a different story. It was more in keeping with the language and spirit than with the set of particular measures the documents contained.

#### Implementation

##### Law, order and the Party rule.

A brief digression seems in order here, for it is hard, if at all possible, to discuss why and how the alcohol reform took its actual rough course, without addressing the basic mechanics of the Soviet mode of governing. Here, it will be only a brief preliminary remark limited to the purposes of this work.

It would not be true to say that law in the Soviet Union never had to do with the ways social processes were regulated, or that it always had only a trifling significance. But it is certainly true that law per se was not the basic source of power and decision-making. There was a combination of various sources of power and ways to channel it where law was a factor, and a major one, which historically had the tendency to slowly gain

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<sup>38</sup> See Pravda 26 September 1985.

ground over time. But law never once had precedence. Whenever it clashed with the will of the Party, it had to give way (even though Soviet law was itself a creation of the Party). For the Party, law was a consideration, sometimes more and at other times less serious, but never an impediment, never an impassable block.

In the domain of law proper, in polar opposition to what occurs under the rule of law, the higher was the level of law, the less was its impact on life. The best example to consider is probably the Soviet Constitution of 1936 - by far the most democratic in letter of all four Soviet constitutions and by far the least illuminating about reality in the country as it was entering the most gruesome span of lawlessness. Known informally as Stalin's Constitution, it included, among other things, all the democratic freedoms, and, unlike Brezhnev's Constitution of the 1970s, which to a degree reflected the slowly growing realism of law-makers, did so unconditionally. At the level of law codes of the 1930s, the issue of freedoms was largely treated in Article 58 of the Criminal Code. Article 58 included a broad range of behaviors under the heading "Anti-Soviet Activities"; it effectively made any attempt to exercise one's freedoms a criminal offense, thus, making null and void everything the Constitution stated. Further, at the level of regulations under the law, the legal process was streamlined to remove restraints on the prosecution (e.g. there was no notion of inadmissible evidence) and at the same time to limit the defence in its every move (e.g. no access to the evidence or to the accused at the stage of investigation). Quite officially, the commanding principle of justice was made "Prove you are innocent" (Prosecutor General Vyshinsky's revolutionary invention), meaning the presumption of innocence was replaced by its opposite - the presumption of guilt<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, so called "out-of-court sentences" were introduced and used massively; a troika, a panel of three officials (not judges, not lawyers) was on those occasions to decide the fate of the accused, and, as a second best-known feature, lists of names that could be dozens or hundreds long were signed for sentences that in many cases were death sentences. According to Alexander Yakovlev, present Chair of the President's Commission for Rehabilitation of Victims of the Political

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<sup>39</sup> Orwell's rendering of this phenomenon of "holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them" (p.176) as doublethink seems to me accurate. Somehow, many Soviet people genuinely believed that the USSR was by far "the freest country in the world", and could refer to the Constitution as a proof, while knowing very well that the palest hint of deviation from the present line would be punished and they had to prove every minute they were not guilty.

Repressions, in 1937 and the beginning of 1938, close to 5 million arrests were made and about 800 thousand of them led to death sentences<sup>40</sup>; during all of Stalin's rule, in the Russian Federation alone, 42 million people were processed through the jail system<sup>41</sup>. It was hardly any exaggeration to state:

Thoughts and actions which, when detected, mean certain death are not formally forbidden, and the endless purges, arrests, tortures, imprisonments, and vaporizations are not inflicted as punishment for crimes which have actually been committed, but are merely the wiping-out of persons who might perhaps commit a crime at some time in the future<sup>42</sup>.

Under Stalin, law was made a purely ornamental detail of the Soviet scenery. In the 1980s, of course, things were far less likely to escalate to matters of life and death; however, law could and was just as easily ignored by the Party when necessary.

One other observation of relevance to this study is that the power of law was in reciprocal relationship to the Party's interest in a given subject or sphere. The closer it got to the core of Party rule, the weaker became the law; the farther from that core, the more likely the law was to have an influence or even a decisive one. Most criminal cases, for example, were routinely decided on the basis of existing laws; at least, the laws or their absence were not ignored. By contrast, there were no laws against going abroad or reading foreign papers, as there was, officially, no censorship, but in reality people were safely isolated from the world and literally not one word could be said in the mass media without having been approved by the censor.

An important implication of this general relationship is the fact that where the focus of the current Party policy was, there - and then - the law was the weakest. On the other hand, as the leadership's attention shifted elsewhere, law gained greater importance.

This has much to do with the actual course of the 1985 alcohol reform. It explains why relatively moderate legal amendments could be enforced in such a way as to make the policy extreme. The Party wanted it that way, and that way it had it. All the officials who were in charge of the implementation and enforcement were Party members and were accountable to their Party bosses before being accountable to the office bosses

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<sup>40</sup> Novoe russkoe slovo, 13 June 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Novoe russkoe slovo, 6 October 1997

<sup>42</sup> Orwell, op. cit. p.174.



or to the law. On the other hand, there was no protection or even representation of the interests of the population. People had nowhere to appeal, no legal channels of action or means of fighting back.

As soon as the decisions were brought out, there was a campaign as usual, with its specific campaign machinery. Every regional Party boss had to present some program of action (plan meropriyatii) to the end of making drinking as difficult and costly as possible, and he<sup>43</sup> had to regularly report to his boss: what has been done, what is being done, what will be done and when. He naturally saw to it that all those who were under his command composed and ran their own programs of action. Those who were in charge of trade had to report how many liquor stores they had closed down over the last week, and how many they would close the week after. Those in industry had to produce some proof that they too were doing their best, for instance, disassembling a production line for beer and replacing it with the equipment for lemonade. Those in charge of bars and restaurants had to report the ratio of the facilities changed to non-alcoholic premises. Further down the line, directors of restaurants (if alcohol was not removed from there) had to do something convincing at their places, like putting a limit to the amount of alcohol served, two drinks per customer for instance, or no drinks without food. People who were growing grapes had to switch to other kinds of fruit or to grapes that could not be used for making wine. People who enforced the law had to deliver more drunks to detox stations, to make more arrests for indecent behavior, for the sale or purchase of illicit drinks, and for every other possible infraction. The judge was not to show any softness and had to sentence as many as possible for as long as possible.

In every case, for big and little bosses alike, jobs and careers were at stake. To refuse or to be unable to make your boss happy was a deadly risk; to make the rest of the population unhappy meant nothing and did not matter (as long, of course, as the boss did not get unhappy about it). Not surprisingly, law enforcement

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<sup>43</sup> "He" in referring to a Party boss is consistent not only with the traditional usage of words in English but also with the Soviet political reality where there were virtually no "she-bosses", perhaps even literally no women. In all Soviet years, a woman never was a member of the Politburo or of the Secretariat of the CC CPSU, or of any top Party organization where principal decisions were made. Outside the Party proper, very few women had positions of importance in the first Soviet years and none after. Of course, it was taught at school and proven every day in the press that socialism had overcome the capitalistic inequality between the sexes.

had a strong tendency to be extremely strict.

One should also bear in mind that much of the policy was carried out, as were other policies, through channels other than law or its interpretation and enforcement - mainly, through the Party chain (pyramid) of command. The top of that chain in the combatting of alcoholism was the Party Control Committee under the CC CPSU. It was the chief agency to oversee the implementation, and it indeed fought on all fronts. An instance of its ideological vigilance was the decision on the USSR Ministry of Public Health and most particularly on E.A.Babayan (see above). There were also practical shortcomings. For example, the Party Control Committee found "serious shortcomings in organizing the fulfilment" of the resolutions on the part of the Perm city officials. This important work had "not been given an aggressive (nastupatel'nyi) and large-scale character". However, of all the shortcomings only one was clearly spelled out in that decision: the leaders of the city had

ignored well-founded proposals by local district organizations and individual labor collectives for reducing the number of stores authorised to sell alcoholic beverages<sup>44</sup>.

The above is also a clear indication as to what the main tool of the new policy was: making alcohol scarce.

The follow-up Party resolution of September 1985 was on the whole optimistic about the achievements of the first months of the campaign and carried over the initial extreme energetic and aggressive style:

The course set by the Party... has received the full approval and support of the Soviet people.... The CC CPSU believes that this is only a beginning of the struggle for sobriety which shall gain further momentum without interruption or deviation. The Party will not retreat from this important task.... It is necessary to so organize this work everywhere that people will see and deeply realize that on these issues there will be no retreats and no concessions.... The work must be so conducted that every family, village, settlement and city struggles for a sober way of life<sup>45</sup>.

"Every family", of course, could not fight for sobriety, but the Party's effort went on for two more years before it waned, and was probably felt by every family.

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<sup>44</sup> Pravda 6 August 1985.

<sup>45</sup> Trezvost' p.27-28.

The All-Union Voluntary Society for the Struggle for Sobriety.

The Society of Sobriety was a rather noticeable creation and part of the new order. Its official establishment was ceremoniously announced at a constituting meeting in Moscow on 25 September 1985<sup>46</sup>. The chairman, Academician Ovchinnikov, spoke of the tasks of the society in a way that could be interpreted as the eventual goal of sobriety for all. As has been noted above, the initial Party resolution used a vocabulary which was obsolete even by the standards of the Soviet official language of the 1980s; four months later, the Society of Sobriety used in places the language whose origin went still further back to the early Soviet years of the first five-year plans, that is, the late 1920s - early '30s:

The society should become an organization of uncompromising enthusiasts who set an example by totally renouncing the drug alcohol and waging an active struggle for sobriety. [The society] will be made up primarily of advanced representatives of the working class and the collective farm peasantry.... They are called upon... to rally the broad masses of Soviet people to overcome drunkenness and alcoholism and jointly to establish a sober way of life<sup>47</sup>.

It was hardly possible not to notice the new organization, whether one had any interest in sobriety or not. Years before the reform, people who had worked in the field of alcohol research or treatment or had just been concerned citizens - both prohibitionists and moderates - had tried a great many times in very many ways to convince the leadership of the country to allow for the establishment and existence of such a society. They argued, in essence, that it could not hurt Soviet power but could help to reduce alcoholism, which in turn would help labor productivity, to the benefit of Soviet power<sup>48</sup>. Finally, it was being done - but not the way any of its protagonists could imagine, or be happy about.

The voluntary-in-status society was a child of the Party apparatus. Of the three parties to the process - the prohibitionists, moderates and the Party - it was the Party that ran (not just supervised) the show. It expressed preference for the dry side, to be more precise picked out its major slogans, but did not trust its representatives to assume any autonomy or authority in this important and officially blessed innovation. All sorts of public heroes - renowned scientists, rate-busters and even the fabled hockey goaltender Tretiak - were

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<sup>46</sup> See Pravda, 26 September 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Pravda 26 September 1985.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, a collection of articles in Mnenie neravnodushnykh, M., 1974.

forced to lend their names, if not energy, to the cause<sup>49</sup>. The true warriors of sobriety were, however, carefully left out (see the quote below). The only exception to the rule was the editor-in-chief of the sobriety journal, but this exception only confirmed the rule<sup>50</sup>. The Party firmly took the matter into its own hands, leaving the prohibitionists out of all the key positions and excluding them from important decision-making. None of the people from the sobriety camp known for their work and struggle for sobriety were allowed access to matters of actual policy, even though the pro-sobriety ideas were at the moment celebrated by all means and much of the dry terminology had become official.

The speaker for the grass-roots sobriety bitterly complained:

Why, among the officials in charge of the Society of Sobriety, almost nowhere find we those warriors for sobriety who for many years fought for making our people sober, [and did so] in the difficult circumstances of lack of understanding and outright corruption? Why, contrary to the will of the Party, expressed in the Resolution of the CC CPSU, top positions in the Society of Sobriety are occupied by people who have nothing to do with the struggle for sobriety, and who for decades were on important [official] posts and never said one word in its [i.e. sobriety] favor...?

The situation is also no better with the journal Trezvost' i kul'tura. ...

With such state of affairs, it is hard to expect that the Society (and the journal) will ever become a combat unit [boevoi otrvad] in the struggle for sobriety, for a potent patriotic sobriety movement happens to be thrown out of the struggle<sup>51</sup>.

Instead, an apparatchik (a professional Party bureaucrat), comrade Chernikh, was put in charge of the Society, technically as Vice-Chairman; Academician Ovchinnikov, another stranger to these affairs, was nominally Chairman, a one hundred percent pure public figurehead. When the society was being organized, its executives pointedly and repeatedly pledged allegiance to the Party, as in Ovchinnikov's official speeches and interviews where he stated that the society "must be an active helper of the Party in solving these tasks", should follow "the directions of the CC CPSU" and "the All-Union Voluntary Society of the Struggle for Sobriety will wage all its work entirely under the direction of the Party committees..."<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> See Pravda 29 August 1985 for some names of those who were officially trusted to represent sobriety: all of them are perfect outsiders.

<sup>50</sup> Stanislav Sheverdin was a known protagonist of sobriety and the dry law but was clearly at odds with the active crusaders whose tactics and anti-Semitism he considered immoral. On the other hand, he was acceptable for the Party as a devoted communist and professional journalist.

<sup>51</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

<sup>52</sup> Pravda 29 August 1985.

Chernikh had never been known as a sobriety warrior, as an expert in the field of alcoholism, or as a genuine leader. For him, already in the twilight of an unimpressive career, the new appointment probably was a lucky chance to stay afloat at the time of a vertiginous rotation of supreme leaders: the fourth general secretary during just over two years, and all the old Politburo quickly dying out - after the eighteen years of slow motion under Brezhnev when Chernikh had made his career. For the Party, it was probably the way to "promote off" a mediocre, aging fellow<sup>53</sup>, in a rather classical fashion. From day one, it was crystal clear to everyone that the newly appointed head of sobriety had no knowledge of the subject, no ideas or convictions of his own. His team was worthy of its commander. Most certainly, he was a professional "soldier of the Party" and there could be no doubt that he would be willing to live by the will of the Party. No doubt, to put in charge a man like that was the whole purpose of the appointment.

The Society of Sobriety started in traditional Soviet style. Two major lines of work were to organize a country-wide sobriety network and perform ceremonial-and-exorcising activities in sufficient amounts. As foreign observers noticed,

The campaign generated its own bureaucracy. The nationwide sobriety society developed a staff of 6500. By all accounts, their work was mostly useless and all too often downright damaging<sup>54</sup>.

The basis for the establishment of the network was more the so-called work-place (or, literally, production) principle (po proizvodstvennomu printsipu) than the residential one (po territorial'nomu printsipu - literally: by the territorial principle), although, technically, it was in this case called territorial-and-workplace<sup>55</sup>, to include those who did not work. The work-place principle was always applied to matters of importance. The essence of it is that the organization builds its structure following the pyramidal structure of the country's economy. This is also how other networks were spread over the country, including those of the Party, Komsomol, Soviet trade-unions and various official voluntary organizations. Levels and units of the Society of Sobriety used this pyramid structure: the central apparatus - (governmental) ministry - industry - branch -

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<sup>53</sup> Chernikh was known as strictly a Brezhnev/Chernenko man, unrelated to any of the newer leaders.

<sup>54</sup> Economist 313 (23 December 1989) p.53.

<sup>55</sup> Pravda 29 August 1985.

enterprise. The bottom level would be a factory, plant, library, research institute, school, artists' association, kolkhoz, etc. There, at the concluding local point, were established the so-called primary organizations (pervichnie organizacii).

Pravlenie (the top apparatus, sort of a Board of Directors) of the Central Council of the Society of Sobriety sent orders down the line. The first and chief directive was to recruit a given number of the Society members, in the order of millions<sup>56</sup>. The leadership of every enterprise had to find someone to do it; that one had to enlist a certain percentage (which varied by republic and industry) of the personnel into a primary or ground-level group of drys. One of those involuntary helpers in the building the sobriety pyramid recalls the events a decade later:

The "Society of Sobriety" rapidly increased its staff in its headquarters up to 7 thousand people, which was where the fees collected from the members went; then, they were forced to pay. I know that from my own experience, for I was appointed chair of a ground level (primary) organization of abstainers at our plant, which had to be approved at a Regional Party Committee's meeting ["na raikome" - Soviet lingo]. The ground level [organizations] contributed their activities as volunteers ["na obshchestvennykh nachalakh" - same lingo, literally "on the public service grounds"]. On that occasion, I recall, we had a drink right then"<sup>57</sup>.

The methods used by the society were an open secret from the start. Now and then the newspapers would publish a report or readers' letters that pictured "wholesale herdings" of employees into the society, bureaucratic obsession with the "figures and percentage covered" and the society becoming an irritant and laughing stock in its hunt for members' fees. For example, Pravda, even though very sympathetic to both the cause and society, published reports from a number of places where people were told just to pay 2 rubles each and at the same time were promised that nobody would bother them if they had "a hundred grams if necessary"<sup>58</sup>.

The total number of the members of the Society of Sobriety<sup>59</sup> was so far beyond any credible estimate

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<sup>56</sup> The number was calculated as the total of planned expenses of the Society (with the lion share earmarked for Chernikh and his crew) over the member fee. For the first year, the needed budget was said to be about 30 million rubles; the member fee was set at 1 ruble and so was the admission fee; it follows that 15 million members were needed to support the organization.

<sup>57</sup> Novoe russkoe slovo 20 May 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Pravda 27 April 1986.

<sup>59</sup> It appears that around 14 million in 1986-87 was the peak of its membership: see Economist 313 (23 December 1989).

of the size of the abstinent crowd in the country that Chemikh had to account for the improbable membership rates. In all, the effects were scandalous, for by the end of 1987, "the central organ" of the Party daily Pravda cited the USSR Minister of Internal Affairs:

The activities of the Society of Sobriety have so far produced insignificant results. There is a great deal of stereotype and formalism in its work<sup>60</sup>.

This was a sure sign of some very powerful forces getting very unhappy about the Society's contribution, and for good reason. Few things brought more discredit to temperance and sobriety than the "All-Union Voluntary Society for the Struggle for Sobriety".

#### Effects for the drinker.

The core of the new policy, as said above, was an attempt to drastically reduce consumption of alcohol. What did it feel like for the drinker? Probably, three things were felt most: prices, waiting lines, and the witch hunt.

Prices for vodka were doubled in two steps<sup>61</sup>; the first increase occurred in August 1985, and the second - and the more brutal one - in August 1986. That made the regular half-liter bottle cost 10 rubles, which was about a whole work day's pay for the average employee<sup>62</sup>.

However, the price load was not the heaviest blow upon regular drinkers. That was the closing down of liquor stores. So few of them were left in operation and so short became their hours (five a day) that in most cities, towns and villages of a large country, people did not have an easily available opportunity to pay their money for the desired commodity. Queues were, as a rule, so long that in Moscow it took two to four hours, and in many cases quite a bit of physical struggle, to get in<sup>63</sup>. In fact, a popular joke of the time was: The bus-

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<sup>60</sup> Pravda 15 November 1987.

<sup>61</sup> In the Soviet economy, prices were state-regulated and did not reflect the relationship between demand and supply in any observable way. Prices could only be changed by a decision of the Goskomcen - the State Committee of Prices.

<sup>62</sup> The average employee wages reached about 210 rubles per month in mid 1980s: see Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v ... g. for 1985-88.

<sup>63</sup> An official survey conducted the USSR Goskomstat in 30 regions in summer 1988, when the campaign was nearly over and queues were shorter, revealed that a queue for liquor in most cases contained between 200 and 800 people, who spent between 1.5 and 3.0 hours before getting in: Vestnik statistiki 1989 no.6:55.

driver calls a stop: "Liquor Store... Next stop End of the Queue".

There were some infrequent exceptions to this queue problem. Leningrad was the largest of them. The number of liquor stores was sharply reduced there too, but, for the most part, there were no long waiting lines and one could buy liquor almost as soon as one got to the store<sup>64</sup>. On the other hand, quite a few areas were declared by local authorities to be "zones of sobriety" with no alcohol available there.

Three months into the campaign, the USSR Ministry of Food Industry reported that the plans for reduction in the output of alcoholic beverages were being successfully overfulfilled<sup>65</sup>. 649 alcohol producing enterprises were switching to production of non-alcoholic items. Characteristic of the implementation of this policy, far more was being done much faster in practice than had been planned or officially demanded:

[Even] the output of champagne, natural grape wines and beer has been reduced..., though, if you recall, the reduction was set to start only next year and was only intended for vodka and low quality fortified or fruit-and-berry wines. The output of the latter was supposed to stop by 1988, but already... if those brands still can be found in stores, that's leftovers from last year<sup>66</sup>.

Soviet economy was so designed and maintained that it would produce every year more of every product than the year before. Aside from the post-war conversion, with its planned reduction of military production, it is hard to think of another instance when a reduction was planned. The system was used to making plans for increases rather than decreases in production. In this context, the exhortations and incentives to overperform would only have a limited effect, since there were all kinds of built-in impediments to actually fulfilling the growth in production called for in the plan. One reason that the effects of the central directions for the alcohol reform were so disastrously magnified in the provinces was that it was much easier to accomplish or overperform a reduction in production than it was to accomplish an increase in production. A system built around the assumption that fulfilling plans would be a steep uphill climb suddenly found itself putting into effect a plan on a downhill slope, where applying the same pushing produced a runaway

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<sup>64</sup> Leningradskaya Pravda 11 July 1985. The popular explanation of the exception for Leningrad, whether true or not, was that it was thought advisable to keep the sale of liquor to the guests from Finland brisk, for it was a well-established source of hard currency, particularly important for the financially challenged city.

<sup>65</sup> See Izvestia 27 August 1985.

<sup>66</sup> Izvestia 27 August 1985.



"success"<sup>67</sup>.

Samogon and other issues of enforcement.

The samogon threat in those first months also did not seem to substantially materialise, which provided Pravda and all enthusiasts of the new course with a reason for optimism<sup>68</sup>.

There are curious examples that witness to the severity of alcohol scarcity at the time. It appears that it affected even the highest echelons of power. Yeltsin's close aide recalls that he once brought for his boss a bottle of samogon which he and his wife made themselves<sup>69</sup>; Yeltsin was in disfavor at that point of his career but he still held the rank of a state minister.

Attempts to reduce the demand for alcohol were initiated too. Propaganda against drinking and for a healthy style of life was exceptionally strong, but there was also a more substantial part to the campaign. Much of that consisted of making inebriation costly in more than just monetary terms and making it simply difficult to accomplish in some typical settings, such as at work or in public places.

One could easily lose a job and ruin a career if caught drinking in either case, especially at work. For anybody in a position of responsibility, even celebrations at home in some instances would do that, although strictly speaking they did not comprise a legal offence. Alcohol became unavailable in bars and hardly available in restaurants. Previously, it had been very nearly impossible to find a non-alcoholic beverage in a bar; now it was next to impossible to find any alcohol there. A hint of an unsteady walk on the street could result in an arrest. A number of articles were published (thanks to the growing glasnost) which documented cases of drying out people who had collapsed in public with a heart attack or other sickness.

More and more often, it was recognised and said publicly that methods were used in the struggle for sobriety that "degrade human dignity"<sup>70</sup>. Local authorities, as usual, were blamed for the excesses, such as

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<sup>67</sup> This draws partially on the suggestion from Robin Room.

<sup>68</sup> Pravda 31 August 1985.

<sup>69</sup> Korzhakov 1997 p.72, 78. That bottle of samogon, according to the author, was brought for Yeltsin to warm him up after the famous mysterious episode where Yeltsin, according to his own self-report, was kidnapped and thrown off a bridge into the river, on a cold autumny night.

<sup>70</sup> Pravda 27 April 1986.

checking customers' passports at liquor stores and taking their names down or stopping buses to make every passenger "breathe into a special tube"<sup>71</sup>.

#### The Blitzkrieg in Progress and Regress

##### Fast forward.

The planned pace of reduction was more than successfully achieved in the starting stage: alcohol sales were cut from 8.4 liters of absolute alcohol per capita in 1984 down to 7.1 the next year, to 4.4 in 1986 and to 3.3 in 1987<sup>72</sup>.

The significance of these numbers is underscored by the fact that, outside of the four instances of prohibition, never before in the recorded history of alcohol had sales dropped so sharply over so short a period of time.

There was a real reduction in alcohol consumption behind it (see below with regard to the probable scale of it). And there was an observable improvement in terms of public drunkenness and even drinking as such. Namely, drinking in non-designated public places and at work was virtually abolished, and in restaurants and bars it was greatly reduced, with the classic picture of blatant drunkenness rather cleanly erased.

##### The offensive stalls.

Such a tempo of reduction in registered sales of alcohol, of course, begs the question of whether it provoked an illicit compensation. The history of alcohol shows that, in actuality, it is only a question of to what extent or for how long the deterrence of underground stills is possible. In this particular case, the exceptionally close attention of the Party to the matter, and the corresponding enforcement prevented a noticeable increase in the flow of samogon (moonshine), but only for the first few months and only in part. In 1986 and 1987, extra samogon was produced, at least, to reach the total that matched the amount of alcohol sales officially registered<sup>73</sup>, although estimates for samogon production during those years vary wildly to this day. What is not

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<sup>71</sup> Pravda 27 April 1986.

<sup>72</sup> See Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v ... g. for corresponding years.

<sup>73</sup> My estimate was a minimum of 2.2 liters of absolute alcohol per capita in extra samogon produced in 1987 compared to 1984. It is based on the fact that the sale of sugar increased by 1650 million kg. This excludes the use of sugar as payment in kind, which increased over 1986 and 1987 by another 500 million kg,

and never really was in dispute, is the fact that sugar disappeared from the stores for the primary reason of it being used for the making of samogon<sup>74</sup>.

The unofficial leader of sobriety started to claim early that the tide was being reversed. In an article which had to be ready for publication<sup>75</sup>, probably, no later than in May 1987, his evaluation was that ...the sobriety movement not only is not growing stronger but, on the contrary, has in many a place stalled<sup>76</sup>.

Another examination was made by the CC CPSU of the progress in the struggle and another resolution was adopted in June 1987<sup>77</sup>. It was not as optimistic as the ones before; the positive, "feel good" part took only a couple of paragraphs, whereupon the resolution turned promptly to the much lengthier "At the same time, ..." part. It was sounding the alarm but it could not keep the campaign going any further. "A substantial amount of work has been done... facilitating an improvement in the moral atmosphere in society", it stated. Most specifically, "The consumption of alcoholic beverages in 1986 was little more than half the figure for 1984"<sup>78</sup>.

At the same time,

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and the use of products other than sugar for samogon-making, an estimated addition of 25%. It also excludes the increase in theft of sugar which was, according to the Interior Ministry, "enormous" (see Pravda 15 November 1987), as well as any other possible additions of samogon (and the non-samogon additions - thefts of drinking and industrial alcohol and home-made wine and beer - are not even addressed here). These may add up to close to 4 liters p.c. as a maximum total estimate, although such quantity, for a number of reasons, looks beyond credible. On the other hand, the scarcity of sugar late in 1987 was certain to produce the effect of panic buying by the population to stock up, therefore, some part (probably, not very considerable) of the 780 mln.kg increase in sugar sale in 1987 was not used for moonshining. The registered legal sales of alcohol, as said above, were 4.4 in 1986 and 3.3 in 1987. The lowest estimate of all I know of, with the exception of the official estimates, is that by Treml: about 1.4 liters p.c. of absolute alcohol in growth of samogon production from 1984 to 1987: see Treml 1991 p.131-132. This puts the total of samogon production for 1987, according to Treml, at close to 10 liters of samogon, that is, no less than 4 liters in absolute alcohol per capita, which is still well above the total of all state sales of alcohol in 1987. The USSR Goskomstat estimates were, of course, lower still and, in fact, showed no significant increase for 1986-87, or for later years. see Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1987 g., M., 1988 p.422, SSSR v tsifrakh, M. 1989 p.87, and Vestnik statistiki 1991 no.9:64. But those official numbers could not be and never were taken seriously.

For a detailed account of the samogon problem and related methodological issues see Chapter 5.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, New York Times, 26 April 1988 ("Soviet moonshiners drain sugar stocks").

<sup>75</sup> For journals like Nash sovremennik, the amount of time which normally elapsed between the signing of the number into publication and the commencement of circulation was about 3 months.

<sup>76</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

<sup>77</sup> Pravda 2 June 1987.

<sup>78</sup> *Op. cit.*

We have not managed to create a broad front in the struggle against alcohol abuse everywhere, ... to increase the upbringing role and influence of labor collectives.... In many places, the work of preventing and eradicating alcohol abuse has slacked off.... There has been no appreciable taking-up of differentiated, individualized forms of work with specific carriers of this social evil..., no tangible breakthrough in... developing the social infrastructure... and organizing leisure-time activities of the population.... With the connivance of local agencies, moonshining, for which large amounts of sugar are bought up, has been growing recently in a number of areas<sup>79</sup>.

The grave portrayal of shortcomings of the anti-alcohol work, however interesting and important it was, did not, though, comprise the main feature of the resolution. For it contained what could, and in my view should, have been interpreted as a sharp criticism of the Committee of Party Control:

Many personnel of Party, Soviet and economic organs and public organizations... overestimate what has been achieved, they do not take into account the fact that a liking for alcohol cannot be overcome at a single stroke, by noisy, short-term campaigns.... The attempts to solve the problem of eradicating alcohol abuse mainly by prohibitive, administrative methods not only fail to produce lasting results but, on the contrary, drive the disease deeper, give rise to new problems and, as a result, compromise an important and necessary undertaking.

....

The existing situation calls for serious, urgent measures and for the overcoming of sentiments of complacency, as well as of manifestations of dismay at the difficulties and complexities of the struggle against ingrained habits<sup>80</sup>.

The concluding part of this resolution - the program of action - does not, however, seem to closely follow the points of criticism. It was deemed necessary to step up the anti-alcohol work at all levels, "to give it a new impetus, a systemic nature and effectiveness, and to raise it to a qualitatively different level". But, with the exception of only one minor point<sup>81</sup>, the resolution did not specify how to achieve that task or what exactly needed to be changed. The other points of the program were either unclear with respect to "how", noticeably, the need "to make up for losses in trade turnover stemming from the reduction in sales of alcoholic beverages", or were repetitions of old abstract formulae, such as using "all forms of ideological and moral influence on people" or "melding firm anti-alcohol convictions in young people".

As though to dispel any possible expectations of a change in style and methods of the anti-alcohol work, the CC ordered the Party organizations "to facilitate in every way" the work of the Society of Sobriety;

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<sup>79</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> The point was to "abolish trade in alcoholic beverages on the basis of coupons... as at variance with the very idea of a struggle for the eradication of alcohol abuse...".

in the same sentence, it called for "debunking the ingrained opinion that moderate, so-called 'cultured' utilization of alcohol is harmless". The concluding paragraph reads as a strong warning:

The Party regards overcoming of alcohol abuse and alcoholism as an urgent task of great political importance and as a component part of perestroika and of the multifaceted work of cleansing the moral atmosphere of our society of everything alien to the socialist system.... There will be no retreat or relaxation of effort. The noble cause of establishing sobriety as a norm of our life must be carried through to conclusion<sup>82</sup>.

The above contains a few interesting possibilities for analysis, but here I will touch upon only one. One last time, the Party stated "There will be no retreat", but this time it sounded desperate, not so much as an enthusiastic promise but rather as a threat to make life difficult for the adversary before the retreat.

The same day, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet passed a decree which increased liability for samogon brewing<sup>83</sup>. This appears to have been the last legislative shot of the campaign.

A few months later, the Committee of Party Control passed yet another resolution of its own, dealing with the increased output of some alcoholic beverages during the first half of 1987. Somehow, the USSR Gosplan had planned an increase, if only by 2.1%, of total sales of alcohol for the year. This plan combined a further reduction in vodka sales and an increase in output and trade turnover of other beverages, but the reduction for vodka was planned "in smaller amounts than those set by the resolutions [of May 1985]"<sup>84</sup>. On the other hand, another symptom of the system rejecting the policy was the fact that the actual numbers for the first half of 1987 showed that the plans for reduction were not fulfilled and those for increase were overfulfilled, both for vodka and non-vodka beverages.

On the whole, this resolution was very technical, devoid of the earlier slogans, promises, threats and, most importantly, of energy. This trend continued and was increasingly obvious<sup>85</sup> - until the very stream of publications about drinking and its eradication became virtually exhausted by mid-1988. This was substantiated by Western reports about the campaign in the USSR<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> Izvestia 2 June 1987.

<sup>84</sup> Pravda 31 October 1987.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Pravda 15 November 1987, Pravda 10 March 1988, Kommunist 1987 no.11:33-47.

<sup>86</sup> For example, the title of one of them was "Is the War on Liquor Losing Ground?" - see The Current Digest of the Soviet Press vol.XXXIX, 45:5 (9 December 1987).

In the second half of 1987, it must be noted, the sales of state-produced beverages started to rebound, and so too did alcohol-related crime and violations<sup>87</sup>. In 1988, the amount of registered sale of alcohol of every kind, including vodka, was already considerably greater than in 1987<sup>88</sup>.

According to Ryzhkov, the situation was difficult for the Politburo:

In the summer of 1988 the situation with alcohol trade was overheated to the limit. The Party Control Committee of the CC CPSU continued to apply pressure as before. The monthly reviews, to which obkom first secretaries<sup>89</sup> and USSR Ministers were summoned, concluded with dressing-downs and scores of censures and reprimands along the Party line. All of this sent the wave from the Center to the provinces. But the situation only got worse. The rare liquor stores that remained were besieged by crowds, cheap perfumes had disappeared, and so had ethanol-based chemicals and medications. The supply of sugar was becoming short<sup>90</sup>.

It's over, and it's official - officially, it's still on.

In October 1988, the last Party resolution on drinking was issued<sup>91</sup>. It demanded putting an end to the waiting lines for alcohol. In fact, since the queue was the core of the whole enterprise, it was the announcement of the campaign's end. This demise was being done covertly, but the resolution was an unmistakable declaration of the shift in policy. In full accordance with the principles of doublethink, the Party was officially ending the failed campaign by the means of officially stating that the campaign would continue, though the methods of it had to be corrected. The meaning of that correction was clear to everyone concerned: the policy was being abandoned, the war on drinking was over.

The results of the war, according to this resolution were, on the one hand, positive. As the resolution stated,

...The work launched by Party and Soviet agencies and public organizations... has facilitated an improvement in the moral atmosphere in society and the strengthening of law and order. Establishing a healthy way of life has become an important component of the policy of perestroika. ...

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<sup>87</sup> In fall 1987, a big interview with the USSR Interior Minister Vlasov in Pravda acknowledged this fact in a semi-official fashion. See Pravda, 15 November 1987.

<sup>88</sup> See Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v... g. for 1987 and 1988.

<sup>89</sup> The highest rung in the provinces, effectively, the commissar of a region. From there, he could be moved straight to the very top, as happened with Gorbachev, Ligachev and Yeltsin, among others.

<sup>90</sup> Op. cit. p.98.

<sup>91</sup> See Pravda 26 October 1988. For the full text of the resolution "On the Progress in the Fulfilment of the Resolutions of the CC CPSU on Questions of Intensifying the Struggle Against Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism" see Izvestia TsK KPSS 1989 no.1:48-51. For a "condensed text" in English see the CDSP XL (1988) 43:14-15 ("The War Against Drinking Slacks Off").

[The efforts] have made it possible to appreciably reduce the number of cases of drunkenness on the job and in public places. The situation in families has improved, and the incidence of injuries has fallen. The number of drunken crimes has decreased.

On the other hand,

...No radical changes have been achieved as yet. In many regions, the broad opportunities...have not been used properly.... The solution of one of the most complicated social problems is often reduced to administrative measures and noisy, short-term campaigns. ...

The declaration of entire districts and cities as "sobriety zones" without taking public opinion into account was not backed up by intensified educational work. The production volume of wine and vodka was cut back hastily, at a significantly more rapid pace than stipulated in the established assignments. The output of cognak, dry wine, champaign and beer was reduced for no good reason, and the raw material and production base for their manufacture was eliminated. ...

These actions turned alcoholic beverages into an object in high demand and led to long waiting lines, a sharp increase in samogon-brewing, speculation in liquor, and in drug abuse and abuse of toxic substances. Difficulties arose with trade in sugar and confectionery products. ...

Some officials...are greatly behindhand in dealing with the problems that have come up. Some primary Party organizations and Party agencies are displaying complacency and a lack of principle....

However, the Party as such, as opposed to some of its components, was not to blame for whatever had gone wrong. If anything, apparently the Party was to be heartily thanked and praised for the brilliant plan of the campaign:

The experience of the past three years and more has shown that positive results in the struggle against alcohol abuse are achieved when this work is conducted in accordance with the fundamental directives of the Party....

Not only some and not only provincial but a whole host of "central" agencies - from the internal affairs agencies and the head-quarters of the trade unions and the Junior Communist League to the State Committee of Physical Culture to that of Cinematography and the boards of the creative unions - were reprimanded in this resolution for their poor work for the cause of "establishing a sober way of life". And the Voluntary Society of Sobriety, with "many of its organizations inactive for all practical purposes", got a particularly heavy dose of criticism.

Nevertheless, all the wrong parties were guilty not of carrying out a poorly thought-out policy but of deviating from the line wisely drawn by the Party. For next the resolution pointed out

the impermissibility of any deviation whatsoever from the set course aimed at overcoming alcohol abuse and alcoholism. The resolute intensification of the struggle for sobriety has been and remains a matter of exceptional importance for all Party, state and public organizations, labor collectives and law-enforcement agencies.

In this work, it is necessary to be guided unswervingly by the provisions of the CC CPSU Resolution of 7 May 1985... in all its aspects.

Ritualistic dances performed, the resolution at last proceeds to say the only thing which really mattered:

...It is necessary for Soviet agencies and trade organizations to eliminate, as quickly as possible, the conditions that are causing waiting lines for alcoholic beverages.

The closing paragraph, on the surface of it, reveals the Party's frustration and disappointment with both sides of the policy debate. The mass news media

...Should call special attention... to the bankruptcy of the positions both of the supporters of a "dry law" and those of "cultured drinking" and should sharply criticize passivity in the struggle against alcohol abuse.

At the same time, and more importantly, this was a signal to stop the talk about prohibition.

The prohibitionists were being told publicly they, too, have lost. (The moderates, of course, lost in May 1985.) This, therefore, represents the unusual case of a fight lost by both fighters. Unusual for an open society because there one of the two must win. Unusual for a closed society because there public political fights are unusual. In the end, as was customary in the Soviet system, all who were genuinely concerned and spoke out received a beating from the Party, by far the strongest player.

#### The net result.

There is hardly any significant disagreement over the overall outcome of the campaign. Those who supported it in 1985 try to point out, somewhat apologetically, that there were some bright spots too. The following may serve as an example:

It would not be accurate to say that the adopted measures proved to be absolutely counter-productive and were met with only negative emotions. Body injuries from accidents, mortality of people, losses in work time, hooliganism, divorces on grounds of drinking and alcoholism were reduced. And it was not all restrictions and bans. For the first time, the information on production and consumption of alcoholic beverages came into the open, statistical data were published which earlier had been kept in secret. But the negative consequences of the anti-alcohol campaign far outweighed its pluses<sup>92</sup>.

The campaign did have some true achievements, especially in 1985 and 1986, and most particularly in the two domains of work and the street. Data on mortality and some research done to relate it to alcohol

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<sup>92</sup> Gorbachev 1995, book 1, p.342.



consumption strongly suggest there were considerable improvements in public health during the years of the reform<sup>93</sup>. However, in the long term it did not alter the tendency toward growing alcohol-related problems. Instead, it changed the mechanics of those problems but not their nature and, perhaps, not even their amount (if you do not limit your considerations to those two years).

The chief promoter of the campaign a few years later conceded it had been a failure, even though it had had some promising moments:

[Once the campaign got under way] the central agencies were immediately inundated with letters of thanks: millions of families heaved sighs of relief. ...

Along with positive results, the anti-alcohol campaign also brought considerable costs - a sharp increase in home-distilled vodka production, and a black market in alcoholic beverages. Obviously it would not be possible to overcome this age-old ailment immediately. An emphasis on prohibition, on administrative measures... could not bring about the desired results. In addition, quickly mounting financial difficulties caused the government to rely again on the production of vodka<sup>94</sup>.

One of the most considerable facets of the experience was that the reform's failure became a bitter lesson: the lost alcohol war became a syndrome for the society, perhaps, comparable, in a sense, to some more famous syndromes caused by lost wars. It has made unthinkable any new attempt to take serious measures against alcoholism.

Not only the reform was designed and attempted in the old Soviet system, it also failed largely before the democratic changes in the country. I realize that it is not possible to draw a clear line which would mark where or when, in the Gorbachev era, the old ends and the change begins. However, in broad terms, there can hardly be a doubt that the campaign failed because it was impracticable even in the old totalitarian state, and not because the perestroika came around, even though the latter, probably, accelerated the failure.

#### One Policy, Many Symbols

It would seem helpful to take a look at the reform through the eyes of some key players and the publics.

Juha Partanen, in a paper written when the campaign was at its peak, observes that "political

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<sup>93</sup> See Nemtsov & Shkol'nikov 1994, Shkol'nikov & Nemtsov 1997 and Ryan 1995. On the other hand, Trembl 1991 questions the link between alcohol consumption and death rates.

<sup>94</sup> Ligachev 1993 p.336-337.

considerations... are also relevant" - to which no objection can be seen, and proceeds to say:

On the level of symbols, emphasis on alcohol differentiates the present regime from the previous one and affirms its moral superiority<sup>95</sup>.

This I will undertake to question - not as an erroneous statement but as a one-sided and somewhat vague one. It is not unusual for any new leadership to make gestures that aim to convince the public that new is better; the question is why a radical reform of alcohol policy was chosen as a means of this symbolism. It did, in a sense, differentiate the new from the old - but in what sense? Representative of exactly what was the new policy? The answer is not at all obvious. Representative of new people? Of new thinking? Of a new era?

Further, was the reform seen by the audience - the population - as a sign of moral superiority of the new leadership? It is interesting that when this paper by Partanen was discussed at a Kettil Bruun international conference, Jacek Moskalewicz, who knows life under real socialism first-hand, suggested an interpretation of the campaign's symbolism much different from that by Partanen but similar to how, I believe, most Soviets felt about it: as a further humiliating interference of the party-state into the private sphere of life<sup>96</sup>.

The very fact that the decision was made within one month after "the new regime" was in office<sup>97</sup> (effectively, a new regime could only mean a new Secretary-General) suggests that the new emphasis on alcohol might have been a left-over from the old days only taken up by the new leadership. How new and how old were the leaders of the time, their thinking and decisions, is a question of importance here. The relationship between new and old was complicated and had more than one dimension.

I will entertain three arguments which help clarify the issue. First, speaking strictly of facts of recent Soviet history, the first moves to prepare the reform were made no later than early 1981. Second, the content, techniques, spirit and language of the alcohol campaign belonged entirely to the old Soviet mode of action and were diametrically opposite to those of the "new thinking" introduced in the course of glasnost and perestroika. Third, for Gorbachev, the real maker of the "new regime", alcoholism and the struggle against it were not part

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<sup>95</sup> Contemporary Drug Problems 14 (winter 1987):511.

<sup>96</sup> Surveyor 22 (May 1988):61-62.

<sup>97</sup> Chernenko, the predecessor of Gorbachev, was gone in March, and the Politburo decision on alcoholism was made already public on April 5 - see Pravda 5 April 1985.

of his political and social program. Below, I argue why.

What was and what was not new in the reform.

Some time in the winter of 1980/81, this writer received a telephone call from the Gosplan (the USSR State Planning Committee) with an invitation to present constructive ideas ("bring your contemplations", it was said: prinosite svoi soobrazhenia) as to what should be done about the alcohol problem<sup>98</sup>. Others who were viewed as experts in the field were getting at that same time similar calls from the same source<sup>99</sup>; in the following years the work continued, with its level soon elevated to the Party Central Committee. More than a decade later, I learned that "under Brezhnev, the question [of alcoholism] was several times discussed at Secretariat meetings"<sup>100</sup>. None of us, no matter how badly we could differ on any other issue, would ever think of Gorbachev as a player in the game. As a matter of fact, he had nothing to do with it until the very final decision. Some reform was being prepared in the old system under supervision of old Party guards: Katushev, head of the Gosplan, then Pel'she, head of the Party Control Committee, then his successor Solomentsev<sup>101</sup>. The new leadership (in fact, the Politburo consisted of almost all the same old people) applied final touches - which, probably (but not for sure), were more than just cosmetic - and made the decision. New was, first, the breaking with indecisiveness, and second, the extreme nature of the reform. Both moments are important but the fact that the idea of the reform had been there and had been worked on beforehand is important too. The new leadership not only could not have prepared such a major policy over a couple of weeks or so but, quite simply, had not the time to become entirely new.

Some changes in personnel must be explained. The decision was in principle made by the Politburo on 4 April 1985. By that time Gorbachev had been Gensek for about three weeks, and major shuffles still lay

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<sup>98</sup> Personal experience. A. Smirnov, Deputy Chief of the Department of Social Statistics of the Gosplan, was the one who initiated the contact.

<sup>99</sup> Personal contacts with B. Levin, G. Zaigraev, L. Gordon, I. Bestuzhev-Lada, and a few others.

<sup>100</sup> Gorbachev 1995, book 1, p.339. The Secretariat of the CC CPSU was the second most important body in the Soviet hierarchy of power. The Gensek (Secretary-General) was head of both the Politburo and the Secretariat; several other most important figures were members of both. The Gensek led Politburo meetings, and the unofficial "number 2" led Secretariats.

<sup>101</sup> For more details see White 1996.

ahead. The key player of the alcohol saga, Ligachev, was two levels below the Politburo: only a Secretary of the CC CPSU. So was Ryzhkov, the most ardent opponent of the extreme version of the alcohol reform. Under normal circumstances, being so low would make their opinions unimportant. However, Ligachev was at the time the closest man to Gorbachev; Ryzhkov too was close and ascending, and changes were coming soon. In mid-April both were made Members of the Politburo - skipping the stage of Candidate Members, which was very unusual - at the April CC Plenum, and Ligachev was immediately made the unofficial "Second Secretary"<sup>102</sup>. The influence of Ligachev in those weeks was probably growing by the day. His part in the making of the alcohol reform appears to have been very significant but, perhaps, not decisive yet between mid-March and mid-April, and it became overwhelming after. It appears that since then he was allowed to do on the alcohol front pretty much everything he wanted.

The Soviet ruling elite, in the exclusive sense of the very top of those who ruled (as opposed to sociological definitions of elite as a social group), could be described as follows:

Persons that occupied the top three rungs of the ladder of the Party hierarchy were an elite. ... On the highest one, there were Members of the Politburo. On the middle one, the Candidate Members were. And on the third one, the Secretaries were<sup>103</sup>.

In order to make the definition of the top political elite complete one has only to add that Secretary-General of the Central Committee (Gensek) was above the ladder rather than one of those on the top rung. An avid follower of the Soviet leadership life could figure out who was positioned where by the order in which the leaders would appear in official ceremonies: Gensek, Members, Candidate Members, Secretaries, and lastly, the rest. The same order was always followed in all publications and news reels on official events which included a list of the officials in attendance, namely: the Gensek's name first, followed by Politburo members' names in alphabetical order, and so on.

The above is about the hierarchy which was official. A considerable unofficial nuance was the so

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<sup>102</sup> Memoirs of all three, among other sources, present a rather detailed picture. Gorbachev made an unusual show right after the Plenum voted for Ligachev: "Over here, Egor," he said, "here's a chair beside me" (see especially Ligachev 1993).

<sup>103</sup> Ryzhkov 1995 p.38.

called "nucleus" of the Politburo<sup>104</sup>, an unofficial group of less than half of its members. This varied but most often included the Gensek, the unofficial No.2 man<sup>105</sup>, the Chairman of the KGB, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Ryzhkov also gives a hint as to the atmosphere in which the elite worked and lived:

I remember I asked Dolgikh... like, what do you people do for holidays?... where and who with whom gets together, would it be okay with the wives? ...

"Nobody gets together with anybody", he said. "Forget it".

Among the "people of the three rungs", any relations beyond their offices and official halls were non-existent. Even though their dachas could share a fence or their apartments could be on the same landing, seeing others in after-hours was regarded - what word should I use? - unbecoming, perhaps. ... Relations with colleagues outside the office, apparently, could be interpreted as attempts at conspiracy.

...All of the above referred only to some twenty people<sup>106</sup>.

Ryzhkov presents an account far more detailed than other former leaders, and he is the only one who tells at least in some detail the story of the decision progressing from a draft to the Resolution. According to him,

...Already under Brezhnev, a commission on struggle against alcohol abuse was established, with Pelshe as head. However, it did not do much work, whether because its wise chairman was badly ailing or because he could not find the right solutions of this most complicated problem. After his death, the commission was automatic inheritance for the new Chairman of the Committee of Party Control Solomentsev. Still, it did virtually nothing until the advent of the new Gensek Gorbachev.

It was the dynamic duo Ligachev - Solomentsev that launched a storm of activities<sup>107</sup>. Drafts of resolutions were prepared on a short notice. At some stage of their drafting Secretary of the CC I.V. Kapitonov, myself and B.I. Gostev were familiarized with them. And the three of us like one objected... that that was no way to fight alcoholism.... Great was our perplexion and even astonishment when Solomentsev uttered:

"As long as vodka is on the store shelves, they'll drink it!" ...It felt as though the authors of the proposed strategy were grand abstainers<sup>108</sup>....

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Ryzhkov 1995 p.41.

<sup>105</sup> Past the late 1970s until which time Kosygin had been No.2 while holding the post of Prime Minister, it was the so-called "Second Secretary". He chaired Secretariat meetings and was a replacement chairman for Politburo meetings when the Gensek was sick or on vacation. Ligachev, who was No.2 under Gorbachev, provides a clear and colorful picture of how the hierarchy was organized in the late Soviet years. The books by Ryzhkov and Gorbachev are enlightening as well.

<sup>106</sup> Op. cit. p.38-40.

<sup>107</sup> That is, the duo was put together and went to work on the orders of Gorbachev after he had become Gensek. This implies that this job for Ligachev and Solomentsev began in mid-March and was approved on the Politburo on April 4 (see below in this quote from Ryzhkov).

<sup>108</sup> As a reference to Solomentsev this is curious, for Solomentsev had the reputation of a reformed alcoholic.

When the final draft of the Resolution was discussed on a Secretariat - which was chaired by Gorbachev<sup>109</sup> - it raised my hair.... There was a timetable, by the year of the 5-year plan, how much alcoholic beverages had to be produced and by what time all the production had to be reduced virtually to naught. By the way, this part [of the Resolution] was not published in May - it stayed secret.

I was again arguing against it. I said the direction proposed by comrades Ligachev and Solomentsev was deadend, once again I said that this country was led right into a "dry law"....

Gorbachev on that occasion provided active support for the anti-alcohol warriors....

In a few days, the Politburo meeting was held at which the issue was discussed<sup>110</sup>. The "heavy metal" spoke - PB<sup>111</sup> members. N.A. Tikhonov and his first deputy G.A. Aliev attempted to prove the impermissibility of such a slapshot reduction in production of liquor beverages. They tried as well to defend beer. But no! The new Gensek and his comrades in arms... would not back down one bit<sup>112</sup>.

It appears not to be accurate that the old guard was against the reform (in its actual extreme form<sup>113</sup>) and the new people were in favor. Of the two protagonists, Ligachev was new and Solomentsev was old guard. The most vocal antagonist, Ryzhkov, was new. The two closest Gorbachev's allies and major new people, Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, later (though not at the time) spoke against this reform. Ryzhkov names four other new Members of the Politburo who later, in 1988, spoke for the recall of the campaign<sup>114</sup>. The old Gromyko, it appears, supported it. The relatively old Tihonov and relatively new Aliev objected. There is no straight association between being new and being in favor of this reform. It did not exactly represent people who were new in the leadership, whether already actual or future members of the ruling dozen. Of all of the people, Ligachev was the sole prohibitionist. And he soon emerged as the best-known conservative and hard-liner - not at all a pure representative of "the new regime".

#### Alcohol reform representative of the old Soviet approaches.

To present the second argument - that the reform was in the spirit of old and not new thinking - it would be suitable to compare the language of the 1985 Party Resolution on alcoholism with that of glasnost.

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<sup>109</sup> Probably, because at the time there was no No.2, and Gorbachev was No.1 who had been No.2 just prior to that. Ligachev was made No.2 in mid-April and led Secretariats thereafter.

<sup>110</sup> In all probability, this must be the meeting on 4 April 1985.

<sup>111</sup> Politburo.

<sup>112</sup> Ryzhkov 1995 p.94-96.

<sup>113</sup> Everyone appears to have been quite definitely in favor of some reform. Ryzhkov, for example, argues: "There were (as there still are today) more than enough reasons for alarm and adopting measures against growing alcoholism" (p.94). The disagreement was about what exactly had to be done, whereas there was a remarkable consensus that something had to be done. In the post-reform era, there has been an equally unanimous agreement that the policy was a mistake.

<sup>114</sup> See op. cit. p.100.

The former was chiefly in the language of Brezhnev's era, with some spice of pre-Brezhnev late-revolutionary rhetoric; in a word, it was obsolete, even by the standard of official Soviet speak of the 1980s. By contrast, glasnost, by and large, had an intonation of change, and that was quite obviously a change to tolerance and democracy, not back to totalitarian methods.

There were signs used in the Party-speak that one could not fail to recognize. To take just one example, the reference to letters which the "central and local organs" said they received from Soviet people who demanded of them to "take (more) efficient steps" against something was a classic sign. Pis'ma trud'yashchikhsya (letters from working people) had long become a notorious phrase because it had been used for decades in every Party resolution that announced a decision to put an end to some undesirable activity or other, and along with it, normally, to the people identified as guilty.

The resolutions on drinking did use that expression<sup>115</sup>, while the first important speech by the new Secretary-General, at the April Plenum of the CC CPSU, did not. I think a comparison between the two documents is telling.

The very word perestroika - used by Gorbachev for the first time - had not been previously allowed in relation to Soviet economy and society, because it was quite definitely ideologically unsound. The usual term was sovershenstvovanie, which reflected the process of perfecting socialist relations of production; usovershenstvovanie, meaning just slightly more, just hinting at some limited change or correction, was already too strong in vast majority of cases<sup>116</sup>. In that late Soviet speak, perestroika was off the scale. On the other hand, the anti-alcohol vocabulary, with its intimidating drum-beat and its utter disrespect for human beings, was entirely from the old days

One other sure sign of the anti-alcohol campaign being at odds with what was really new was a taboo on criticism of the campaign. A largely unnoticed fact is that open discussion of drinking matters was not allowed at the time of already booming anti-Stalinism, nor even when polite criticism of the new leadership

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<sup>115</sup> See Trezvost'... p.4. It was slightly modified there, as had become customary under Brezhnev, to "letters from Soviet people".

<sup>116</sup> Personal experience.

came about. It was only allowed along with public criticism of Gorbachev's person, in the closing chapter of perestroika.

The direction in which society was changing was towards more participation, openness, debate, and, to an extent, market. One can say it was a transition from anti-democracy to democracy. The methods used in the struggle with alcoholism were traditional for the Party: reliance on the apparatus, direct cohesion, intimidation and punishment, and censorship. The latter cannot be possibly interpreted as representative of the former.

"Gorbachev's alcohol reform" not really Gorbachev's.

The third argument - that Gorbachev's part in creating this policy was limited - comes from public comments on the campaign made by Party leaders, including Gorbachev and Yeltsin, which I will support by some speculations of political nature.

The reform is, of course, known as "Gorbachev's", and the Gorbachev time will probably go down in history symbolized by three things: perestroika, glasnost, and waiting lines for liquor. No reform could occur, of course, without his blessing, but all indications are that he did not go much further than that.

The two chief speakers for the anti-alcohol campaign, Solomentsev and Ligachev, spoke often and extremely toughly, using heavy political and ideological stereotypes and threats. Gorbachev never made this a major subject of his speeches. Even on the eve of the introduction of the new order, speaking on 16 May 1985 in Leningrad, he only devoted a few lines to it and used a language not nearly as harsh as that of the Party Resolution<sup>117</sup>. And later on, I believe, he only said something when he had no escape from the topic. On one occasion, he was asked, in 1986, by a man from the crowd why people should stay in waiting lines for alcohol for hours. Gorbachev's answer was rather moderate: Well, just don't.... This was in sharp contrast to the aggressive anti-alcohol rhetoric of the time.

Finally, there is some almost direct evidence that Gorbachev played only a limited role in that reform. A testimony came first from Boris Yeltsin who was, in the days of the reform, a Candidate Member of the

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<sup>117</sup> See Pravda 17 May 1985.



Politburo and could witness which player did what:

The campaign against alcoholism was downright ignorant and ridiculous.... I told Gorbachev about that more than once. But he for some reason chose to wait and see.... Along with Ligachev, Solomentsev was in agitation<sup>118</sup>.

Nobody can suspect Yeltsin of being a fan of Gorbachev. Whenever he has a chance to score another point or two on his former boss and rival, he always will. If he had a justification for implicating Gorbachev in more than just suffering two lunatics, he would probably do so. But his worst accusation on this occasion is only that Gorbachev did not stop others, but not that Gorbachev was the ignoramus who initiated the unpopular campaign.

The only insider who puts any blame on Gorbachev is Ryzhkov, openly hostile to Gorbachev. His harshest criticism, however, is that Gorbachev "actively supported the warriors against drunkenness..."<sup>119</sup>. Here and there he puts Gorbachev in a negative context, as in "the troika Gorbachev - Ligachev - Solomentsev"<sup>120</sup>, but the essence of his accusations does not amount to more than Gorbachev's being under the influence of Ligachev. To Ryzhkov, Gorbachev is a willing enabler, while the doers are Ligachev and Solomentsev. Ryzhkov's true perception becomes obvious when he summarizes his account of how the policy was made: I relate to E.K. Ligachev with respect, I value his honesty, fairness and devotion to principles. But this was his great political mistake, and most devastating blow to perestroika<sup>121</sup>.

How exactly things got worked out between Ligachev and Gorbachev remains mystery. Neither one tells the story, and others do not appear to know.

A few other former members of the Politburo published their accounts of the time and touched upon the anti-alcohol campaign too, and among the more recent was one by Gorbachev himself. He is, in fact, more critical of his role in the campaign than Yeltsin is, and more than I thought he would be. His account is second most critical, if not as critical as Ryzhkov's, of his part in the campaign: "Well, I have to repent: my share of

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<sup>118</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Ispoved' na zadannuyu temu* [Baring Soul on a Predetermined Subject], Moscow: Pik, 1990, p. 96.

<sup>119</sup> Op. cit. p.95.

<sup>120</sup> Op. cit. p.97.

<sup>121</sup> Op. cit. p.96.

the fault for that failure is big"<sup>122</sup>. Quite so, but what was specifically Gorbachev's part in the making of that decision? How was the decision made? Not uncharacteristically, Gorbachev is somewhat evasive on that and does not tell the whole story. He approaches the subject by posing to himself exactly the question that so many people would love to ask him:

The anti-alcohol program which was adopted in May 1985 remains to this day a subject of perplexion and guesses. Why was it decided to make a start with that measure?..<sup>123</sup>.

Gorbachev does not say it was not his idea. In his account, there is an air of acknowledging the guilt that he should bear as the ultimate decision-maker of the time. He seems to accept to a considerable degree the popular version of events which identifies him as the author of the campaign, even to the point of mentioning the fact that he earned then a nickname "Secretary-Mineral". He does not dissociate himself from the decision and even seems to be doing the opposite when he refers to "we", "our" and "us" as the group which considered and made the decision. There is no mention of who proposed, who or how strongly supported and who, if anybody, opposed it. No mention of any split of opinions, no mention of any arguments.

On the other hand, he does not say the idea was his either. He argues as follows:

We had to face this problem in the very beginning. The Politburo was presented with gruesome materials telling the story of a disaster of the people. ...

It is now frequently asked who took the initiative.... The wisecrackers sort of say it's an undoing of the Politburo whose members had long used up their drinking quotas. This is a joke. As it were, the initiative came from the society [obchshestvennosti]. Powerful pressure was exerted on party and state organs which received through incoming mail innumerable letters, chiefly from wives and mothers. Horrible instances were cited of tragedies in the family, of industrial accidents, of crime as a result of heavy drinking. Our writers and medics were extraordinarily brusque on the issue<sup>124</sup>.

The above is how Gorbachev explains what compelled the Politburo to expeditiously start an anti-alcohol campaign in May 1985. In a sequence of points: 1) alcohol excesses in the country were extreme and growing, 2) "we" were shocked to see the picture (although he himself confirms that it had been discussed in the Secretariat several years prior to that), 3) the decision-makers were under a "powerful pressure" from the people, 4) "we" felt something must be done, and, 5) done immediately.

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<sup>122</sup> Op. cit. p.342.

<sup>123</sup> Op. cit. p.338.

<sup>124</sup> Op. cit. p.340.

Gorbachev is one of the two (along with Ligachev; see his account below) decision-makers who mention the pressure for anti-alcohol measures as part of the situation. One can argue this looks like excuse making, and especially Soviet readers are unlikely to take seriously Soviet rulers' references to public opinion. However, it is conceivable that for Gorbachev that pressure was part of his consideration, and it is possible that he was the only one sensitive to it. His former comrades, with the sole exception of Ligachev, present accounts in which the popular crusade for a dry law not only looks insignificant but non-existent, as if there never was a crusade or any pressure.

Gorbachev does not say that the steps had to be radical - which brings us to the point of how he explains the drastic character of the actual campaign. He cites the problem of a gap between good intentions and their materialization:

It was planned to gradually (I underscore - gradually) reduce liquor, by the measure of its replacement in the goods turnover and budget revenue by other commodities....

Initially, the society (I am not talking about possessed boozers) took the decision favorably<sup>125</sup>; however, by the measure of its being put into effect, there emerged a sense of disbelief, then irritation, discontent and, eventually, plain anger. What really happened?

As is not unusual in our land [u nas], an enormous gulf divided the intention and its realization in life. I would say, at the stage of discussion and decision-making, both realistic approach and responsibility were exercised, but at the stage of implementation, it was more zeal than smart [porot' goryachku] and borders were badly overstepped; a good and healthy initiative was blown up<sup>126</sup>.

Gorbachev's explanation as to why the attempt to curtail alcoholism went astray is that the wrong people were at the helm of the campaign. He adds that he should have interfered but did not. As he states,

Ligachev and Solomentsev were entrusted with the control of the implementation of the resolution. They jumped on it with a wild eagerness and brought everything to the point of absurdity. [They] demanded from the local party leaders, from the [government's] ministers and the industry that they "overfulfill" the plan for reducing the production of liquor and for its replacement by lemonade. [They] got hard on those who "lagged behind", to the point of firing from the job and excluding from the party. ...

In our society, one is used to "revolutionary leaps" rather than to scrupulous work during a long run of time. The anti-alcohol campaign, regrettably, became one more sad example of how a belief in omnipotence of the commanding methods, maximalism, [and] administrative frenzy can kill a well-intentioned enterprise. As a matter of urgency, [liquor] stores, breweries and distilleries were being closed down, and in places they even destroyed vineyards. The production of dry wines was being reduced, which was not part of the resolution. ... Moonshining became massive. A shortage of sugar was becoming observable...<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>125</sup> Here, I believe, the author is overstating the case.

<sup>126</sup> Op. cit. p.341.

<sup>127</sup> Op. cit. p.341.

The above, indeed, was not, technically speaking, included in the decision packet of measures against drinking. The extremes of implementation, however, were in keeping with the extremist spirit of the Party Resolution as well as with the Soviet mode of putting Party demands into effect. The "administrative frenzy" and all its fruits, which Gorbachev pictures as unexpected by-products of a well-intentioned initiative, were more than usual in that system and absolutely predictable.

As for Ligachev and Solomentsev, it appears, they were put in charge of the alcohol policy reform prior to the passage of the Resolution. At any rate, Solomentsev had been chair of the anti-alcohol commission<sup>128</sup> and was officially assigned to work to prepare the decision. It is also highly probable that Ligachev joined Solomentsev, even if somewhat informally, already in March and did not just oversee the implementation, as Gorbachev states, but also prepared the draft(s) of the Party Resolution and the overall game plan<sup>129</sup>, which included both the list of measures and the implementation. The latter, including waiting lines, did not come later on as some surprise distortion of the plan but was its natural and intended part.

Ligachev himself published a book of memoirs too. It contains about four pages on the anti-alcohol campaign. How the leadership decided on the campaign is presented as follows:

...In the early 1980s there was an increase in the number of letters - mostly from wives and mothers - received by the Central Committee, the government, and the editorial offices of newspapers and magazines. ... It was impossible to read these women's bitter outpourings without shuddering. ... Moreover, many scientists were sounding the alarm and forecasting the threat of degeneration of the nation's genetic stock.

It was impossible to ignore the countless letters, the nation's groans. In 1984, the Politburo established a commission to draft effective measures for overcoming drunkenness and alcoholism<sup>130</sup>. The May decrees and the 1985 edict were the outcome of its work<sup>131</sup>.

Ligachev's own role in the campaign and especially initiation of the policy, according to his post-factum account, would look limited if we were to take it at face value:

I was not a member of that commission and did not participate in the preparation of its documents. However,

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<sup>128</sup> This, from the time of his predecessor Pelshe, came with the job of Chair of the Committee of Party Control.

<sup>129</sup> Gorbachev uses a typical phrase from the apparatus jargon (control za vypolnieniem - control of implementation) perhaps, without thinking about its exact meaning. The phrase does not have to be understood literally; its principal meaning is to relate a task to the names of those in charge.

<sup>130</sup> This commission must have been established about two years earlier than 1984.

<sup>131</sup> Ligachev 1993 p.335-336.

as a member of the Politburo, I became actively involved in the cause; we discussed this issue many times at the Central Committee Secretariat. My official responsibilities and my personal refusal to tolerate drunkenness coincided in this case.

...

[The campaign] unexpectedly acquired a certain political tinge as well - it was linked with my name.

...The decision to declare war on drunkenness was collective; formally, I did not even take part in drafting the decree. However, this does not mean that I want to evade the issue. As a leader of the Secretariat, I indeed had to take an active part in drafting practical measures for the struggle with drunkenness<sup>132</sup>.

This modesty, however, does not match other known accounts, which include Gorbachev's mentioning of the Politburo decision to put Ligachev and Solomentsev in charge of the reform implementation. In fact, no names other than these two have ever surfaced in any accounts. It is impossible to name a third active supporter of their plan. Shevardnadze was rumored to spell out what can explain the mechanics of that collective decision: "Inwardly I was against, but voted for"<sup>133</sup>. Nor does Ligachev's citing of the collective nature of the decision (as if it were everybody's - and nobody's in particular) look genuine in light of other portions of his own account where he speaks of the campaign the way one speaks of one's own actions:

Apparently a certain involuntary personal element was at work here. As a nondrinker, I was psychologically unprepared to accept the fact that someone would not be able to "kick" drinking if the possibility of obtaining alcohol were sharply curtailed. This was undoubtedly a mistake on my part. And I will add frankly that initially I appeared as a radical in the anti-alcohol campaign, even though I myself condemn radicalism and extremism. It seemed to me that if you went at it with a will, drunkenness could be eliminated quickly<sup>134</sup>.

What Gorbachev says in his published account is that he gave them free hand in implementation which was "theirs" as opposed to the initially good decision which was "ours":

I should not have entirely entrusted others with the implementation of the adopted resolution. And it was certainly my duty to interfere when the first signs of distortions were becoming apparent. ...

What stopped me was the enormous overload of domestic and foreign affairs that struck me like an avalanche...<sup>135</sup>.

A question of some importance is whether Gorbachev stopped paying attention to the details at the stage of preparation of the Resolution or after. The former would confirm that his part in the extreme scenario was limited to letting Ligachev and Solomentsev shape the policy as they saw fit. The latter would mean that

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<sup>132</sup> Ligachev 1993 p.336, 337.

<sup>133</sup> It is quite feasible and even likely that the vote was unanimous.

<sup>134</sup> Ligachev 1993 p.337.

<sup>135</sup> Op. cit. p.342.

he was a co-author of it (but not the principal author).

On at least one other occasion, Gorbachev appears to be less critical of himself: "They tried to make an abstainer out of me"<sup>136</sup>. This looks more like an attempt to blame "them" and to excuse oneself from accountability. Where he is more genuine, he himself may not know. My impression, though here I am really guessing, is that he never carefully read the final version of the Resolution and never bothered to examine the details of the implementation plan. His account of the events gives me an impression that even ten years later he was still unaware not only of many details of that decision but even of its true, half-Stalinist nature. Indeed, his and other leaders' accounts are witness to how poorly they knew the country they ruled<sup>137</sup>. He might have given in to the idea of the decisive offensive on drinking at the Politburo meeting in April 1985 and never returned to it for a serious second reflection. Stephen White, the only writer other than myself who has investigated Gorbachev's part in some detail<sup>138</sup> and the only one who, incidentally, does not think that the reform was Gorbachev's creation, suggests this:

Ligachev [was] the campaign's chief promoter. ... Gorbachev himself, on the available evidence, did not initiate the process that led to the resolution of May 1985... but he did not oppose the case for a public campaign and then identified himself with it wholeheartedly...<sup>139</sup>.

My only disagreement here is with the word "wholeheartedly"<sup>140</sup>, at least, as far as his behavior in

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<sup>136</sup> An interview of 1992 quoted in White 1996 p.183.

<sup>137</sup> The impression is based, among other things, on the fact that Gorbachev cites false data - in a book published in 1995! - which, by the looks of it, he probably borrowed from the pre-reform writings of the prohibitionists. He cites 1.8 liters as per capita alcohol consumption in pre-revolutionary Russia in 1914 in contrast to 10.6 liters for the years preceding the 1985 campaign. In fact, the officially registered consumption was around 4 liters for 1900-13 and much higher in many previous years; in fact, in the mid-19th century it was significantly higher than in the mid-20th. The 1914 figure is, of course, meaningless for the obvious reason that in the August of that year an alcohol prohibition was declared in Russia as it entered the war. On the other hand, the record high of registered sales of Soviet time was 8.7 in 1980; it was 8.4 in 1984 and never was even close to 10.6 (which is likely to reflect the registered consumption in the Russian Federation around 1980, but not that in the USSR). Gorbachev also writes how Gromyko was indignant after reading some letters about drinking: "Can you imagine, our people - they drink everywhere...!" (p.339, 340). The episode is presented as some sort of an eye-opener. If the leaders did not know that "people drank everywhere" - what did they know about their people?

<sup>138</sup> See White 1996 p.182-200. Stephen White is also the author of a book about Gorbachev: see White 1991.

<sup>139</sup> Op. cit. p.182.

<sup>140</sup> The memoirs by Gorbachev, apparently, were not at the time available to White. Now as they are, they seem to very much support White's interpretation.

public is concerned. I tend to see his attitudes as half-hearted.

Others who were at the time in the leadership appear to blame Ligachev. Neither "friends" nor foes of Gorbachev point at Gorbachev, although none says Gorbachev had nothing to do with that decision; for the most part, they simply do not mention his name in any link to the campaign.

Alexander Yakovlev, known as the chief ideologist of perestroika, mentions the anti-alcohol reform as among the worst blunders of the new leadership. As to whose it was, he says this:

Many were against that cavalry attack, including Chairman of the Council of Ministers N.I. Ryzhkov, but Ligachev's conception of 'sobriety' carried the day, which resulted in even more drinking<sup>141</sup>.

In an earlier, interview-stylebook, which must have been prepared for publication when Gorbachev's team was still in power, Yakovlev makes some interesting remarks. One is that he supported "the struggle against alcoholism, but disagreed with the methods, on the premise that cavalry attacks will lead to reverse effects"<sup>142</sup>. Taking into account that the nature of the campaign was defined exactly by its "methods", which were the dividing line between the two sides, his statement effectively means he was against the campaign.

His other argument about that campaign deals with its ethics. He refuses to accept the "good intentions excuse" used by his friend Gorbachev (see above). "This is what, indeed, constitutes a case of lack of ethics in politics", he argues, "when one assumes that good intentions are self-sufficient, and as for the rest, it will happen by itself. No, by itself it won't"<sup>143</sup>.

Shevardnadze writes that, at the stage of formulation of the new policy, he was "horrified" at the news about the draft of the future anti-alcohol reform. For his native Georgia, the land of traditional (and superb) wine-making, it was a tremendous economic loss and a slap in the face from Moscow<sup>144</sup>. According to him, people in the Politburo truly believed: "If we make an order to stop producing and drinking alcohol, the country will"<sup>145</sup>. Unfortunately, he keeps the old-fashioned Soviet "we" usage and mentions no names.

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<sup>141</sup> Yakovlev 1994 p.248.

<sup>142</sup> Yakovlev 1991 p.65.

<sup>143</sup> Yakovlev 1991 p.245.

<sup>144</sup> Shevardnadze 1991 p.32-33.

<sup>145</sup> Op. cit. p.318.

Those who were close to the top often mention the campaign as Ligachev's or say something like "when Ligachev wrestled with drinking..."<sup>146</sup>.

My understanding is that for Gorbachev, that campaign was of no particular importance, far outside his strategic interests. He probably had to, and was prepared to, sacrifice a peripheral issues in order to minimize objections to the core of his program. Every indication suggests that, as in other instances, he left it to the old-thinkers to keep them busy and out of his way. It could seem to him smart to leave this to his future main opponent and rival Ligachev and to let him play with the toy and be the fool to blame for what population could not like. As it turns out, however, people have blamed Gorbachev, they still do, and his name will probably remain forever attached to a reform which he never initiated.

An odd piece of Stalinism at the dawn of perestroika.

Now, what did the reform symbolize for the Soviet people, not for outside observers or Members of the Politburo? In my view, there is more than one dimension to it. But the core of that symbolism, as perceived by a vast majority of Soviet people, I believe, was accurately expressed by one of them in the following way: For the first time since the Stalin days, the contempt of the communist rulers' for human beings was displayed so barefaced<sup>147</sup>.

The cited above Yakovlev and Shevardnadze express the same perception in other words: disregard for people, the belief that the Party knows best what is best for them, instilling fear, encouraging policing on fellow citizens, suppression of the palest hint of disagreement or self-will. Humiliation and insane may be the words most of those who experienced the campaign would use to describe it.

Partanen appears to be correct in his assessment that the decision-makers wanted to see themselves and to be seen as people's saviors, although he is wrong in what he does not say (see below). Ryzhkov's chapter "The anti-alcohol campaign" opens with several pages of reflection on Gorbachev's first days in office; this supports Partanen's proposition:

In the international lexicon of politics, there is a certain notion of "hundred days".... During this "grace"

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<sup>146</sup> Korzhakov 1997 p.72.

<sup>147</sup> Novoe Russkoe Slovo 30 May 1997.



period... [the new leader] tries to show his best side, to earn people's respect, to convince the public of his political and human image....

There was a sense of euphoria [after Gorbachev's first public appearances]: people saw an energetic leader, not a decrepit man struggling to read out loud, like illiterate, from a sheet.... Firmly entrenched in our minds is the belief that the people always needs a tsar-father, or someone with the power of a tsar. The title depends on social order....

But the "hundred days" required that something had to be done for people, something good and kind which would be taken in a positive way and would show the new leadership's noble goals. [Gorbachev discussed with us] what could be done for people now?...

In the opening stage of perestroika a multitude of cardinal decisions were made.... Many of them had positive effect on people's economy and the situation in society in general.... Unfortunately, made were also some "historical" decisions that left bitter residue for decades to come....

One would suppose Gorbachev discussed his "hundred days" not only with me.... In spring 1985, proposals for struggle against alcohol abuse and alcoholism became a priority<sup>148</sup>.

The above, indeed, reads very much like a story of creating certain kind of symbolism. However, the public obviously did not buy the perception the Party was trying to sell. To people's side of the story, to the fact that the audience did not read the gesture the way the actors wanted it to be read, Partanen does not pay attention.

The discrepancy between projected symbolism and actual perception is noteworthy. In terms of Gusfield, this reform is one example of the "distribution of prestige in society"<sup>149</sup> not happening the way he has suggested. He seems to believe that prestige can indeed be distributed the way material resources (goods or money) are. This is not a very logical hypothesis, and empirical data show it wrong. In the Soviet case, one meaning was conveyed and another received. Gusfield himself, I believe, provides enough ammunition in Symbolic Crusade to show the same phenomenon in the case of American Prohibition as well.

The "moral superiority" over the old leadership was not all of the favorable impression the new leaders were trying to create. Another important aspect was to show that the days of lax discipline and the Party's patience with people were over. There was a perception that not only a strong hand was needed but people were longing for it. A glimpse of that perception can be seen in Ryzhkov's praise of Andropov:

Critics of that Gensek claim that he is guilty of overly zealous struggle for discipline. Yes, as always, there were distortions.

...Volens-nolens, he brought with him the methods he was accustomed to: in his former "firm" [i.e. the KGB],

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<sup>148</sup> Op. cit. p.89-93.

<sup>149</sup> See Gusfield 1963.

they always knew how "to tighten the screws" if somewhere it was necessary.

To be sure, people were so tired of everything being lax and loose they took that "tightening" not without relief<sup>150</sup>.

This was rarely so plainly stated. But Ryzhkov expresses a common sentiment held by bosses and, alas, by many ordinary human subjects as well. It can be interpreted as an aspect of moral superiority, or as paternalistic arrogance of those in power. In either case, it was a major aspect of the Party's vision of its moral crusade.

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<sup>150</sup> Op. cit. p.43-44.

### CHAPTER 3. THE EVOLVING TRADITION

At any point in the history of alcohol in the Soviet Union, drinking and alcohol-related phenomena bear the marks of various trends and often clashing influences. In describing the history of evolving drinking patterns, as well as corresponding perceptions and meanings, one can provide a comprehensive analysis of the nature of those phenomena. To try and understand things through their history has always been a valid approach, and in this particular case, it seems to me the best one.

This chapter presents a review of those factors that combined to produce unique results in the course of the 1985 reconstruction in the alcohol field in the USSR. These include the Russian national tradition of drinking and responding to it in terms of both government regulations and public opinion; the Bolshevik theoretical interpretation of the alcohol question; and the actual control policies as reflected in Soviet publications.

#### Traditional Russian Drinking

Among other things, Russia is famous for her love for vodka and Russians are famous for a special talent for drinking. Available data, historical and modern, support the image to a considerable extent (although reality pales next to the legend), but they also help to correct and to draw a more accurate picture.

In considering the Russian drinking tradition, it is almost impossible to avoid citing Prince Vladimir's fabled words (here in a rough translation): "Rus' knows the merriment of drinking, cannot be without it"<sup>1</sup>. Prior to 988 A.D., Russia had not joined a world religion. According to the chronicle, when abandoning paganism and weighing the two rival options, Prince Vladimir used those words to make public his final choice to adopt Christianity and not Islam, which forbids alcohol.

According to the known history of alcohol, the distillation process came about after the process of

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, which in the ancient original reads "Rusi est' veselie piti, ne mozhets bez togo byti", comes from Povest' vremennykh let, the medieval chronicle, which stands out as one of the few most treasured primary documents of Russian history. For centuries now, it has entered virtually every historically-minded account of drinking in Russia.

disintegration of the Kievan Russian state had been completed<sup>2</sup>; vodka was not known then. This is to say that the key ingredient to the Russian pattern of alcohol use and abuse was not yet there. Assuming the Grand Prince indeed stated that Russia's future was inconceivable without the joy of drinking<sup>3</sup>, he could not have been referring to the tradition which was to become famous.

From what is known today, it looks that not only vodka but the whole fashion of drinking, which many an author characterized as extremely problem-causing, had not evolved until much later.

Russian drinks include the universal beer, wine and liquor (vodka), plus the not too well known today mead, and braga and kvass - virtually unknown to Westerners.

The old sources routinely mention mead as the most common and/or most valuable drink of the time. Beer, in several versions, was also common. So was its relative braga (see below). Wine appears to be least known; grape wine had to be brought from remote lands and could not be common<sup>4</sup>.

Kostomarov and many other Russian authors attest that mead, made of honey (myod means both honey, which is the primary meaning of the word, and mead), was the most authentic and the best Russian drink (although it was known outside of Russia too). However, the recipe appears to have been lost a long time ago. Technologically complex and cost-ineffective, its production steadily declined over the centuries, losing ground to vodka and even beer and other drinks, including non-alcoholic ones; the 19th century was catastrophic for mead in Russia<sup>5</sup>.

Kvass remains to this day a very popular summer drink. The Russians consider it non-alcoholic, and so does every classification of food and drink based on chemistry and pharmacology - in contrast to Western

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Gregory Austin, Alcohol in Western History from Antiquity to 1800. A chronological history. Santa Barbara, CA, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> The historian of the Russian drink-shop introduces the phrase as "the words put by an ancient Russian letterman into Vladimir's mouth": (Pryzhov 1914/1868 p.10).

<sup>4</sup> See Pryzhov 1914/1886 p.7-18; Segal 1987 p.10-12.

<sup>5</sup> See Smith and Christian 1984 p.298-299, for a brief account in English. Particularly, "by 1896 total production [of commercial mead] was down to about 50,000 buckets [about 600 thousand liters], or less than 1% of beer production [meager itself in Russia]. Domestic mead production declined over the same period as a result of deforestation and the decline of bee-keeping, and the skills of mead-making slowly disappeared" (p.299).

students of Russian culture who seem to unilaterally believe that kvass is some sort of Russian beer<sup>6</sup>.

Braga is a low-grade yeast-based drink, a cheap home-made substitute for beer. Today, it is not popular as a drink, but its "half-way" version is used as raw material for moonshine<sup>7</sup>. Most people in today's Russia have an idea what braga is but many never tried and never saw it.

Vodka probably came to Russia in the 16th century, but distillation was so expensive that few could make it their drink of choice without completely ruining their welfare. Further, Russian governments, over a long period of time, imposed extensive restrictions on the drinking of vodka. About two centuries later, comparatively affordable hard liquor became one of the fruits of the technological revolution. The government, for its part, also made it more accessible at that time; in fact, the regulations and alcohol trade system strongly encouraged drinking, and specifically the drinking of vodka.

Since then, Russia has traditionally been and presently remains a country where the main form of alcohol intake is represented by the drinking of vodka. What is important to note is not that vodka contains 40% of alcohol, but the traditional way of drinking it, known as the "Slavic pattern" (as with any cliché, this one lacks accuracy). In 19th century accounts of alcoholism, this pattern of drinking was described through the following features.

First and foremost, drinking is done for the purpose of getting drunk. Second, drinking is done infrequently, with large amounts of alcohol being consumed on one occasion, for example, excessive indulgence on Saturday (this is opposed to moderate daily drinking in other cultures). Third, drinking is often done with little or no food - known in Russia as pit'ne zakusyvaya ("drinking without chewing", as far as it is translatable). Fourth, there is rather unequal participation of various groups in drinking, such that there are distinct and comparatively large subpopulations of heavy drinkers on the one hand, and non-drinkers on the

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<sup>6</sup> Which some versions of kvass apparently were - but centuries ago and quite definitely not today. One documented indication of that is provided by the 1985 Party Resolution on alcoholism. It mentions kvass among non-alcoholic alternatives to liquor; along with juices and mineral water, its production was supposed to "considerably increase" (Trezyost'..., p.7).

<sup>7</sup> Water with yeast and sugar left at a room temperature for one week to ten days yield the drinkable braga; after three to five days of the same process, the liquid is suitable for distillation. There are many variations to this basic recipe.

other. One important distinction for traditional Russia was based on gender: down-to-earth drinking men and hardly-ever drinking women (in fact, a drinking husband and an abstinent wife were usually pictured in pre-revolutionary emotional anti-alcohol essays). Fifth, there is the tradition of exposing rather than hiding one's state of inebriation, of being offensive and violent.

These features still apply to much of the drinking in contemporary Russia. The essential outcome of this type of consumption of alcohol is higher social costs, so to speak, per unit of consumed alcohol. For example, the level of 10 liters per capita of absolute (100%) alcohol in Russia, or Poland or Finland, may indicate a more severe social problem than 15 liters in France or Italy, where the traditional pattern of drinking is in many respects polar to the so-called Slavic pattern.

It probably takes a foreigner, like Simmel's "stranger", to perceive and describe the colorful picture of Russian drinking. Perhaps we Russians are so used to it, we assume that everybody knows what we are talking about when we talk about the most problem-causing aspects of our drinking behavior. This cultural belief is reflected in Russian literature. Maxim Gorky, in the classic Mother refers to things but does not depict them. To be more exact, there are two aspects in the life of pre-revolutionary workers that he presents as killing people's bodies and souls: hard work and heavy drinking. About the latter, he says:

The young people went to the taverns or to their friends' houses, where they played the accordion, sang ribald songs, danced, swore and got drunk. Worn out as they were by hard work, the drink went quickly to their heads, and some unaccountable irritation rankled in their breasts, demanding an outlet. ... On Sundays the young people came home in torn clothes, covered with dirt and mud, with black eyes and bloody noses...; they were drunk and pathetic, miserable and disgusting. ... [The elders] cursed their children and beat them mercilessly, but the fighting and drinking of young people was taken as a matter of course; when the fathers had been young they too had fought and drunk....<sup>8</sup>

Gorky perhaps assumes that the reader does not need a description of this form of drinking any more than one needs a description of, let us say, walking or breathing. In fact, about a hundred years later, the picture is still so painfully familiar, we hardly need a description.

On the other hand, one often finds the most detailed and shocked portrayals of Russian alcohol

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<sup>8</sup> M. Gorky, Mother. Translated from Russian by Margaret Wettlin. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, p.10-11.

excesses in writings by foreign visitors to Russia<sup>9</sup>. Historically there have been certain accounts that customarily enter both Russian-written and foreigner-written, old and recent, depictions of drinking in Russia. Amongst the most often quoted are observations by Giles Fletcher of England who observed kabaks in Moscow in 1588-99<sup>10</sup>, Olearius of the Holstein Embassy to Moscow in the next century<sup>11</sup>, Yurii Krizhanich (first via Pryzhov<sup>12</sup>), a Serbian priest who lived in Russia in the second half of the 17th century<sup>13</sup>. Similar depictions - incredibly wild, narrated in a mix of horror-and-admiration undertones - are found in observations by foreigners that never acquired much fame. Here is one which refers to the time of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05):

In Vladivostok I entered a cafe... filled with officers, the most of whom were drunk, - one old captain, so much so that he fell off his chair and slept, lying on the floor.... A quarrel had broken out. There was a regular explosion of revolvers and two officers, apparently wounded severely, were left lying<sup>14</sup>.

There are many other descriptions, by travellers of every origin and every tongue, and of every century since Russia came into existence, but all are rather similar in what they say. Some even noticed, in a sort of observation of an observation, that drunkenness was, indeed, too familiar a sight for the Russians to catch their attention, as in a 17th century account (among the famous ones) which states that the vice of drunkenness is prevalent among all classes in Russia, high and low, young and old, men and women; so much so that "to see them lying here and there in the streets, wallowing in filth, is so common that no notice is taken of it"<sup>15</sup>.

What the foreigners (along with the Russians) observed was naturally a product of a long history. That history has not gone unaddressed by Russian historians. "The feast [pir] was some sort of war of the host

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<sup>9</sup> There seems to be a steady pattern of quoting travelling foreigners on Russian drinking habits and excesses. See, for example, Christian 1990, Smith and Christian 1984, White 1996, Gordon 1916, Johnson 1915. It seems, every major book on Russian drinking employs those travellers' observations to sketch the big picture.

<sup>10</sup> Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, Harvard U. Press, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> S.H. Baron, ed. *The Travels of Olearius in 17th Century Russia*. Stanford U. Press, 1967. Hereafter: *Olearius*.

<sup>12</sup> See Pryzhov 1868.

<sup>13</sup> Yurii Krizhanich. *Politika*. Moscow: Akademkniga, 1965.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Gordon, *Russian Prohibition*. Westerville OH: American Issue, 1916, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> *The travels of Olearius in seventeenth-century Russia* (S.H. Baron, ed.), Stanford U. Press, 1967, p.144.

against the guests"<sup>16</sup>, writes N.I. Kostomarov, a prominent author who worked in the second half of the 19th century. His subject of interest was not drinking per se, but the history of home life and customs of the Russian people. Nothing suggests that Kostomarov's view of Russian drinking was evaluative; it seems that he neither condemned nor condoned it. He refers to the 16th and 17th centuries, which appears to be the time when the tradition of self-destructive, near-suicidal drinking began to take shape, or to become noticeable. So thought Pryzhov as well as some other pre-Soviet authors. Segal, who seems to have investigated the issue, asserts that the foreign travellers' accounts of drinking excesses in Muscovy were less frequent before that time but sharply increased beginning in the second half of the 16th century when the unseemly sight "struck all foreigners.... They reported drinking in Moscow to be far heavier than in any other country"<sup>17</sup>.

Much has changed since, and the tradition of playing host or handling alcohol has not remained one hundred percent intact. Particularly, the ways of life and drinking have become far more diverse. However, in its essentials, the tradition is very much alive and well. Segal seems to be going even further in asserting a similar but, in my view, somewhat exaggerated perception. He approaches the "Russian drinking patterns of the 19th-20th centuries" as a single stretch, making, apparently, no distinction between the two centuries or between pre-Soviet and Soviet drinking. On the other hand, he attests that the pattern of that period continued the earlier tradition, which included the old-style war of the host and guest, drinking duels, human warmth beside sudden aggressiveness, etc. Speaking more generally, drinking, in his opinion, was regarded as "an integral part of any form of any ceremony and any type of social communication"<sup>18</sup>. This and some other author's generalizations seem to be in conflict with known broader traits or circumstances of social life (which may be excusable for travellers but less so for researchers). For instance:

The 19th- and 20th-century Russians still preserved their ancestors' love for feasts and carousals. People came to life when the conversation turned to drinking and when they saw liquors on the table. ... But the most striking... [was] the fact that the urge for severe intoxication often predominated over hedonistic aims of drinking. ...Drinking was still characterized by a tendency to become intoxicated as described by Fletcher,

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<sup>16</sup> N.I. Kostomarov. Sobranie sochinenii [Collection of Works] vol.19. Saint-Petersburg: Stasyulevich, 1905, p.108.

<sup>17</sup> Segal 1987, p.31.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit. p.139.



Mayerberg, Olearius, Krizhanich and other observers of the 16th-18th centuries (a symptom considered by Jellinek and some other researchers as one of the criteria of alcoholism).

Rarely did men of the lower classes stop with the dose that produced euphoria without distinct behavioral and motor disturbances....<sup>19</sup>.

There is, indeed, no historical or other evidence to support these speculations about "the lower classes", that is, a vast majority of the population at the time. It is not credible that the quotation above could be true about virtually all population, even though many sources point to frequent drinking excesses and permissive attitudes among Russians. For one, Kostomarov interprets the meaning of drink for Russians as follows:

The Russians attributed to drinking indulgence some heroic meaning. In the old songs, the gallantry of a knight [doblest' bogatirya] was measured by the ability to outdrink the others.... Jubilation, love, kindness expressed themselves in wine<sup>20</sup>. If a [social] superior wished to indicate his favoritism to an inferior, he offered him wine, and the latter did not dare to refuse; cases have been known when a nobleman, for sport, had a simpleman drink, who... kept drinking until he fell down unconscious or even died. ... A Russian ambassador to Sweden in 1608 immortalised himself through pumping himself up with strong wine before the very eyes of outlanders, and dying as the result<sup>21</sup>.

One, however, has to remember that for the overwhelming majority, well over the 90% mark of the population (based on the fact that even on the eve of the First World War, more than 90% still were peasants), drinking was limited to the altar and throne holidays (prestol'nye prazdniki) and very special family occasions: a wedding, a christening, and few other infrequent celebrations<sup>22</sup>.

#### Alcohol Economy and the Shaping of the Vodka-Drinking Pattern, or the Key Terms

The key words for the history of drinking in Russia, as most or all experts would probably agree, are vodka, kabak (drinking shop), monopoly along with its eternal quasi-alternative *otkup* (the farming-out system

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<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. p.139-140.

<sup>20</sup> The old meaning of "wine" [vino] in Russian included vodka and other alcoholic beverages. My sense is that the broad, non-specific use of the word "vino" in the past is somewhat analogous to the old-fashioned use of the word "brandy" in English.

Today, in non-specific context, especially in a poetic line or a lofty speech, the word is still often used as a generic term for alcohol or euphoria.

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. p.110.

<sup>22</sup> See for more: Pryzhov 1868, Segal 1987 (esp. p.35-36), Christian 1990.

of trade), and, as a counterpoint, sobriety.

These terms are also key to the depiction of the emergence of the modern drinking tradition in Russia. They are all intimately interrelated; to explain any single term, except vodka in the narrow sense of a substance, one will need to consider all the others. To address vodka as more than just a substance, that is, to consider its part in Russian drinking, would also be impossible without much reference to the kabak and otkup and monopoly. The terms, except sobriety, are addressed in what follows. The sobriety movement in Russia is addressed in Chapter 6.

#### Vodka.

Since vodka presents the key ingredient to the Russian mode of alcohol consumption, it merits at least a brief special consideration. The standard vodka ("the normal", "the good vodka", as so many practitioners in Russia would put it) is supposed to consist of 40% alcohol and 60% water. That is, ideally. The degree to which an actual product approximates the ideal in terms of chemical purity is the measure of its quality. In the sense of being one among quite a few forms of distilled spirits,

vodka is similar to other distilled grain alcohols such as schnapps or gin. What distinguishes vodka is its purity. In theory, ordinarily, unflavoured vodka consists of nothing but grain alcohol diluted with water<sup>23</sup>.

For the drinker it means no color and as little smell or taste as possible. In a sense, these criteria are the reverse of the quality criteria for other beverages: you will appreciate wine that gives you scents of grape, or cognac that carries "the sun" of the harvest and the flavor of the oak - but you will hate any noticeable deviation from sterility in vodka.

A Dr. G.A. Blosfel'd presented his observations in the last century:

Good bread (khlebnaya) vodka should be as clear as spring water; it... should not have a burnt or excessively tart flavor.... When lit, it should burn with a blue flame, leaving pure, flavorless water. When drunk by healthy individuals, such vodka should have no unpleasant side-effects. There should be no giddiness or headaches, no excessive acidity in the stomach, and no sense of lassitude, depression, anger or rage<sup>24</sup>.

Mendeleev, the greatest Russian chemist of the 19th century, has been remembered, probably, above

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<sup>23</sup> Christian 1990, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Zapiski po chasti vrachebnykh nauk, St. Petersburg, 1846, book 2, part 1, p.134.

all for the composition of the (Mendeleev's) Table of Chemical Elements. But he also left for posterity a piece of research which is so fitting for a Russian and is dearly remembered by some grateful descendants. Mendeleev, in fact, devoted much time to the research of spirits<sup>25</sup>. Particularly, he is believed to be the first to scientifically establish that the 40% mark is the right alcohol content for human consumption. Effectively, this means that 40% is the limit above which spirits cause dehydration in a human body<sup>26</sup>.

The introduction of vodka to the Russian table marked the transition from "pre-history" to a modern history of drink in Russia, and shaped the tradition as it has been preserved to this day. There are historical documents of the 16th century that mention vodka, and most historians, both Russian and foreign, believe that distilled spirits were not known there much earlier. The earliest suggested age of its first arrival in Russia is the 14th century<sup>27</sup> - but this has been commonly dismissed, particularly in recent historical works on the subject. That vodka came to Russia in the 16th century, was stated in the last century by the knowledgeable Pryzhov (1868), so do such contemporaries as Smith and Christian (1984)<sup>28</sup>, Christian (1990)<sup>29</sup>, White (1996)<sup>30</sup>.

Vodka was definitely known in Russia by the middle of the 16th century, because it is mentioned in the 1545 order by Tsar Ivan IV (alias Ivan the Terrible) to establish, in Moscow, a special vodka-drinking place, called kabak (drink-shop, a special drinking facility), for his personal guard (oprichniki)<sup>31</sup>. The manner in which Pryzhov presents these historic events suggests strongly that vodka had been well known in Russia

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<sup>25</sup> See D.Mendeleev, ed. Tekhnologia po Vagneru, 3 vol., Saint Petersburg, 1862.

<sup>26</sup> See Alkulemetria, ili opredelenie dostoinstva spirtov in Mendeleev 1862 vol.3, p.351-431.

<sup>27</sup> The most recent assertion of this kind has been made by Segal (1987 p.12).

<sup>28</sup> R.E.F. Smith and David Christian. Bread and Salt (A social and economic history of food and drink in Russia). Cambridge U. Press, 1984 p.88-90, 101-105.

<sup>29</sup> David Christian. Living Water. Vodka and Russian society on the eve of emancipation. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. This book stands out as by far the most thorough work, in English or any other language, on the subject of vodka, its trade and other important dimensions of alcohol-related history of the pre-revolutionary Russia. George E. Snow, another expert in the field, introduces Christian's work as a "splendid monograph", "a masterpiece of social history written by a master of the genre" (Snow 1992 p.39, 42).

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. p.11, 192 (endnote 44).

<sup>31</sup> I.G.Pryzhov [1868] Istoria kabakov v Rossii v svyazi s istoriei russkago naroda [The History of the Kabak in Russia in Relation to the History of the Russian People] Kazan, 1914 p.44. Pryzhov, in fact, does not cite any source, nor does he tell where the story comes from, but historians continue to quote the passage without question.

for some time before that: "Having returned from near Kazan' [in 1545], Ivan IV forbade vodka trade in Moscow, allowing solely the oprichniks to drink it; and for their orgies, he built... [by the Moscow-River] a special house, called in Tatar kabak"<sup>32</sup>.

Russians did not invent vodka - contrary to what so many sources say, including some quite respectable. Encyclopaedia Britannica, to quote one, in its entry "VODKA" states: "The word means 'little water', a diminutive, endearing term. Vodka was first produced in Russia in the 14th century"<sup>33</sup>.

The above is incorrect on every account and seems to follow fables rather than historical or linguistic sources. Vodka does not mean "little water", was not first produced in Russia, and was not even known there in the 14th century.

Historically, vodka probably was, many centuries ago, related to voda, the Russian for water. States Pryzhov: "Grain brandy [khleбноe vino], when first came to Europe, was named water of life [voda zhizni], aqua vitae.... The Serbs and North-Eastern Rus' called it water [...vodoi]..."<sup>34</sup>. Christian 1990 cites an etymological dictionary to establish a relationship between vodka and voda (i.e. water)<sup>35</sup>. Nevertheless, the

<sup>32</sup> Pryzhov 1914/1868 p.44. His Chapter V (p.40-45) is on the first kabak in Moscow and Russia. Its title, without an explanation of the ostensible contradiction to the text, cites "circa 1555" as the date. Whether it is a misprint or it could have taken so long as perhaps ten years to erect that house for the first kabak, appears to have never been satisfactorily clarified. However, further in the book, Pryzhov has a chapter with this title: "XII. Rasprostranenie kabakov s 1552 g. do nachala XVIII veka" (p.103) - "The spread-out of kabaks from 1552 to the beginning of the 18th century". In the opening of this chapter, he says in passing: "We have seen that circa 1552 in all of the Moscovia Tsardom there was only one big tsarev kabak, situated in Moscow" (p.103). And still further just about the same word for word: "Circa 1552, in the whole Moscovia Tsardom... there was only one kabak..." (p.260), though, again, with no reference to sources. All of which, apparently, suggests that the first kabak was open some years after the 1545 supreme order, but no later than the early 1550s.

<sup>33</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica vol.23, 1971, p.96. There is also a popular Polish version of the same misunderstanding; it is identical to the Russian one, only with a replacement of Russia/Russian by Poland/Polish and with a minor variation in spelling: voda - wodka rather than voda - vodka. The Polish colleagues interviewed on the issue unanimously affirm the ill-conceived nature of the hypothesis.

<sup>34</sup> Pryzhov 1914 (1868) p.44, f/n.

<sup>35</sup> Christian 1990 p.1: "The word vodka is a diminutive of voda, the Slavonic word for 'water'. ...It hints that vodka may be, in some sense, the quintessence of water, its very heart. ... Such imagery gives vodka no more than its due". The corresponding footnote in the original reads as follows: "The Russian vodka may be a calque from the Polish wodka (itself a diminutive of voda), which had acquired the sense of 'distilled grain alcohol' under the influence of the Latin aqua vitae. N.M. Shanskii, Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo yazyka (Moscow,

association has been long lost; these days, vodka reminds Russians of water no more than, for example, whiskey does; Russians do not think of vodka as "little water", and there is nothing diminutive or particularly endearing about the word<sup>36</sup>.

### The Kabak

Kabak, speaking technically, is a house where people gather for drinking. But it is infinitely more than that. Kabak is one of those very special words that have the fate of becoming, by some twist of history and language or other, a token for the national character. On another plane, it is as big a part of Russian history as the Russian church.

There is an essay on the history of the kabak, titled Istoria kabakov v Rossii v svyazi s istoriei russkago naroda [The History of the Kabak in Russia in relation to history of the Russian people] published in 1868. According to a recent assertion, "The first and, essentially, the last attempt to present the development of drinking houses and customs as a reflection of the history of Russian society was that of the Russian dissident, Ivan Pryzhov..."<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, Pryzhov's book stands out as a unique study of Russian drinking in its development over a period of about a thousand years, from the beginning of the Russians as a distinct ethnos and the inception of the Ancient Russian state to the mid-nineteenth century (it ends at the 1863 reform in the national alcohol economy). If there is a monograph which deserves fully the attention of the student of this topic, The History of the Kabak... certainly is the one. And it appears that not much substance has been added to the history of the kabak since.

Pryzhov stated later that, in fact, he had produced two more volumes on the kabak - but: "To publish now such a book would amount to ratting against the people, would amount to robbing the people of its last refuge... - so I burned up those two volumes"<sup>38</sup>.

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1963) vol.III".

<sup>36</sup> The only regular, and commonly used, diminutive for voda (water) in modern Russian is vodichka. A somewhat old-fashioned voditsa may have an endearing connotation when speaking of water. But never can a diminutive of it be vodka. Vodka can only mean vodka. It has its own diminutives and "endearings", such as vodochka and vodyara, but these too are not associated with water.

<sup>37</sup> Segal 1987 p.XV.

<sup>38</sup> I.G. Pryzhov. Minuvshie gody, vol.II, p.60-61.

An extra stimulus for the reader can be the personality of the author whose biography well may serve as a prototype for a fictional character. That Segal should have called Pryzhov a dissident surprised me as a peculiar choice of words, for in my day Soviet dissidents for the most part were known as the vocal part of Soviet (and Russian, of course) intelligentsia which stood vigorously against everything Pryzhov had stood for. "Dissident" is explained in a dictionary of modern American English as "person who disagrees"<sup>39</sup>. So a political dissident must be someone who disagrees with the contemporary political order (and freely admits it). Pryzhov was far more and far different than just that, and the anti-government stand is where the similarities between him and the Soviet dissidents end.

In 1869, the next year after the publication of his famous book, Pryzhov joined four other members, including S.G. Nechaev, the head of the deep-underground revolutionary organization Narodnaya rasprava, "The People's Execution", to murder another member of the organization. They were all young, very well read and educated, and ready for whatever it took to change Russia, which included bloody methods that were absolutely foreign to the dissidents. Pryzhov was a close comrade of Nechaev, who was preparing an "all-crushing people's revolution" which would eliminate the state and classes in Russia. The organization consisted of a number of quintets of warriors. When one of them wanted to quit the organization, Nechaev decided to kill him.

Fedor Dostoevsky, who himself had a first-rate official record of underground revolutionary activism and years of the Tsar's katorga (penal servitude) behind him, was among Russians to whom the news came as a shock. The "Nechaev process" (so called even though Nechaev was not in court: he fled and took refuge abroad) revealed an anatomy of the secret society that very few liked. The "Nechaevites" became a proverbial term for anti-humanism stemming from equating oneself with super-human knowledge of all the rights and wrongs and of all the perfect ways to build the ideal society. The events are believed to have profoundly influenced Dostoevsky; criticism of Nechaevism is believed to have become the quintessence of one of the

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<sup>39</sup> Hornby A.S. Oxford ESL Dictionary. For students of American English. Oxford University Press, 1991, p.174.

most popular Dostoevsky's novels, The Possessed<sup>40</sup>, in the original, Besy<sup>41</sup>.

In the one-page foreword to his book, Pryzhov asks why Russian people drank so bitterly, and suggests a very definite answer: out of misery (s gorya); drinking was their way to protest against the society<sup>42</sup>. Poor life and hard work, on the one side, and the government's conscious policy of drinking the people down (spaivanie), helped by the shameless Jews and Poles, on the other hand, was the overall picture he presented. The kabak in that picture had a prominent place. It was where people went to drown their sorrows and to express themselves - which had a paramount importance particularly in Russian life because of its special misery.

According to Pryzhov, both vodka and the kabak came to Russia in the 16th century. The passage quoted above on the 1545 order by Ivan the Terrible is not, of course, very specific with respect to the time of the coming of vodka to Russia but rather definitely states that it was then that the first kabak was set up; that is, soon after 1545, or "ca. 1552", as Pryzhov puts it on a couple of occasions. By default, it reads as no kabaks in Russia earlier than 1545<sup>43</sup>

A source of 1579, cited by Pryzhov, says that it had been ordered to keep kabaks and serve there vino<sup>44</sup>, mead and beer - but no food. Pryzhov remarks:

We know that among the [Ancient] Greeks and Romans, among the Teutons and even Tatars - everywhere the drinking houses were at the same time also eating houses. Such was the Old Slavic korchma, too. Now, in the Rus', special houses were started where you could only drink, but could not eat. The monstrous inception of those drinking houses would reverberate throughout all the consequent history of the people...<sup>45</sup>

Kabaks were made the only place where drinking was allowed. Particularly starting in the 17th

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<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Budanova N. "Roman Dostoevskogo 'Besy'" in Dostoevsky F.M. Besy, Moscow, Hudlit, 1990, p.3-20, particularly, p.3-8.

<sup>41</sup> Bes is one of the devil's aliases in Russian. Another curiosity is that Pryzhov's alias in the organization was Chertov, which comes directly from chert, the main name for the Evil One.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit. p.3.

<sup>43</sup> Apparently, Segal was in error in his assertion that the beginning of the 14th century opened the era of the tsar's kabak's domination (1987, p.18).

<sup>44</sup> Given the context, I believe, "vino" was very likely to include vodka; perhaps, it even might have meant vodka rather than wine.

<sup>45</sup> Op. cit. p.45.

century, a sort of special kabak police was established which had nearly unlimited powers and enough sleuths and soldiers to search everywhere, including private households. They brought "violence, shame and insult to the moral dignity of people"<sup>46</sup>.

The name "kabak" would every now and then sound offensive to the government's sensitive ears, and they would try - apparently with no long-lasting effects - to replace it with a less disreputable word. In 1746, "They again began taking notice that the word kabak produced a vile impression, and... it was ordered to inscribe on the posters near kabaks: Drinking House [Piteinyi dom]..."<sup>47</sup>.

In the 17th century, another kind of drinking houses came around: the kharchevnya, sort of simple restaurants which, it appears, were state owned and which Pryzhov characterizes as "quite in the spirit of the people"<sup>48</sup>, probably because people there both drank and ate. But soon the otkup changes it, and the Jews<sup>9</sup> began to take over the otkup<sup>50</sup>.

Further on, the author pays so much attention to the Jews and, to a degree, Poles, and expresses so much joy about killing Poles and then Jews, as in Khmel'nitsky's riot and on some other occasions ("the Ukraine got cleaned up, not a single zhid [was] left alive"), it makes one think the author is truly possessed by some cannibalistic, human-eating spirit, and that, probably, it was no accident Pryzhov was in Nechaev's crew and killed people himself. It would be hard to tell, without applying a special comparative study, whether his book or Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler breathes out more anti-semitic hatred (matched in both cases by great, if twisted, love for the respective author's own people).

Towards the end of his book, Pryzhov gets to the time of his own life, or very close, that is, mid-19th century, which was eventful for Russia in many ways. By that time, he observes with pain, "The Great Russian people had, little by little, developed a new rule of life, that was, no drinking meant no living in the world"<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. p.71.

<sup>47</sup> Op. cit. p.219.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. p.124.

<sup>49</sup> The actual word is zhidy, the Russian equivalent of "Kikes" today, though, probably, not quite as derogatory in his day, and definitely not so in the 17th or 18th centuries.

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. p.146 and on.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. p.233.



Major policy shifts.

Monopoly - otkup - monopoly - otkup.... This represents much of the history of Russian state policies in the alcohol field from the 16th century to 1914. The state monopoly was resumed in the 1920s by the Bolsheviks - in a considerably modified form, of course. It lived throughout the Soviet period. Some of its features were shared with the monopolies before the Revolution, particularly, with the last one which started in 1894. Some other major features were specifically Soviet. Today, in 1997, the present policy is a form of state monopoly, too.

To put the discussion of liquor trade in pre-Soviet Russia into perspective, two historical circumstances are necessary to mention. One is that for Russia the 16th century was still the early age of absolute monarchy, suffice it to say that the end of the Tartar Yoke is officially dated as late as 1480, when Moscow discontinued tributes to the Golden Horde. And even as late as the 17th century, when revolutions against feudalism had already occurred in Holland and England, Russia had yet to mature as a nation and as a state. For that, it needed more political and economic power: not the least, the state needed some substantial revenue.

The other circumstance has to do with the manner in which the Russian state and its sources of revenue were organized at the time. One has to bear in mind that the alcohol trade was by no means the only or a rare field for the state to run as a monopoly. The salt monopoly is another peculiarity Russia was famous for, and another example of a centuries-long unique institution. Until the mid-nineteenth century, salt brought more silver to the Treasury than alcohol<sup>52</sup>. Other monopolies did not survive that long but they did exist in abundance for quite some time<sup>53</sup>. On the whole, long before Soviet time, Russia, by the standards of place and time, was a country of an unusually centralized economy (for a European country), a fat and powerful central bureaucracy, a rigid social structure, and a lawless state<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> See Christian 1990 p.5.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Smith and Christian 1984.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson 1915 provides another insight of a stranger, this time on those broader issues, drawing comparisons between Russia and Western Europe and North America. The fact that he defined Russia as the most centralized country on earth before it entered its Soviet period makes his analysis, in my view, even more

The issue of the monopoly/otkup one more time brings us back to the episode of the establishment of the first kabak in Moscow by Ivan the Terrible in the mid-sixteenth century, for the episode happens to be the first step the Tsar made to build up the state monopoly system of the alcohol trade. As said above, the kabak was far more than just a peculiar drinking house. Most importantly, it was an institution, set up not to peacefully co-exist with the earlier forms of liquor trade but to displace and to eventually supplant them.

Later, the crown set up more kabaks through Muscovy, simultaneously enforcing the ban upon other drinking establishments and, far more consequentially, upon every alcohol retailer other than the crown. The system was not always the same, but had in its foundation one constant: a state monopoly over the sale of alcohol coupled with a state-regulated and licensed private production of alcohol. The distilling of vodka was entrusted to only the better citizens, the gentry above all. The other side of the system - vital to its functioning - was that most of the alcohol production and all of its sale in any form outside the system was either tightly regulated or banned, and backed up by brutal, crushing enforcement.

Otkup - the system of farming the retail sale of the commodity in question out to the highest bidder - was another way to run this trade. In Russia, the farming-out of the alcohol trade had a colorful history, in fact, far more colorful and longer lasting, than that of the monopoly proper<sup>55</sup>. But the otkup did not really demonopolize the trade; some authors even consider the differences between the two secondary and regard them as versions of the state monopoly. Segal, for example, treats the otkup as an indirect monopoly: "Sometimes the Treasury exercised these rights [i.e. the monopoly over the sale of alcohol] directly; at other times it farmed them out"<sup>56</sup>. The otkup might have been and probably was more entrepreneurial than the state monopoly but neither system had much to do with the free market.

With the exception of the 1863-1894 excise system, the policies shifted back and forth for centuries between the monopoly and the otkup; it was not at all unusual that the two co-existed for long periods of time. 

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remarkable.

<sup>55</sup> The word otkup has long outlived the institution of otkup. In the modern day Russia, people customarily use the phrase otdat' na otkup - to allow a subordinate or a free-lancer to run something with broad powers and limited accountability - without thinking and often without knowing the history behind the expression.

<sup>56</sup> Segal 1987 p.98 - restating Fridman Vinnaya monopolia, Petrograd, 1916.

According to David Christian,

...In the seventeenth century, tax farming existed alongside the state administration of kabaks. Indeed, the two systems overlapped. ...

The government wavered between the two systems for the next two and a half centuries. During the 264 years after the accession of Tsar Boris Godunov in 1598 [i.e. until 1863 when the excise system was introduced], mixed systems were used for 131 years, the tax farm dominated for 89 years..., and the state attempted to administer and tax the trade directly during 44 years. So some form of tax farming was in existence for 220 of the 264 years...<sup>57</sup>.

As elsewhere, the goal of every shift, and every adjustment of either system, was to find the elusive balance between the state's unquenchable thirst for greater revenue and, on the other side, the necessity to avoid consequences of drinking which could render the population dysfunctional. As elsewhere, the balance proved hard to find or sustain, with the tendency of the former to overpower the latter, though it did not everywhere prove to be impossible<sup>58</sup>. But it seems that more so than in most other countries, all imaginable extremes took place in Russia. Indeed, Russia stands out as a country whose alcohol policies were exceptionally malign - just another example of its rulers' total disregard for their own people.

I will focus on the later history of these policies to serve the purpose of this work. For the sake of overall clarity, I think, the chronological table below will be helpful. The table includes only major policy shifts.

1545:

The order by Ivan IV to limit vodka trade in Moscow to the kabak.

This went far beyond of an opening of a drinking place. It meant an establishment of an institution of great historical significance. What followed immediately after this order, is thus presented in the words of the angry Pryzhov: "And now they [the Tsar's men] began writing places, in order to establish kabaks"<sup>59</sup>.

1649:

"The claim to a government monopoly was asserted clearly in the great law code, or Ulozhenie of 1649. This made it illegal to sell or buy vodka except through kabaks, and prescribed savage punishments for offenders, including torture. All revenues from the sale of alcoholic drinks were henceforth reckoned in law to be part of the royal regalia"<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Op. cit. p.32-33.

<sup>58</sup> As logic suggests and particular policies of our time show, the fiscal interest does not have to be in conflict with the control of alcohol consumption. The province of Ontario, I suppose, would qualify for such a case.

<sup>59</sup> Op. cit. p.45.

<sup>60</sup> Christian 1990 p.28.

1650s - '60s:

First, there was a ban on all commercial distilling except under government contract. Soon after, to restrict non-commercial production of vodka as well, the non-noble classes were forbidden "to distil even for purely domestic use"<sup>61</sup>. These steps meant a complete government monopoly over commercial distilling and an almost complete ban on non-commercial production of hard liquor.

1705:

Peter the Great makes otkup a major system of taxation for the alcohol trade.

1765:

Catherine the Great makes it the system.

1819-1827:

Direct monopoly of the state over liquor trade, under Alexander I.

1827-1862:

Back to the otkup, after the monopoly's failure.

1863-94:

The excise system.

1894:

Count Witte starts his reform, back to monopoly. The system known as the "Witte monopoly" was put in place gradually over a number of years.

1914:

A dry law is introduced in the Empire "for the duration of warfare" (upheld by the Bolsheviks till about mid-1920s).

1925:

The last remnants of the Dry Law are scrapped. The Soviet state monopoly on both sale and production of alcohol is fully in place. The system's core remained intact all through the Soviet time.

1992:

The first post-Soviet President of Russia Yeltsin discontinues the state alcohol monopoly. The government introduces a free market for alcohol. The industry becomes what is called in North America "deregulated". This was done a few months after the initial overall "liberalization of prices" had got under way (it started the "shock therapy" early in 1992).

11 June 1993:

Russian President Yeltsin issues the Decree "On Restoration of the State Monopoly in the Trade of Alcoholic Beverages". The stated objective was a return to the monopoly not of the Soviet but rather of the pre-Soviet type. *In terms of enforcement, the Decree has been a freely admitted full-scale failure; it is said to have in practice "changed absolutely nothing".*

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<sup>61</sup> Christian 1990 p.28.

The otkup.

Pryzhov states the otkup had a noticeable pre-history before it became the darling of the Treasury. But its real growth began along with the Ivan IV's policy of forcefully spreading the kabak network all over the land. "Along with the kabaks", he states,

the otkup came about. The example of the otkup system might have been borrowed from Byzantium where the emperors had since the old times farmed the [trade in] beverages out; or from the Tatars. ... The first trace of the otkup we find back in 1240 in the Galitsk territory.... Moscow, too, had known the otkup<sup>62</sup>.

Pryzhov quite obviously blamed the otkup system for the widespread drunkenness he observed. Among other things, he was angry at the enormous concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few who ran the liquor trade (so to speak, so few who sold so much to so many):

All the otkup-runners, who were head of the drinking business for a population of 70 million, in 1859-1863 numbered up to the total of two hundred sixteen people<sup>63</sup>.

According to Pryzhov, the otkup auction for 1859-62 (the actual event of farming-out: it was administered every four years) brought the sum total for the Treasury up to almost 128 million rubles, "which amounted to 40% of the total of the state revenue.... The liquor revenue of the crown increased 335 times over the 140 years of the existence of the otkup"<sup>64</sup>. The other interested party, that is, those who ran the business got immensely rich. Pryzhov cites estimates - which "do not include the huge amounts stolen by otkup-runners" - from 500 to 781 million rubles per annum<sup>65</sup>, i.e. averaging about 5 times as much as the cash flow to the Treasury or, based on his numbers, about 2 times as much as the total revenue of the state at the time.

At some point, Pryzhov's narration becomes unexpectedly very reminiscent of something else, from another time and place, but, too, related to the art of running the liquor trade.

...The farmer above all tried to please the officials, and... as a salary, on certain days, sent them money and vodka. ... Besides, on their payroll otkup-runners had very nearly the whole police department<sup>66</sup>.

Next, he places a table of payments from an otkup-runner's book-keeping which only in minor details

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<sup>62</sup> Op. cit. p.45.

<sup>63</sup> Op. cit. p.241.

<sup>64</sup> Op. cit. p.240-241.

<sup>65</sup> Op. cit. p.241.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit. p.241.

differs from essentially the same picture one finds in accounts of, for instance, Al Capone's infrastructural costs<sup>67</sup>.

Pryzhov pictures the late years of this otkup system as being ugly as sin, and he is not alone there. The abolition of the otkup in the early 1860s, as part of the dramatic reformation of society by Alexander II, was praised, although it is hard to say how genuinely, even by such a critical observer as Ivan G. Pryzhov: "The liquidation of the otkup constitutes the best page of the present Reign"<sup>68</sup>.

Towards the end of the otkup era (which happens to almost coincide with the end of the serfdom), that is, by the 1850s, the proceeds from liquor trade - both to the Treasury and the otkup-runners - were growing astronomically. This was in close relation to an unheard-of increase in prices, which, in turn, brought an unprecedented devastation to peasant communities. During a few years, especially in 1859, Russia saw an explosion of anti-otkup anger which manifested itself in massive collective oaths of sobriety and also in anti-drink riots in many territories across the land<sup>69</sup>.

#### The state monopoly proper

There were two periods of a direct state monopoly over alcohol trade after 1800. Before that, the monopoly, in contrast to the otkup, did not have much of a pre-history. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, there was some movement against the otkup system of that time. Probably, at least in part, the anti-otkup sentiment of the time was one reason why Tsar Alexander I abolished the otkup and decreed a state monopoly in 1819<sup>70</sup>.

Segal presents the major regulations of the short-lived monopoly as follows:

...Spirits [were to] be produced in plants operated by the Treasury and sold in Treasury-operated warehouses. The number of licenses granted to private persons for the production of vodka was limited. Retail sales were permitted only in a restricted number of drinking houses. The result... was that [vodka sales] diminished and

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Fred D. Pasley, Al Capone: the biography of a self-made man, Freeport, NY, Books for Libraries Press, 1971/1930.

<sup>68</sup> Op. cit. p.251. Curiously enough, the quoted line should also mean, by default, that the liquidation of the serfdom was not for Pryzhov "the best page" of the Reign of Alexander II.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>70</sup> See Johnson 1915 p.113-115; Christian 1990 p.197-199, 208-211.

government revenues decreased<sup>71</sup>.

Narrates Pryzhov:

So in 1827 the otkup was again resumed. Count Kankrin wrote: 'Although when the crown ran the liquor trade the revenue for the Treasury was augmented (from 52 to 67 millions), ... all the abuses... often were interpreted as a direct fault of the government, and the guild of (government) officials was becoming corrupt'...<sup>72</sup>.

Every author appears to agree that the brief experiment with a monopoly under Alexander I was a failure. Not so the second and last one, the Witte monopoly of 1894-1914. This was not entirely unlike the Soviet monopoly. Count Sergei Witte stated from the outset that the government should place the anti-drunkenness considerations first and the fiscal ones second. In his memoirs, Witte maintained, "During my whole service in the government, the goal of the liquor monopoly... was to help lower drinking"<sup>73</sup>. However, the monetary dimension could not be forgotten. Witte thought it natural to try and increase revenue by rising prices, by removing private hands from this trade, and - the quintessence of his approach - changing the pattern of Russian drinking, especially among the lower classes, from drinking in excess at intervals to drinking the same average amounts, or perhaps even more, in a regular, cultured fashion, thus causing less drunkenness. As Segal comments on this reform's results, "The fact that the workers drank more regularly did not mean that their drinking pattern had become moderate"<sup>74</sup>.

#### The uncharacteristic policy: Excise, 1863-94

If one indeed chose to judge an alcohol trade system on the basis of "less drinking problems first and revenue after", the thirty years of excise in Russia would have to be championed. It reduced drinking and its excesses while at the same time had no drop in state revenue from this source (in absolute numbers). The excise system was not without controversy either, but on the strength of the above criteria it must be viewed as a success.

Two major authors have been critical, each in his own way,

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<sup>71</sup> Segal 1987 p.81, with a reference to Fridman 1916.

<sup>72</sup> Op. cit. p.230.

<sup>73</sup> S.Yu. Witte [1914] *Vospominania*. Moscow: Socekgiz, 1960, vol.2, p.84.

<sup>74</sup> Segal 1987 p.105.

of this system. Says Pryzhov,

Early morning on the first of January 1863, the new excise system launched its work, and the cheap vodka left over from the otkup, was christened by the name deshevka [cheap stuff, cheapie]<sup>75</sup>.

...

In spite of the abolition of the otkup, people had no place where they could eat..., the resort for the people, again, remained the kabak alone and not the kharchevnya...<sup>76</sup>.

Segal presents the 30 years of excise in a contradictory fashion. His initial analysis on p.89-96 he opens by stating the following:

Under the excise system, the price of vodka fell by 50 or 60%... with the consequent increase in sales. Another factor in the increased consumption [note!] of vodka was undoubtedly the liberation of the serfs<sup>77</sup>.

Then Segal discusses at length the whys and hows of alleged increase in vodka consumption, while the data available clearly shows the opposite to be the case. Incredibly, after having done everything within a writer's power to give the reader the (false) impression that drinking and drunkenness were always on the rise in Russia, Segal refutes himself (in passing, when approaching another issue):

During the excise system period the annual consumption of vodka (at 40% alcohol) declined from 1.23 pails per capita in 1863<sup>78</sup> to 0.52 pail in 1893-94. These numbers evidently reflected a real decline, even when corrected [how?] for the consumption of illicit alcohol<sup>79</sup>.

Furthermore, the author presents a table for vodka consumption in the Empire for 1863-86 which shows a gradual decrease in consumption over those two decades of the excise, down to 0.58 in 1886. Whether one accepts the record 1.23 rate for 1863 or ignores it, the data look sufficient to disprove the initial assertion on p.89 that consumption of vodka increased under the excise system.

#### Enforcement.

Pryzhov, who obviously thought Kievan Rus' a perfect world, asserts that there was then a freedom without limit in making beverages at home:

Everyone brewed for himself the tipsy drinks, beer, braga and mead, as much as was needed for his own use;

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<sup>75</sup> Op. cit. p.267.

<sup>76</sup> Op. cit. p.254.

<sup>77</sup> Segal 1987 p.89.

<sup>78</sup> That is, close to 15 liters, by far the highest rate for that period cited by any author.

<sup>79</sup> Op. cit. p.104.



on some occasions, the drinks were brewed by families, by the community [mir]<sup>80</sup>.

However, in later centuries, according to Pryzhov, life had changed for the worse. For example, ...In 1740, it was suggested... to dig up a wall around [Moscow].... The otkup-runners assumed the next year the charge..., and along all its length they set soldiers. Our grandfathers and even fathers remembered well how anyone who would traverse the wall over was at once put down and flogged with whips<sup>81</sup>.

As for the other capital, "Round Petersburg..., for eradicating the korchemstvo (the illegal keeping of drinking houses), were established turnpikes guarded by military brigades"<sup>82</sup>. Was that sort of enforcement sufficient? Not quite, according to Pryzhov:

In general, it was the rule at that time that on any occasion of violation of the liquor interests [of the crown] no excuses were accepted and punishment followed.... But korchemstvo never ceased: they did it in every town or village, in every house.... Catherine in secret... admitted that there were so many guilty of korchemstvo it was hardly possible to punish them...<sup>83</sup>.

He also cites a police report of 1848 from the Smolensk gubernia (province):

'...in 277 villages... nearly all the inhabitants without exception were into korchemstvo, smuggled liquor [vino]..., armed with wood-pikes and rifles..., and not only did they forcefully resist the action of the korchma guards and military squad but got frequently engaged in a crossfire with them, and would be the first to attack. ...The lax attitude of the local police formations became in many cases obvious<sup>84</sup>.

Nevertheless, the overall picture appears to be a success rather than a failure of enforcement. According to Christian, "In the long run, the government's policing of its monopoly over distilling seems to have been remarkably effective"<sup>85</sup>. One may wonder if this is credible: How could those regulations of the past be enforced while we know of the failures of our time? Is not it much easier to police in the crowded world of the 20th century, especially in a country like the USSR, where regular people have no protection and enforcement structures have all the equipment, techniques and manpower? The scholars who have written on the issue point out the vast powers and extreme brutality of the enforcement. This certainly was true and the point is valid beyond doubt. But does it fully explain the situation?

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<sup>80</sup> Op. cit. p.8-9.

<sup>81</sup> Op. cit. p.214.

<sup>82</sup> Op. cit. p.214.

<sup>83</sup> Op. cit. p.224.

<sup>84</sup> Op. cit. p.240.

<sup>85</sup> Christian 1990 p.29.

Something seems to be overlooked. Namely, the nature of the Russian peasant community, obshchina, in my opinion, was a necessary condition of successful enforcement. The very design of this institution greatly helped the policing and made any outlawed activity difficult to hide, with the consequences of being caught very painful. Specifically, one of the pillars of the peasant community was krugovaya poruka - the principle of mutual help and collective responsibility. One side of it was helping an individual out by the community. But the other side was a collective punishment for all when one, or one family, was guilty of something. If, for example, a family was caught brewing beer, the whole obshchina would pay a heavy price; so the peasants themselves had to ensure that there were no such transgressions. This, in fact, was used in the USSR too, but with no reference to sources; for instance, if an employee committed an infraction of discipline, his or her unit did not get a bonus pay; or, earlier, when one broke from a labor camp, many who worked or lived with the escapee were punished, and so punished that not everyone could survive it. Krugovaya poruka was, indeed, a powerful tool, and the vast majority of the population in the Russian Empire was skilfully subjected to it.

#### The ascendance of vodka to prominence.

It is now time to return to vodka in order to touch on the issue of how it, of all alcohol products, acquired its prominent place in Russian life. The material on the alcohol economy, particularly, on the kabak and the otkup, should provide a sufficient background for addressing the making of the modern Russian drinking tradition, and above all, the vodka drinking pattern as its most distinct feature.

There appears to be a commonly accepted speculation, reasonably backed by facts, as to why vodka, and not some other drink, became - and remained ever since - the drink of the land in Russia, while in almost all the rest of Europe (outside of Scandinavia) people used less potent drinks: mainly wine in Mediterranean countries and beer elsewhere. According to Pryzhov, it was the government and its fiscal policies, and most particularly the otkup system, established by the government, that discriminated against beer and favored vodka, and left Russian drinkers with hardly any alternative to vodka. He particularly points to the 1765 edicts and later perfection of the otkup under Catherine the Great as the cause of the rapid spread of heavy vodka drinking. At the same time, the old mild drink culture faded away from the Empire. As Pryzhov pictures it, "In

gubernias [provinces] of Great Russia, where hitherto they subsisted the ancient ways on beer and braga, now it was vodka all alone, horrid drunkenness came about from nowhere...."<sup>86</sup>. By the mid-nineteenth century, on the eve of both the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and of the abolition of the otkup in 1863, things had further deteriorated. Heavy drinking and its consequences reached the point at which many started to genuinely fear an irreversible degeneration of the people from vodka.

To Pryzhov, it was the result of combined work of forceful promotion of vodka by the otkup, and even of the new (from 1863) excise system in its first years, on the one hand, and of the prohibitively high excise on beer, on the other<sup>87</sup>. He makes unfavorable comparisons of his motherland with Western countries to make the point that Russia moved in the direction opposite to that of the civilized world's advancement: there people drank 10, 15, 20 and over times as much beer as in Russia, and not nearly so much vodka. In the United States, in Pryzhov's view,

All the people... drink mostly beer; if sometimes they have vodka, they at once chase it with water. Not a single citizen knows how it is to keep drinking vodka until getting drunk, and only Negroes, plus the Irish paupers, satiate themselves with vodka<sup>88</sup>.

According to Smith and Christian (1984), Russia had a peculiar set of drinks for the two major purposes of drinking: for everyday use and for holidays. The Russians had kvass as their chief daily drink, they had vodka at festive occasions, and there was hardly any space left for beer (the authors probably assume, and for good reason, that wine could not become a drink of mass consumption in Russia). In that, Russia differed from the rest of Europe "north of the grape", where "by the nineteenth century, beer was the major drink both for everyday consumption and for festive occasions"<sup>89</sup>. For good or for ill, in Russia, neither beer nor mead nor wine at the time could compete with vodka as a festive drink; on the other hand, they failed to capture the everyday territory occupied by kvas. Here, one can also recall that kvas had the advantage of being outside of fiscal and multiple other regulations imposed by the crown upon brewing, selling, drinking, or keeping beer.

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<sup>86</sup> Op. cit. p.223.

<sup>87</sup> Op. cit. p.256-261.

<sup>88</sup> Op. cit. p.260. A derogatory reference to ethnic groups other than his own is quite in character with the author.

<sup>89</sup> Smith and Christian 1984 p.290.

Before the liquor trade reform of 1863, the State Council of the Russian Empire prepared a detailed report on every aspect of the then widely questioned liquor trade<sup>90</sup>. There it stated facts and comparisons indeed striking; a summary of them is found in Smith and Christian: about 20 times as much of (absolute) alcohol was consumed as vodka as was consumed in the form of beer. Vodka generated 80 times as much revenue for the Treasury. Speaking of physical amounts, "about 11 liters of 40% vodka were consumed per capita in this period"<sup>91</sup>. This, by the way, matches the all-time record of the Soviet period in 1980 (see Chapter 5), based in both cases on the respective official statistics.

At the same time, a number of authors of the 19th century, most particularly before 1863, observed with consternation that for a steadily increasing part of the population vodka was not only continuing to be a drink for rare festive occasions but it was becoming also an (almost) everyday drink<sup>92</sup>.

Fiscal dependence of the state on the liquor trade was immense throughout the century, with not much variation under the farming, monopoly and excise systems, and the last pre-revolutionary monopoly. It averaged about 30% of all ordinary revenue of the crown throughout the century, with a low of 20% in 1810 and a high of 45% just before the 1863 reform<sup>93</sup>. Both the low and the high marks occurred during the otkup years.

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<sup>90</sup> Svedenia o piteinykh sborakh [Facts on the Liquor Tax Collection]. Saint Petersburg, 1861.

<sup>91</sup> Smith and Christian 1984 p.294.

<sup>92</sup> Such as N.M. Karamzin, I.G. Pryzhov, K.K. Grot, N.M. Druzhinin, as well as The State Council's report Svedenia..., and foreign travellers in Russia, e.g. von A. Haxthausen, the author of The Russian Empire, London, 1865.

<sup>93</sup> Smith and Christian 1984 p.301-302.

## CHAPTER 4. THE REIGNING IDEAS

### "The Alcohol Question"

The overall picture of the pre- and post-revolutionary attitude of the Bolshevik Party toward alcoholism finds three distinct pieces of historical evidence that shed light on how the Bolsheviks' and early Soviet perception of the drinking problem was taking shape. The first of the three consists of the speeches and remarks made by members of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party delegation at the First All-Russian Anti-Alcohol Congress held in 1909-1910.

The second piece is represented by what some people who initially shaped the party and its thinking stated on alcohol. This includes as a centerpiece the few known brief remarks which Lenin made, without any elaboration, on the subject of the alcohol trade (inappropriate for a socialist state, in his view) or, in one instance, intoxication in a far broader sense (in fact, in an unofficial conversation about sex but in a context which does not preclude generalizations). Reportedly, his idea (an off-hand one, apparently) was that the proletariat, in view of its historical predestination, does not need intoxication but needs clear thinking. What other key figures, including even Trotsky, had to say about drinking did not matter nearly as much as what Lenin said, even though their statements could be in some ways indicative of the Bolsheviks' thinking. Besides, except Stalin, they soon all became enemies of the people, and along with them their legacy, so to speak, dropped out of circulation for good.

The third cluster of evidence is not purely theoretical, since it refers to the "after Lenin" 1920s, when the Bolsheviks were the ruling party and were, in a sense, forced to deal with alcohol issues while being under the pressure of urgent political and financial considerations. Their decisions to restore the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, to introduce an all-embracing state monopoly on alcohol, plus some key phrases on drinking spoken publicly, foremost by Stalin, are powerful illustrations of their attitudes towards the alcohol question. But we have to bear in mind that these took place at the time when those attitudes were put to a test

by the power and responsibility of ruling the country.

The working class of pre-revolutionary Russia and the country's socialist movement (which, of course, was considerably older and broader than the Bolshevik stream in it) had a potent anti-drink, pro-sobriety tradition. As in a number of West European countries, it should hardly come as any wonder the two movements were closely related. It is no accident that Gorky mentioned hard work and heavy drinking in a single breath: many thinking Russians, if not most, felt much the same way, no matter what disagreements they might have otherwise. And it is only natural that the two curses of laboring people often went hand-in-hand together both in life and in people's minds.

Stephen White states probably quite correctly: "As in other European countries, the Russian socialist movement had a strong temperance tradition: particularly so as the drink trade was in the hands of government itself"<sup>1</sup>. However, this does not suggest a direct link from the tradition at large to the particular interpretation of the question by the Bolsheviks<sup>2</sup>. There is no indication that the Bolshevik Party as such had ever a continuous major interest in the matter as such. Its radicalism with regard to the social question placed alcoholism into the category of secondary issues which had to wait for the prime goal - social revolution - to be achieved first in order to provide a necessary socio-economic basis for the amelioration and further eradication of those secondary conditions.

Russian Marxists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike, were quite sensitive to the opinions among the international (European) Social Democrats, where the Russian branch was among the youngest. The German one was, of course, the eldest and most respected and the opinion leader. The Bolsheviks took on what has been termed Engels's position, while disagreeing with the other well-developed approach which was at the time influential among European Social Democrats.

Opinions among working class ideologists in Europe varied as to what formed the proper attitude towards die Alkoholfrage. There was a gradually developing controversy to which Karl Kautsky, the heir

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. p.15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. p.15-27 ("The Bolsheviks and Alcohol"), especially p.16-18.

apparent to Marx and Engels and the executor of their theoretical legacy, made a contribution. The major alternative to it is largely associated with another big name in socialism at the time, Emile Vandervelde, branded as a "revisionist".

The alcohol question never was central to the Marxist agenda, but there were times when the growing Social Democracy found that question among the most urgent issues of public discussion - internationally or domestically. At those times, it would become their issue too. Such was the case both in Europe and Russia before World War I.

Whenever Marxists addressed the question, they would more often than not make two kinds of reference, one to the doctrine's view of society, that is, historical materialism, and the other to the far more concrete, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 by Frederick Engels. After the October Revolution, so too and with even greater consistency, would Soviet authors who wrote on the nature and cause of alcohol use and abuse. Yet, there has been a split of opinion within Marxism with regard to the relationship between alcohol and society, particularly, between the development of capitalism and alcoholism, and between the advancement of socialism (communism) and alcoholism.

In the school of speculation that was popular with Russian Social Democrats and was to become the official ideological line on alcoholism in the Soviet Union, Engels' passage on alcoholism has traditionally and to this day been viewed as "the concretization" of the Marxist analysis<sup>3</sup> of the capitalist socio-economic formation, as applied to the subject of alcoholism. To state briefly its essence, it is inevitable that capitalism produces pauperism and along with it alcoholism, prostitution, crime and other curses of mankind. In other words, capitalism is the cause of alcoholism. On the other hand - as some later Marxists, notably Kautsky, extended Engels' logic - socialism is the cure, and as such will eventually make society alcoholism-free, or, as some thought, perhaps alcohol-free.

The authors of the other perspective have been considerably more cautious in their conclusions. They

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<sup>3</sup> Marxism did not yet exist in 1844-45. Engels himself later referred to this essay as pre-Marxist. The issue is addressed in greater detail later in this chapter.

saw a more complex picture of cause-and-effect workings in society and did not exclude factors that could be historically non-specific, that is, present in all formations throughout human history.

Engels.

In my opinion, what Engels wrote about alcoholism in that early work does not warrant any far-reaching theoretical interpretations. More specifically, it is in no measure an exhaustive application of Marxist social philosophy to the subject of drinking. The alcohol-related part of Engels' book makes up about one percent of the text. It contains a testimony of widespread drunkenness among English workers, and a sympathetic defence of the workers as victims<sup>4</sup>. He does imply, of course, that it is related to capitalist exploitation but there is little theoretical or authentically Marxist present in this connection. Most of it does not differ from what scores of authors, concerned about the plight of the working people across the world, wrote in the last century, some before Engels and some after. As Engels stated,

Liquor is almost their only source of pleasure.... The working-man comes from his work tired, exhausted, finds his home comfortless, damp, dirty, repulsive..., he must have something to make work worth his trouble, to make the prospect of the next day endurable. ... His enfeebled frame, weakened by bad air and bad food, violently demands some external stimulus; his social need can be gratified only in the public-house, he has absolutely no other place where he can meet his friends<sup>5</sup>.

Notably, the above resembles Maxim Gorky's portrayal of the Russian workers' drinking:

The young people went to the taverns... and got drunk. Worn out as they were by hard work, the drink went quickly to their heads, and...<sup>6</sup>.

The closest Engels comes to theory is this:

It is morally and physically inevitable that, under such circumstances, a very large number of working-men should fall into intemperance. ... Drunkenness has here ceased to be a vice, for which the vicious can be held responsible; it becomes a phenomenon, the necessary, inevitable effect of certain conditions....<sup>7</sup>

Engels not only never undertook to examine that relationship between intemperance and life

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<sup>4</sup> He thus sums up the anti-proletarian sentiment of the day: "Drunkenness, sexual irregularities, brutality, and disregard for the rights of property are the chief points with which the bourgeois charges them" (Friedrich Engels. The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892, p.126).

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. p.102-103.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. p.10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. p.103.



conditions in any detail, he was a young radical in transition and not yet a Marxist when he wrote the book. This is obvious from the text, but it was also confirmed by the author, about half a century later, in the preface to the English edition (1892) when he was already a patriarch. In his own words (he wrote the preface in English),

The author, at that time, was... twenty-four years of age, and his production bears the stamp of his youth with its good and its faulty features.... The general theoretical standpoint of this book... does not exactly coincide with my standpoint of to-day. Modern international Socialism, since fully developed as a science..., did not as yet exist in 1844. My book represents one of the phases of its embryonic development....<sup>8</sup>

One may find it puzzling that a few brief remarks in passing by an author who never was (and never, to his credit, pretended to be) a student of the subject, should have been the beginning of a particular perspective. But so it has been, and these days the perspective is still alive, although perhaps not quite well. The perspective, no doubt, is real, but it is not so much about what Engels said as about what has been made of it by a partisan following. Some authors believe:

Engels established a direct causal relationship between alcoholism and industrial capitalism.... Alcoholism was an epiphenomenon that would end when the social order based on capitalist exploitation ended<sup>9</sup>.

Just a few years later, Marx and Engels in their Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) referred to the "temperance fanatics", rather irreverently (quite unlike in the Condition...), as an example of false ("conservative") socialism which attempts "to secure the continued existence of the bourgeois society"<sup>10</sup>. This indicates that from their standpoint temperance did not serve the interests of the working class in capitalist society, but it does not suggest the revolution would by itself resolve the alcohol problem, nor that sobriety would become a norm of socialist life. In fact, Marx and Engels severely criticized the tendency to "fantasize" about minor details of that future life as "anti-scientific". Nowhere can one find traces of Engels' or Marx' thinking in terms of "direct causal relationship" between capitalism/socialism and alcoholism.

Even though we do not have sufficient reasons to hold Engels responsible for the origin of this approach, it became and served, in the shape that later authors gave it, the corner-stone of the official Soviet

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<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. p.V, X.

<sup>9</sup> Snow 1991 p.244.

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels 1959/1848 p.35.

view of drinking for as long as Soviet power existed.

Kautsky.

In Die Neue Zeit, the journal of the German Social Democrats edited by himself, Kautsky presented late in the last century a view which appears to be much closer to the so called "Engels' position" (which, I maintain, is a misnomer) on alcoholism than the aforementioned writings by Engels. "He", as an historian testifies, "went far beyond the occasional comments of Marx and Engels to provide a comprehensive view of the drink question from a Marxist perspective"<sup>11</sup>. There Kautsky stated: "Alcoholism... can only vanish fully with that which creates and constantly recreates it"<sup>12</sup>. And the clause of the utmost importance was there too: "as with any other problem of the capitalist mode of production". This, indeed, is the quintessence of the point - and of the whole ideology - to stress by all means that any problem and, indeed, any phenomenon is one thing in the capitalist system and quite another past it. This dogma would find unlimited use in the Soviet advocacy of socialism, often patently absurd; as the relevant joke goes, "Capitalism is a system where man exploits man; under socialism, it is the other way around".

For Kautsky, an orthodox Marxist theoretician, drinking as such is not a problem but part of life of the peoples of European tradition. It only becomes a problem for society in a certain stage of its development, under certain conditions of production, that is, the exploitive, degrading conditions of capitalist production. Following the same theoretical stance, Kautsky dismissed the teetotal approach as wrong in essence, anti-historical in methodology, and distracting for the working class in its struggle - which must focus on elimination of the system, not on softening its secondary problems. The struggle for the socialist revolution and the eventual victory were the direction for the proletariat and its party to take. Socialism would eliminate alcohol abuse, die Trunksucht, because it would eliminate that which causes it, i.e. the exploitation.

As usual, Karl Kautsky's analysis was done with great theoretical clarity and reached definite conclusions. It would probably be accurate to state that, according to Kautsky, temperance was a misconstrued

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<sup>11</sup> James S. Roberts. "Alcohol, public policy and the Left: The socialist debate in early 20th century Europe", Contemporary Drug Problems 12 (Summer 1985):317.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Kautsky. "Der Alkoholismus und seine Bekaempfung", Die Neue Zeit 9, No.1, 1890/91, S.114.

idea for the proletariat in either society. In the capitalist order, it was hopeless and even harmful for the class instincts; in the socialist one, it was unnecessary.

Vandervelde.

Emile Vandervelde, the leader of the Belgian Socialist Party early in the century and Prime-Minister of Belgium in 1915, presented the spectrum of socialist opinions in his paper read at the 10th International Congress Against Alcoholism. He stated that "Socialist circles are far from being in accord", and proceeded to point to groups from abstentionists to their opposite within those circles - in other words, the same major opinions about alcoholism that one finds outside social-democratic thought.

In a style of reasoning similar to that of Stalin ("iron logic"), Vandervelde dismissed the extremes of Marxist thinking on the subject and, in fact, ended up with an argument similar to that found in non-Marxist thinking.

As he observed,

...It is... absurd to pretend that misery is the sole or the principal cause of alcoholism; and that, consequently, the alcohol question would be solved by abolishing the capitalistic regime, and only by this means.

....

How can one maintain that misery, misery alone, engenders alcoholism when one sees how seriously alcoholism attacks the upper as well as the lower classes.... And if alcoholism has other causes than misery..., how can one hope that without direct efforts against it, alcoholism will disappear of itself, spontaneously, automatically, the day that the workers are freed from the capitalistic domination?<sup>13</sup>

Even though written before the October Revolution, it looks as if Vandervelde was pointedly criticising the Soviet approach (in fact, it could be, of course, a veiled polemic aimed at Kautsky's position). Indeed, what he said was the direct opposite of the Soviet official view on alcoholism. To be sure, his writings could not be well accepted by the Bolsheviks. It is a fact of history that once they were at odds (on principal issues) with other representatives of the working class, they resented every word of the unfaithful. In this case, nothing of what Vandervelde said could possibly be correct. To my knowledge, the Bolsheviks never responded to the non-orthodox approach of European Marxists to the relationship between the mode of

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<sup>13</sup> Emile Vandervelde. The Attitude of the Socialist Party Toward the Alcohol Question. Westerville OH: American Issue, 1915, p.13.

production and alcoholism.

The other principal difference between him and Kautsky was Vandervelde's strong support for workers' sobriety. His view was that sobriety was a more efficient way than temperance to keep or save workers from alcohol degradation. And work for sobriety was not, in this line of thinking, a distraction from the main task of preparing the Revolution, nor was it a contribution to making capitalism healthier; it was only helping workers to get in better shape for their class struggle, and, extending that logic, it was part of preparing some better "human material" for the future socialist society.

Today, both interpretations of the relationship between socialism and struggle for sobriety - whether the latter, as Kautsky and, perhaps, Marx and Engels thought, distracts the workers from the class struggle or, on the contrary, as Vandervelde argued, creates a better environment for their class struggle - may seem equally speculative and irrelevant, even for those in the Left movement. However, about a century ago those were important issues. Vandervelde's idea of sober workers for socialism, it appears, had then a considerable following. Some authors tended to relate socialism, alcohol and even the early Soviet actions in a not so sophisticated manner and to draw some very far reaching conclusions. A professor of sociology from the University of Wisconsin presents the following example of this thinking:

...We may anticipate that the banishing of strong drink will result in accelerating the economic and political advance of labor. ... In a dry society it will be harder to fuddle and befool the worker into voting for policies which are in the interest of another class and against the advancement of his own class.

One of the great surprises of Soviet Russia has been that it has not dissolved in chaos. Contrary to what we expected, the "man-on-horseback" has not taken charge and the Russians do not think he is coming. That a workers-and-peasants' regime did not result in anarchy leading to a military dictatorship is largely owing to the heavy hand the leaders laid on liquor. ... In December 1917... I saw men in the wrecked wine cellars wading up to their ankles in the ruddy liquid and the snow of the street stained rich red where a fire hose was draining the contents of the cellars into the sewers. Here, perhaps, is the secret of why the Russian proletariat revolution has not followed the course which history led us to expect<sup>14</sup>.

One finds in Segal (1990) an almost equally far-reaching linking of drinking and the Revolution from the opposite side of the ideological spectrum. As Snow presents it in a book review,

[Segal] seems to argue that there was a connection between alcoholism and the revolutionary upheaval of 1917; and that alcohol abuse, rather than ideology, political passions and economic conditions, also found expression

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<sup>14</sup> E.A. Ross. Prohibition as the Sociologist Sees It. Westerville OH: American Issue, 1921, p.7-8.

in the atrocities and mutual acts of inhumanity of the civil war (1918-1921). If indeed this is what he is implying in both cases, then the latter assertion is simplistic in the extreme, and the former is patently absurd<sup>15</sup>.

Which leads us to the question of what actually was the Bolshevik attitude toward alcohol before and after their revolution.

#### The Bolsheviks.

Eventually, the Soviet view of alcoholism evolved, in effect, along the lines drawn by Kautsky (without reference to him, of course, and, probably, without any great awareness of his contribution<sup>16</sup>). But that occurred after the October Revolution, and not at once but only in the late 1920s. Prior to 1931, their attitude, it appears, was somewhat lax and inconsistent, their ranks lacking the usual monolithic unanimity. Some of their pre-revolutionary and early post-revolutionary activists, some authors, and reportedly even Lenin, had a predisposition against any alcohol trade under socialism and, perhaps, against drinking as such.

At the anti-alcohol Congress of 1909-10, the Workers Delegation (not purely Bolshevik) made a point that "propaganda must not be about moderation but about sobriety"<sup>17</sup>. However, even then and there Russian Social Democrats were always very thorough in underscoring that propaganda under the present conditions was "plain impossible" and, secondly, the struggle against drunkenness must always be part of the struggle against capitalism. Obviously, Vandervelde never linked the alcohol and social questions so closely as they did. Generally speaking, radical intellectuals and Marxists of the time:

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<sup>15</sup> Snow 1992 p.45.

<sup>16</sup> To my knowledge, Kautsky's brief, abstract writings on alcoholism never were translated, published or well known in Russia. When they were published in his journal in the early 1890s, at the time of a controversy around drink for German social democrats, the Russian social democracy, to borrow Engels's phrase, was "in its embryonic stage", particularly, the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party did not exist until 1898 and the Bolshevik fraction of it did not exist until 1903. When about a decade later the time came for the Bolsheviks to contemplate the issue of alcoholism, the past debate in Germany was, it appears, ancient history.

By contrast, for Vandervelde the subject was by no means accidental, he wrote about it later than Kautsky, and had a name as an expert in the field. A few of his publications on alcoholism, such as The Working Party and Alcohol and Socialism and Alcohol were translated (in the 1910s) and popular in Russia. White remarks that translations of the Western classics of socialist temperance may have played a part in shaping social-democratic views of drink in Russia, citing Vandervelde and Emmanuel Vurm as examples (1996, p.194).

<sup>17</sup> Trudi I Vserossiiskogo s'ezda po bor'be s p'yanstvom. [Works of the First All-Russian Congress on Struggle Against Drunkenness]. Saint-Petersburg, 29 December 1909 - 6 January 1910, 3 volumes. Vol.1, p.119.

used the pre-revolutionary temperance movement as a front for their contention that the alcoholism of that era was an epiphenomenon of the injustices and abuses, the material deprivations and inadequacies, of the Tsarist system and early Russian industrialization<sup>18</sup>.

The Workers' Delegation to the Congress made its presence acutely felt (to the point that several members of the delegation were arrested on the orders of the government) by repeating ad infinitum its sharp criticism of contemporary society as irreparably ill; so much so that the development of capitalism in Russia was the cause of excessive drinking<sup>19</sup>. The underlying thinking was to become key to the future Soviet interpretation of drinking as a social problem in the two respective socio-economic formations.

The Bolshevik theory of alcoholism is, or at least it attempts to be, intimately related to the core understanding of laws of human history and social development in Marxism. Non-economic, "superstructural" social phenomena - such as law, politics, philosophy, literature, art - according to Marx, are secondary to the so-called basic, that is, economic relationships. Although the superstructural phenomena possess a certain autonomy and inertia of developing "in the absence of social roots", their fate in the long run is predetermined by shifts in the economic basis of society. The particular alcohol-related extension of this by the Bolsheviks (apparently, via Kautsky) resulted in an interpretation of alcoholism as a condition which emerged and developed as an involuntary response of the disadvantaged to exploitation. Logically, like crime, prostitution, homosexuality and other "ulcers of capitalism", it would ease down and disappear, by sheer power of historical progress, some time soon after capitalism (the last mode of production where man exploits man) had ceased to exist<sup>20</sup>.

The Bolsheviks were clear and forceful with respect to the relationship between the alcohol and social questions under capitalism from day one. Namely, they viewed alcoholism, as Kautsky did, as an immutable

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<sup>18</sup> Snow 1992 p.47.

<sup>19</sup> For a brief account of this in English see George E. Snow "Socialism, Alcoholism, and the Russian Working Classes before 1917" in Drinking: behavior and belief in modern history, S. Barrows & R. Room, eds., U. of California Press, 1991, p.243-264.

<sup>20</sup> To do justice to Marx, his view of society does not appear to rule out a different reading with respect to drink. Nothing precludes an inclusion of alcohol into the universe of needs that have to be met in society and that people work for, as they work for bread and butter, and cars and other necessities. Thus, the relations of production, exchange and consumption of alcohol comes to be viewed as basic relations that are common to all modes of production.

condition of the capitalist mode of production. In contrast to Vandervelde, the Bolsheviks did not believe in sobriety under capitalism, nor in an autonomous workers' temperance movement which would not be subordinate to the struggle against the class enemy<sup>21</sup>. However, on drinking and temperance under socialism, the Bolsheviks, it appears, were not nearly as orthodox as Kautsky until considerably later. It appears that opinions among them differed. The Party initially was not sure what the right approach had to be, and, probably, did not have a clear-cut approach to alcoholism (in both practical and theoretical terms) until the early 1930s. Then the Kautsky-based line obviously became the view and the policy. Prior to that, some, perhaps a great many of them, it appears, envisioned the socialist future as sober. What is known about thinking of the leaders implies almost with a certainty that it was dominated by the perception that prohibition would be the right policy for the proletarian state. In the Soviet debate of the late 1970s - '80s, the pro-sobriety coalition was adamant about the Old Bolsheviks being on their side. And I believe they were right on that score. Particularly, Lenin, as far as it is now possible to see, had strong doubts about the alcohol trade. The number two revolutionary, Trotsky, made several brief anti-alcohol and pro-sobriety remarks<sup>22</sup>.

At the Tenth Party conference in 1921 Lenin said:

Unlike capitalist countries where they use such things as vodka and other dope, we will not allow that to happen, for however profitable it may be for the trade, it will lead us back to capitalism and not forward to communism<sup>23</sup>.

Not so ardently when sharing non-publicly his sentiments with a fellow Politburo member, but still in disfavor of liquor trade as a practical possibility, he wrote in 1922 in a letter to Stalin:

...We have come to count on some gold coming in [from foreign trade]. I do not see what else could we count on, maybe only the wine monopoly, but with that serious ethic considerations [are involved]<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> This is not exactly the position expressed in the Communist Manifesto, where temperance is dismissed altogether as an instance of false path for the proletariat. The Bolsheviks, in their actual work and tactics, accepted temperance on the condition that it is part of the struggle for the revolution. The difference must be due to the logic of practical politics, where the Bolsheviks were able to be flexible; particularly, Lenin was always careful "not to scare the masses away" and taught his comrades "to attune themselves (prislushivatsa) to the masses".

<sup>22</sup> See White 1996; Stone 1986 p.372.

<sup>23</sup> V.I. Lenin. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (PSS). [Complete Collection of Works] Moscow: Politizdat, 1958-65, vol.43, p.326.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. vol.45, p.223.

Next year, publicly and again more forcibly, he expressed the same view when speaking to the XI Congress of the Party: "We will not resort to a trade in rotgut"<sup>25</sup>.

In broader sense, there is an often quoted line Lenin allegedly said to Klara Zetkin (on the subject of sexual life):

The proletariat is an ascending class. It does not need intoxication<sup>26</sup>, which would stupefy it or arouse it<sup>27</sup>.

History, however, showed otherwise.

#### The Official View and Public Views on Drinking in the USSR

What happened with respect to alcohol in the Soviet Union in 1985, as well as how the events were viewed by those involved, was preordained historically not only by the Russian drinking tradition but also by the relatively new patterns of behavior and thinking created by the Communist Party during the comparatively short but highly eventful existence of the Soviet Union. Consideration of the intellectual, political and cultural aspects of the process is necessary because otherwise it is hardly possible to understand what laid the groundwork for the 1985 shift in alcohol policy.

What was published in the USSR about alcohol matters in the USSR no more reflected events or issues of drinking than it reflected broader turns and complications of Soviet history. Two major determinants guided and directed the formation of the official public view of the subject. One was considerably older than Soviet power, a version of the Marxist theory wherein alcoholism is viewed as an historical phenomenon rooted in exploitation and pre-destined to die out in the non-exploitive (that is, socialist/communist) social order. This was also the general Soviet view of what is called in the West deviance. In the language of American sociology,

According to Marx<sup>28</sup>, deviance results from a lag of social consciousness behind the material level of

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<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. vol.45, p.120.

<sup>26</sup> Opianenie, in the Russian translation from German.

<sup>27</sup> V.I. Lenin o kommunisticheskoi moralj. Moscow: Politizdat, 1975, p.264.

<sup>28</sup> The author, of course, cannot literally mean Marx himself in this context. What he states refers definitely (and accurately) to the Soviet official Marxism.



development of society<sup>29</sup>.

...

Marxist ideology postulates that there will be no social deviance in Communist society, that deviant behavior will disappear with the termination of the exploitation and alienation of man that characterize capitalism, and with the termination of the lag in social consciousness of the individual that characterizes socialism. Communist consciousness will make the citizen a thoroughly integrated member of society<sup>30</sup>.

The other determinant of the content of Soviet publications on drinking came along with the censorship, most notably with its firm installation in the USSR by the early thirties. Censorship lasted until near the very end of the Soviet Union, with the country experiencing wild variations in censorship policies and their topical applications.

The "direct relationship" theoretical stance on alcoholism was easy to maintain in the early stages of the new social order and new socialist life but became ever more embarrassing as time went by. Socialism grew older and stronger, and along with it grew problems of alcoholism. A student of the drink question in the USSR can, without much difficulty, identify several distinct publication periods:

- October 1917 (revolution) - October 1925 (monopoly);
- mid-1920s (discussion of the Soviet alcohol monopoly);
- late 1920s - 1931;
- 1931 - 1954: void in discussion of drinking;
- 1954 - around 1970;
- 1970 - late 1970s;
- late 1970 - May 1985 (the reform commences);
- May 1985 - about 1990;
- 1990 - present.

One, however, can and should see the most important difference as being between the two larger periods: until 1931 and from mid-fifties to mid-eighties.

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<sup>29</sup> Shapiro 1978 p.16.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. p.1.

The early Soviet years.

1917 - 1925: from a dry law to a state monopoly.

The introduction of prohibition in the fall of 1914 sparked an immediate clash of opinions but it was largely forgotten as a public issue by October 1917. The literature on alcoholism in the first Soviet years, until the late 1920s, was scarce. Those were years probably the least affected by censorship, even on clearly "ideological questions". But publications on alcoholism did not benefit much from this relative freedom - simply because few people then viewed alcoholism as more than a side issue at the time of cataclysmic historical shifts. Both policy makers and social thinkers had far more urgent issues to discuss at the time - world war, desperate power struggle, civil war, extreme economic chaos and mass starvation - matters of death and life that pushed alcohol problems out of public discussion<sup>31</sup>.

Alcohol became the subject of discussion and policy making not so much as a public health issue but as a facet of greater and more pressing needs of the time. In early Soviet history, there were two major aspects of life where alcohol was a factor: the alcohol trade as a potential source of state revenue, and home-brewing as an aggravation of the Soviet food crisis<sup>32</sup>.

The establishment of the Soviet alcohol monopoly under Stalin.

The most influential author of the time appears to have been Joseph Stalin who issued a few lines to justify the return to regulation (in the shape, for another time, of a state monopoly). Facing the choice between borrowing from the West and resuming the alcohol trade, he reasoned, the country ought to accept the lesser of the two evils<sup>33</sup>. Publicly, he discussed the issue in 1927 in a so-called conversation with foreign workers

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<sup>31</sup> See M. Levine 1997.

<sup>32</sup> See Helena Stone, "The Soviet Government and Moonshine: 1917-1929", *Cahiers du monde Russe et Sovietique* XXVII (Janvier-Mars 1986):359-379. A very well documented chronicle, well-placed in the context of broader issues of the time.

<sup>33</sup> Stalin was talking about the much needed money for the Soviet industrialization program. The program was discussed in 1925, in one of the most heated Party debates, at its XIV Congress, and was soon under way. There, two months after the state monopoly on alcohol started, Stalin reportedly said: "A great many people seem to believe that we can upbuild socialism while we are wearing kid gloves. That is a great mistake, Comrades.... We have to make a choice between debt slavery and vodka" (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, September 1932, p.227). The dry law first started to gradually lose its dryness in 1919, which continued until the reintroduction of the monopoly on 1 October 1925 (see, for example, Stone

delegations:

When introducing the vodka monopoly, we faced this alternative: sell ourselves into capitalist bondage..., or introduce the vodka monopoly in order to obtain the liquid means necessary for development of our industry on our own<sup>34</sup>.

So spoke the young statesman. On another occasion, Stalin said almost verbatim the same: "What is better: the yoke of foreign capital or the introduction of vodka? That was the question. Naturally, we opted for vodka..."<sup>35</sup>. This became the explanation of the repeal of Russian/Soviet Prohibition for years and decades.

At the same time and at a somewhat less official level, Kalinin, a top Bolshevik figurehead whose particular job was to befriend the workers and peasants and talk to them in plain language, casually acknowledged that the country was drowning in an ocean of samogon<sup>36</sup>, an inferior product that harms people's health and hinders further growth of the productivity of labor. The drinker, according to Kalinin, has learned his way around but the wrong way, he brings his money to illegal distillers which does not serve the interests of the people's state. In brief, if people chose to drink, so be it, but the government had better take over the proceeds. As he stated,

On every peasants' holiday, you can go from house to house, and you will find in every house some amount of samogon for sale; and now a whole new category of samogon-brewers has come to existence who brew it for sale, and not only in the village but they bring it to towns too.... The selling of samogon had taken on such a scale that it in the end required the sale of vodka<sup>37</sup>.

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1986). Whether Stalin's hindsight rationalization was disingenuous, has been debated.

Stalin's discussion of the issue, the very fact of it, is, however, a clear indication of something else: making money on drinking and disavowing sobriety still did not look to be, at least to some, a proper policy for Bolsheviks. The way his argument went, also, had a clear bearing on the Soviet value system: on the negative side of the scale, "the West" was definitely lower than "selling poison to people" (it was so theoretically, ideologically and politically). In popular perception, "the West", especially in view of its potency to enslave customers, evoked a strong sense of dark outside hostility - it might be deadly dangerous - while drinking, of course, was our thing.

<sup>34</sup> I. V. Stalin, Sobranie sochinenii [Collected Works], 1946-51, vol.10, p.232-233.

<sup>35</sup> Stalin 1946-51, 9:192.

<sup>36</sup> According to Stone 1986, the problem was quite serious all the time through 1929 - "the flood of moonshine in the 1920s" is her expression - when the advent of collectivization (not of the alcohol monopoly!) solved it. But the epidemic outbreaks happened in 1922-23 and 1927-28. The re-legalization of vodka and the introduction of a full state monopoly on alcohol as the means to overcome the grand-scale moonshining, according to her, was based on a "mistaken assumption" in the face of the fact that, after 1925, "the production of illegal liquor continued to grow" (p.373; for details, see particularly p.373-374).

<sup>37</sup> O p'yanstve. M., 1926, p.3-4.

Late 1920s - 1931.

As the country returned to lawful drinking, and life started to regain some regularity, the topic of alcoholism came back to public life too. There was not, it appears, a great deal of interest in the matter, but a few books and a number of articles were published. All of them, with the exception of medical works, were educational, with a sprinkle of that theoretical wisdom which scientifically proves that the survivals of capitalism are deemed to die out "by the measure of building socialism". Most of the books had on their covers gruesome drawings of the green dragon of alcoholism, with miserable victims collapsing in its claws - and were just as creative and entertaining between the covers. Among the better books, there were two under identical titles "Alcoholism and the Struggle against It", one by V.M. Bekhterev<sup>38</sup>.

Among the authors, one finds a few known from the pre-revolution debate. To be more exact, they were those who had been sympathetic to the proletariat's cause then and who came to the service of the Revolution now. One of them was the famous Dr. V.M. Bekhterev, a scientist of renowned international standing and a public figure known to every (educated) Russian for, among other things, coming to the defence of Mr. Beilis, the main character in the Russian version of 'affaire Dreyfus.

As though he meant to give a sign of the zeitgeist, Bekhterev, formerly a believer in prohibition, had shifted ground to support the state-run alcohol trade. Indeed, all the authors of this period were of one mind: no questioning the government's policy, hardly an option even at that time of comparative freedom.

During the same period (the late 1920s), two classical anti-alcohol enterprises were recycled: a temperance society and a journal in affiliation with it. They were busy chiefly helping the concerned (at work, in the family, on the street) to fight the abuses of alcohol in practical and educational terms. None of the experts in the field of alcoholism were summoned to head that work; instead, a high-ranking Party worker (Yu. Larin) was put in charge.

Before long, however, all anti-alcohol work was aborted. In 1931, both the society and the journal

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<sup>38</sup> See V.M. Bekhterev, Alkogolizm i bor'ba s nim, Leningrad, 1927; Deichman, Alkogolizm i bor'ba s nim, Moscow, 1929.

died of unnatural causes. Along with them, the whole topic of alcoholism was thoroughly wiped out of public sight for the next twenty-odd years. It is my impression that in the next half-century far more was published about Soviet drinking in the West than in that country. And it may well be that among those publications in the West there was not one, academic or otherwise, which did not start with complaints about the extreme scarcity of data or even any word on drinking in the Soviet Union.

Interpretations of alcohol in the post-Stalin Soviet society.

1954 - 1970.

Stalin died on March 5, 1953. The next year, a brochure was published, the first to reopen the forgotten topic of alcoholism<sup>39</sup>. It also started a specific tradition, that of the warning of danger and, in the same breath, assuring the public that there was nothing to worry about. Mainly, the brochure was a piece of the usual "anti-alcoholpropaganda" backed up by medical data<sup>40</sup>. With respect to the social dimension, alcoholism was characterized as a "survival of capitalism" which had no roots in Soviet reality. Unruly individuals were blamed for "incidents of abuse of alcohol". The overall picture was outlined in two principal statements: a) the USSR was "the most sober country in the world" (with a reference, in 1954, to 1928 data which was cited incorrectly), and b) alcohol consumption was declining year after year in that country.

With little variation, this message was reproduced or implied, at the very least, in virtually every publication until the late 1960s, and decreasingly so in the next decade, and occasionally even into the 1980s. The relationship between this "theory" and actual alcohol control policies was Orwellian: alcoholism, on the one hand, did not exist under socialism but, on the other hand, it did, and it was in practical terms dealt with. One of the key Newspeak terms is doublethink, indeed, a very helpful notion in depicting the Soviet (but not exclusively Soviet) way of approaching reality:

...In accordance with the principles of doublethink, this aim is simultaneously recognized and not recognized

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<sup>39</sup> Strel'chuk, Alkohol' - vrag cheloveka [Alcohol is an Enemy of Man], Moscow, 1954.

<sup>40</sup> The author, in fact, was a far more distinguished professional than the nature of his brochure suggests - one of the leading specialists in the treatment of alcoholism; he was said to treat Vasilii Stalin, the leader's son, from dipsomania.

by the directing brains of the Inner Party...<sup>41</sup>.

As an illustration of the above in Soviet reality, one can think of Khrushchev's deeds and words in 1958. The First Secretary of the CC CPSU attempted a considerable reform of the alcohol policy, which resulted in 1959 becoming the only post-war year before 1981 in which the officially registered alcohol consumption went down. At the same time, he reportedly broadcasted:

One of the harmful remnants of the past is the excessive use of alcohol by some people. In the old society, the cause of this was oppression by the exploiters and lack of any opportunity for cultural activities among the working people, but today we have different social and economic conditions. Under the Soviet system, material prosperity and the cultural level of our people have been raised enormously. Excessive drinking today is explicable only by poor education<sup>42</sup>.

Incidentally, the measures the Party took under his leadership against excessive drinking had little to do with education. Mostly, the measures were represented by raised prices, new trade regulations and harsher penalties and policing - hardly anything, other than words, different from what is most often done in "the old society".

The no-root, no-cause view of alcoholism was adopted in other socialist countries. As was stated in a 1978 American publication,

Until very recently the regimes [in Eastern Europe] have been ideologically reluctant to admit that alcohol can pose problems of any gravity for a socialist society. Ten years ago, the Bulgarian authorities were saying that 'alcoholism, that remnant of the bourgeois past, is not a problem in Bulgaria today;' last year, they were less confident: alcoholism and smoking 'have their roots in the distant past,' it was stated, implying there is still a lively crop from these roots<sup>43</sup>.

However, the tradition was gradually becoming history, although it was never replaced by another theory. Within the framework of Soviet Marxism, it, probably, was impossible to explain growing alcoholism or crime in the socialist society. I am not aware of any attempts to address the issue in the non-Soviet Marxism.

1970 - late 1970s.

In the same US publication just quoted above, the author observes that a statement like Khrushchev made in 1958 was far less likely 20 years later:

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<sup>41</sup> Op. cit. p.155.

<sup>42</sup> Radio Moscow, 5 July 1958, cited in Volgyes 1978 p.193.

<sup>43</sup> Kerr 1978 p.182.

...The few who may still believe in the drying up of social evils... under the summer sun of socialism are guilty of a Stalinist adaptation of Descartes: "It should be, therefore it is"<sup>44</sup>.

Indeed, the 1970s saw a well observable decline of the traditional theory. In 1970, the most influential weekly journal of the time brought out an article that was based on original sociological data, paid no tribute to the no-root thesis and, in fact, forcefully dismissed what the author termed "comforting theory" (the keep-your-eyes-closed approach, as in Strel'chuk's classic formulation above)<sup>45</sup>. In the seventies, the portrayal of the problem became far less simplistic, far more social and even sociological, despite the fact that severe limitations with respect to ideology and data were still there, and access to statistical data became even more restricted.

Starting, probably, from the 1970s, one finds, in fact, some erosion of the early Soviet rigid doctrine of the "birthmarks of capitalism". It was not easily observable, but at closer inspection of the way some items were presented one might at times detect a tiny difference here or a subtle change there.

Particularly, a slight differentiation with respect to the "bad things" in socialist and capitalist societies began. In the earlier years, the difference had only been stated between their social or class nature under socialism and capitalism, and the difference had been that all of them, from unemployment to crime, were organic features of capitalism where they had invariably grown worse and, on the other hand, under socialism, these phenomena had no objective roots and had been steadily declining. Now the strict distinction between socialism and capitalism remained, but the actual degree of a particular deviation being troublesome in the Soviet Union seemed to start affecting the way it was presented.

Unemployment remained the spotless advantage of socialism over capitalism, for there was no unemployment in the USSR since the early 1930s<sup>46</sup>. Soviet people not only had the right - included in the Constitution first in 1936 - but also an obligation to work (tunevadstvo - idle life, parasitism, was a criminal

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<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. p.193.

<sup>45</sup> See Boris Levin, "Sotsial'nii portret alkogolika" [The Social Portrait of the Alcoholic], Literaturnaya Gazeta, 1970, March 11.

<sup>46</sup> 1931 was the year when the Labor Exchange (Birzha Truda) was closed down and unemployment officially forever vanished from Soviet life, according to the textbooks. Effectively, this was a case when the textbooks, by and large, actually told the truth.

offense). In fact, in the 1970s, shortages of the labor force in the economy were increasingly felt, so the problem was not unemployment but that of labor supply.

Prostitution was viewed as virtually non-existent but not as perfectly non-existent as unemployment. Drugs were a similar case. Along with homosexuality, these were areas largely invisible and unknown to the public, and were never publicly discussed.

But with crime and especially alcoholism, old propagandistic exercises were already laughed at, and the intonation of even highly official publications started to slowly lose its boastful enthusiasm. The articles on prostitution, crime and alcoholism/alcohol abuse published in the Big Soviet Encyclopaedia can illustrate this point:

Prostitution is a historically conditioned social phenomenon which evolved in the antagonistic class society and is organically immanent for it. ...

In the USSR, the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution liquidated the root causes of prostitution. ... In the 1930, prostitution as a common social phenomenon was liquidated. Rare instances of prostitution are local in nature and are viewed as a form of parasitical existence<sup>47</sup>.

By comparison, crime was not described as almost entirely foreign or pre-revolutionary, although crime under capitalism was still one thing and under socialism another (there even were two corresponding sub-entries, which was often done). And the assessment of the deep social causes of this deviation is the same as that of prostitution. It reads as follows:

In the capitalist countries, crime is organically immanent to the very nature of the social order based on private property, exploitation, social inequality which breeds and spreads the ideology and morals of greed, money-making and mutual hatred. ...

In the socialist society, the root causes of crime have been eliminated; for the first time in history, it is becoming increasingly possible to liquidate it as a social phenomenon. The crime which still exists is a relation to the fact that socialism... bears "birthmarks" of the old society. The causes of crime are survivals of the past that still exist in various spheres of social life.... Crime in the socialist society is a declining phenomenon...<sup>48</sup>.

The entries on both alcoholism and alcohol abuse (the heading could also be translated as heavy drinking or drunkenness) did not pay nearly as much tribute to the ideological tradition. In contrast to the articles on drinking in previous editions of this encyclopaedia, the authors do not even address the causes of

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<sup>47</sup> Bolshie Sovetskaya Enciklopedia (BSE). Moscow: Nauka, 1970, vol.21, p.114. By and large, prostitution began to become noticeable in the mid-1980s.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. vol.20, p.539.



alcohol problems and their polar opposite nature in two the societies - and, surprisingly, it gets published:

In the developed capitalist countries, the necessity of struggle with alcohol abuse is dictated by the process of intensification of work.... The failure of that struggle largely results from the fact that those measures do not eliminate such causes of alcohol abuse as the uncertainty of tomorrow, loneliness bred by alienation, and the like.

In the USSR, the system of measures against abuse of alcohol... is aimed at persons who are not willing to follow the ethic directives of the socialist society. ...Abuse of alcoholic beverages must be considered a phenomenon which causes harm to the interests of the state, family and personality of the drinker and therefore is incompatible with the morals and ethics of the Soviet character<sup>49</sup>.

Of all negative phenomena, alcoholism was emerging as least subjected to ideological constraints and censorship. This, however, is not to say that an open discussion of drinking was allowed. In practical and propagandistic terms, the official and medical establishment's views on alcoholism and alcohol abusers continued to be extremely stigmatizing<sup>50</sup>. In a hindsight which apparently refers to the 1970s and early 1980s, Gorbachev rightly remarks:

Alcoholism had become a very painful social problem, but for a long time the subject had been bashfully avoided. Heavy drinkers had been presented as "moral cripples"; in propaganda, it had been maintained that, in socialist society, there were no objective conditions that caused that phenomenon<sup>51</sup>.

The last official quote on drinking, which was in circulation in the pre-Gorbachev time, was from the XXVI Party Congress, that is, it appeared as late as 1981. Then, Brezhnev admitted in his speech to the Congress:

Not insignificant harm to society, to the family is caused by alcohol abuse, which, to be open about it, still remains a serious problem<sup>52</sup>.

At the time when not only anecdotal evidence left little doubt that drunkenness had reached unprecedented highs but already Soviet publications, based on data, told the reader in plain Russian that the appearance was not deceiving, comrade Leonid Il'ich personally was rising to a new level of openness to tell the people that drinking still remained a problem.

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<sup>49</sup> Op. cit. vol.21, p.279.

<sup>50</sup> See an analysis of that in Powell 1978.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. p.339.

<sup>52</sup> Materialy XXVI s'ezda KPSS. Moscow: Politizdat, 1981.

1980 - May 1985.

Around 1980, the stream of publications grew quite strong - and took a new turn, with a loud and ugly debate over sobriety vs. moderation. Perhaps it was a repetition, on a smaller scale, of the old Russian alcohol-related history. The prohibitionists' argument had anti-, or at least, non-governmental undertones; it also had an even stronger anti-Semitic rigor which was rapidly becoming their trade-mark. Their spiritual leader, F.Uglov, argued that "the other-born and other-faith" (inorodtsy i inovertsy) brought at all times disaster to naturally sober Russia. His followers talked freely about a Jewish conspiracy against naive, trusting Russians. The second best-known protagonist of sobriety N.Zhdanov<sup>53</sup> blamed some authors with Jewish names for composing deadly pro-drinking theories. Just like the old days, those moderates who were not Jewish were labeled sell-outs, as was Grigory Zaigraev, who by no standards could qualify as a Jew but who was a vocal opponent of a dry law.

As stated earlier (see Chapter 2), the 1985 alcohol reform made only pro-sobriety publications on alcohol possible. Open criticism of the reform was only allowed after about five years of paranoid censorship in this field - when already everything, including the Party, was freely criticised. By that time, however, the country was falling apart. Research and publications on alcohol, again, are now far from being a priority.

#### History and Ideology as Constraints to the 1985 Decision

The principal question this part (Chapters 3 and 4) must answer within the discourse of this thesis is this: How did the history prepare the way for the drastic set of measures taken in 1985? The major aspects of this question are two: the nature of alcohol use and abuse in Russia, and, second, the political and ideological ("theoretical") coordinates in which a political decision to the alcohol question was sought. As the foregoing

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<sup>53</sup> A severely abridged version of "the Zhdanov lecture" (read in Novosibirsk in 1983) was published abroad in Posev, 1985, 3:39-41. Most of the embarrassing speculations were left out, particularly all of the spicy anti-Semitic remarks. In the USSR (or in post-Soviet Russia), the lecture, to my knowledge, has never been published and was only distributed by means of the typewriter-and-xerox, but there were thousands and thousands of copies (at the time when only the more important organizations were allowed to have photocopying equipment and private or unauthorised use of that equipment was a criminal offence).

analysis suggests, these are answered as follows.

The dimension of drinking.

The most significant fact of history is that drinking habits had remained essentially unchanged since at least the 19th century, through all the political, economic, social and technological changes. Moreover, it will be accurate to state that most distinct attributes, if not the details of custom, of Russian drinking had been preserved since much earlier historical times, i.e. from the 17th century, if not earlier still, as described by Kostomarov and other historians. These features are captured by the vodka drinking pattern, with the tendency to drink for the purpose of (heavy) intoxication and, when intoxicated, to behave in extreme ways. Compared to most other drinking peoples, Russian drinking has been for centuries and is today highly visible. It is part of this drinking pattern to display, and often in an exaggerated fashion, one's state of drunkenness publicly, rather than to hide it (e.g. "I feel like fighting" as opposed to "I better go to bed").

Further, not only did this pattern survive broader social changes, but it also proved very resistant to any attempts to consciously change it by means of control or policy. "Civilized measures", like the excise or Witte monopoly, had some limited success, but failed to change the pattern (which was one of the two main objectives of the policy). The same can be said about "barbaric measures", that is, prohibition. Vodka (as opposed to beer or wine), drinking to excess, and the adventure-path under intoxication remained clear choices all the time through. And massive moonshining emerged as a response to attempts at suppression of drinking at the time of the dry law, particularly, in the early 1920s, despite Draconic measures against moonshiners.

The Politburo in 1985, as their predecessors before, had to deal with the fact that when alcohol consumption grew in Russia, it caused more serious and more visible consequences, and faster, than in most other cultures. Drinking and often heavy drinking remained a very noticeable part of life. To do something about the drinking problem had always been a big problem in itself. The history of attempts to fight drinking in Russia provided them with hardly any reliable recipes for success but with many a recipe for disaster.

The dimension of political decision-making.

Facing the situation of rapidly growing alcoholism, Soviet leaders were in many ways noticeably constrained by the officially accepted interpretation of alcohol in the socialist society, by previous experience of alcohol control, by fundamental political and ideological considerations, and, not the least, by financial ones.

The official view of alcoholism in Soviet society as a survival of capitalism made anti-alcohol measures look unnecessary. But as socialism grew older, this view looked increasingly untrue. The theory of a direct causal relationship between the mode of production and alcoholism was an ideological point that obstructed clear vision of real dimensions of alcohol use and abuse.

The political decision-makers were torn between the arguments for practical action and, on the other hand, ideocratic formulae. The latter made any action an admission of either the scientific socialism as a fanciful theory or of Soviet society as not truly socialist. The leaders had to sacrifice either one or the other. Compromises attempted in the 1950s and '70s meant sacrificing and compromising both, and were seen as failures by all concerned. The 1985 decision, in this respect, was a radical way out: it freely admitted that the survival theory should be thrown to the garbage pile of history. This could only become possible after decades of painful experience.

The constraints of the decision-making were conflicting. On the one hand, growing alcoholism and lack of success of the non-radical measures attempted prior to 1985 suggested that something different had to be attempted. On the other hand, the distinct possibility of the population's "samogon response" and the certainty of heavy revenue losses in the radical approach scenario warned the decision-makers against going too far. This, probably, ruled out the dry law decision. Some major aspects of these sets of constraints have been examined in this part of the thesis. The others are addressed in the next chapter which is focused on the dynamics of the alcohol situation over the three decades prior to the reform of the policy in 1985.

## CHAPTER 5. THE PRE-REFORM DYNAMICS OF ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE

There are three sorts of lies:  
lies, damned lies, and statistics.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the dynamics of the alcohol situation in the Soviet Union from 1950 to 1984. An attempt is made to follow the development of the condition in question - the amount of alcohol consumption in the country, the extent of alcohol abuse, and the observable consequences of drinking - in "real", objective, measurable terms. With a view to the sociological import of this, there are three related questions upon which this analysis will focus.

One is whether or not alcohol use and abuse in the country was on the rise before the reform. To answer this question, is obviously a tedious task but by no means impossible. The sociologist is in a position to address it and to answer (at least, speaking of the events of the present or recent past - as opposed to those a century ago). In this particular Soviet case, my answer is that all attempts to measure the dynamics of the alcohol situation will show a clear-cut trend towards more drinking and worse consequences of it.

The second aspect is the perception of the aforementioned dynamics by society, in particular, by the major actors on the alcohol scene - the decision-makers, crusaders, experts, and the majority. The point of this thesis is that things were seen by all of the above as becoming progressively worse since the 1960s. This chapter is a depiction of the overall picture from what can be called the expert's point of view, that is, as detached, unbiased and quantified as available data and measurement instruments allow. The perceptions, interpretations and activities of the other actors are addressed in detail (as opposed to the brief presentation in Chapter 2. The Reform) in the chapters that follow.

This brings us to the third question - what was the relationship between the first two aspects, i.e. between the condition and its dynamics, on the one hand, and the interpretations of it, on the other. This particularly comes into play in the chapters on the crusaders and, to a lesser degree, on the decision-makers.

An aspect of this which is a direct relation to the analysis in this chapter is that the authorities tried to hide all the evidence of the worsening situation on the alcohol front, as on so many others. This, in turn, made the public and the pro-sobriety activists suspect that the indicators of the situation, as such and in comparison to other countries, were even worse than they actually were. Also, the very fact of suppression and distortion of the statistics suggests that the decision-makers did not see the situation as good.

Several trends in alcohol use in the USSR developed over the post-war decades and became especially clear by the mid-seventies. They can and will here serve the purpose of drawing an overall picture of what is usually viewed as a deterioration of the alcohol situation in the country.

What follows is a cluster of general indicators of alcohol situation dynamics used in the 1970s and 1980s by nearly every Soviet author who addressed the issue, "wets" and "drys" alike. At the time, little of the data found their way to the press. However, they were, in a sense, available; they circulated within a small circle of particularly interested people. On the basis of largely the same data, different authors catered analyses for every taste, called "analytical reports" or "suggestions" arriving at "directive organs" (decision-making bureaucracies). First, in this particular case, they were read in the Gosplan, later in the lower parts of the CC CPSU apparatus, later still in the Committee of Party Control, and, finally, in the Politburo. Only minimal use will be made in this chapter of the data that became available later, in a different time and situation, with the advent of Gorbachev's liberalization in the late 1980s and especially after the formal repeal of censorship in the USSR in 1991.

The single most important general trend of those three and a half decades was increase in per capita consumption. Also important, of course, were indicators of what that consumption resulted in. Routinely used indicators of that kind revealed, among other trends, the following: a growing number of chronic alcoholics; more people detained for public drunkenness and processed through the alcohol detoxification system; a higher incidence of alcohol-related industrial and road accidents; higher levels of alcohol-related crime; growing losses in the economy. Indirectly, public health indicators, despite the fact that their precise relationship to drinking has been debatable, also suggested growing impact of alcoholism on people's lives. Particularly

relevant to the dynamics of the alcohol situation in the Soviet Union were such public health indicators as mortality rates and what the angriest critics called degeneration of the people, i.e. a growing number of children mentally or physically defective.

Among the more specific trends were younger age of first initiation to alcohol and the shift of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems to previously non-drinking or low-drinking segments of population. The proliferation of alcohol-related problems among the female population was probably the most important one. Less talked about, but probably the second most important trend of this kind was the steady increase of alcohol use and abuse among ethnic groups that traditionally had been non-drinking. The most visible sector in this process was among the Soviet Muslim population. It was the most destructive among the aboriginal peoples that populated mostly eastern and northern parts of the Soviet Union.

The researchers also reported shifts in drinking patterns that contributed to the increase in problem-drinking. The following two were the most alarming: general decline in the average quality of consumed beverages, and weakening of the core "safety rules" of drinking. The latter was accompanied by ever more obvious increase in offensive, dangerous and violent behavior during and after drinking. A general consensus was that "in the 1970s the alcohol problem reached a crisis level unprecedented in the history of the country"<sup>1</sup>.

1980 was the record year, officially, in the history of alcohol use in the Soviet Union, with 8.7 liters of absolute (100%) alcohol per capita sold to the population through the state-run network of alcohol trade. Over the remaining four pre-reform years, it slightly dropped and stood stable at the 8.4 mark but was more than compensated for by an increase in samogon production. In other words, there was a new trend in the official statistics of alcohol sale, paralleled by continuation of the earlier trends in consumption - the events being a limited and cautious rehearsal of the future reform<sup>2</sup>.

In late 1979, the mark-ups<sup>3</sup> in restaurants and other public dining facilities were considerably raised.

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<sup>1</sup> Trembl 1991 p.119.

<sup>2</sup> See more on that in Levine & Levine 1984a, 1988 and 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Mark-ups were special "service" additions to regular prices. For example, if the regular price of the regular half-liter bottle of vodka was 4 rubles and the restaurant mark-up was 25% of the price, the restaurant patron paid 5 rubles a bottle. Both prices and mark-ups were set exclusively by the USSR State

The next year, the previously known standard state-monopoly vodka was replaced by a more expensive one; to be more accurate, it was exactly the same vodka, as everybody knew, but the label on the bottle had changed. This was a way to increase revenue, technically speaking, without raising prices.

There was, though, another side to it, of which most drinkers were unaware. The old product did not disappear from the assembly lines altogether, but only from the stores open to the public. Under its proper old name, it lived on but now was only available to the nomenklatura people for whom the price, too, remained just as old as the product itself.

In 1981, there was a sudden overt price increase, the first in decades. The population's reaction to these measures was traditional. Some began spending more on alcohol, some others began drinking less, and still others switched to samogon. Over the 1981-84 period, the sales of sugar jumped up by almost 3 kilograms per capita<sup>4</sup>, a coincidence hardly accidental. In terms of consumption of absolute alcohol per capita it meant an increase by no less than 1.5 liters, and quite possibly 2 liters<sup>5</sup>, over the same five years.

One important facet of this new development was that most of the increase in samogon production was urban-based, while traditionally this had always been a rural phenomenon<sup>6</sup>.

This increase in drinking, of course, was not recorded in the official alcohol trade statistics, even though those statistics, again, were only available to the chosen few. The numbers of alcohol sales for years past 1980 are not good even as a proxy for the dynamics of alcohol consumption, to say nothing of its true amounts. I will use 1980 as the last "normal" year with respect to the official statistics numbers.

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Committee for Prices; the stores and restaurants were not allowed to change them.

<sup>4</sup> See Levine and Levine 1989 p.57.

<sup>5</sup> Assuming that 1 kilo of sugar yields 1 liter of samogon, that the alcohol content in samogon is 50%, and, for the upper estimate (the 2 liter increase), that additionally 25% more samogon was produced from raw materials other than sugar (3:1 was at the time the proportion reported by the MVD between the cases of confiscation of sugar-based and other-based samogon - see Zaigraev 1986 p.150, n.17).

<sup>6</sup> The trend was for the first time officially acknowledged only in 1987, at the time of the anti-alcohol campaign running out of steam and the glasnost gaining momentum. The USSR Minister of Internal Affairs mentioned that homebrew was increasingly penetrating into the city and different strata of the population - the intelligentsia and office employees (see Pravda 15 November 1987). In 1987, though, it was not really new; already in the early 1980s, one simply could not but notice it, for in many respectable houses the guests were treated to samogon - something unthinkable prior to that.



### Drinking More from the Liquor Store

Until 1980, the turnover of alcoholic beverages in the Soviet Trade had been steadily and rapidly growing virtually all the time since the early 1920s when alcohol was made again legal, except during the time of the next war with Germany (1941-45). However, drinking had not become a concern for the Party until the late 1950s when the first of the post-war Party Resolution on alcoholism was issued. After that, it was not a serious concern until the 1970s: another Resolution was issued in 1972. But even that Resolution was soon forgotten by the population and disregarded by government agencies<sup>7</sup>.

The attitudes towards drinking, however, changed just a few years later. By the late seventies - early eighties, the drinking problem and the issue of dry law (sukhoi zakon, the term used in the country rather than zapret, the Russian for prohibition) - as an actual policy option - had moved to the very center of public debate and had become a focus of moral controversy and political struggle in society.

For the years before 1981, as said above, official statistics can and will here serve as an acceptable approximation of the true dynamics of alcohol consumption, although, of course, not of the true amounts of alcohol intake. The data in Table 1 shows an extremely fast increase in alcohol sales over the 30 years<sup>8</sup>.

Table 1. Total resale of alcoholic beverages in the USSR, 100% alcohol, liters per capita per annum<sup>9</sup>

1950	1960	1970	1980
1.8	3.9	6.8	8.7

<sup>7</sup> The 1985 Party Resolution, in fact, states in its opening paragraphs that the previous decisions on alcohol abuse and alcoholism had not been carried out (Trezvost'..., p.3).

<sup>8</sup> In publications of recent years on Russian drinking matters, starting approximately in 1992, data for the Russian Federation have usually been used, often even for the Soviet years. Since this study refers to the Soviet period, I use statistics that were in use for the country then, that is, for the Soviet Union as a whole of which Russia was, of course, only part. Per capita intake of absolute alcohol in Russia was a bit higher than in all of the Soviet Union for any given year, e.g. for 1980 it was for Russia higher by about 2 liters than for the USSR.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Goskomstat SSSR [USSR State Committee on Statistics], archives.

The increase in production and sales of alcoholic beverages had been impressive. Compared to the 1940 data, the output in 1980 was larger by factor 16 for grape wines, 5 for beer<sup>10</sup>, 2.5 for vodka and vodka-based products<sup>11</sup>. The sales (in comparable prices) for all alcoholic beverages were almost 8 times as great in 1980 as in 1940, while the population only increased by 34%<sup>12</sup>. In 1984, the last year before the year of the alcohol reform in question, the official trade<sup>13</sup> sold and the Soviet population bought 26 liters of wine, 23 liters of beer, and 10.5 liters of vodka per resident. The illegal addition to it will be discussed later in this chapter.

Internationally, the USSR in the early 1980s still had ahead of itself about a dozen countries with even higher levels of (officially registered) alcohol consumption. But that was a dubious consolation in view of the Russian pattern of alcohol consumption, the amount of unregistered consumption and the rapidity of the increase in drinking and problems it caused. The dynamics of the alcohol situation were becoming bothersome and in some special ways particularly annoying for the Party leadership. Laughable as it may seem to a disinterested observer, one of those special reasons for concern, taken at the time rather seriously, was that the chief adversary, and the point of reference for any occasion, the USA, by the end of the seventies happened to be outperformed - that is, outdrunk. The Soviet pace of progress for 1950-80 (see Table 2), in terms of absolute and percentage growth alike, was number three in the world, number one being the German Democratic Republic and number two Bulgaria.

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<sup>10</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1980 g., Moscow, 1981, p.193.

<sup>11</sup> Deduced from: (a) Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1980 g., M., p.193, and (b) Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1967 g., M., 1968, p.203.

<sup>12</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1980 g., M., 1981, p.402, 471.

<sup>13</sup> Technically speaking, Soviet Trade, not state trade, was the correct term for all officially registered trade turnover in the USSR. The Soviet Trade included the State Trade, which was chiefly responsible for meeting the needs of the population in the cities and was the (much) larger part, plus the Cooperative Trade which covered most of the trade in the rural parts of the country. Outside of the above, and speaking of what was legal, there were no other transactions between the official system of trade and the population.

Table 2. Dynamics of registered consumption of absolute alcohol in sample countries, 1950-80, 1960-80 and 1970-80, increase/decrease in liters per capita and % (1950=100%); and alcohol consumption in 1980<sup>14</sup>

	1950-80		1960-80		1970-80		1980
	L	%	L	%	L	%	L
GDR	8.9	742	6.0	146	4.0	66	10.1
Bulgaria	8.1	736	4.0	77	2.7	42	9.2
USSR	6.9	383	4.8	123	1.9	28	8.7
Netherlands	6.5	310	6.0	231	3.1	56	8.6
Finland	4.9	288	3.9	144	1.9	40	6.6
FRG	7.1	245	4.2	72	1.1	12	10.0
Poland	5.9	197	4.8	117	3.3	59	8.9
Hungary	6.8	142	5.5	90	2.5	28	11.6
Canada	4.4	100	4.1	87	2.3	35	8.8
Great Britain	3.6	74	3.3	64	2.1	33	8.5
USA	3.6	72	3.2	59	1.6	23	8.6
Australia	3.8	62	3.3	50	1.5	18	9.7
Italy	4.7	51	-0.4	-3	-2.1	-13	13.9
France	-1.5	-9	-3.3	-17	-1.7	-10	15.8

Russian students of alcoholism before the Revolution were struck, as have been later generations, by the incongruity of international comparisons based on statistics on alcohol consumption with the gruesome reality they knew. To take just one example, V.M. Bekhterev stated: "Judging by amounts of consumed alcohol, Russia is ranked among the lowest [alcohol drinking countries] throughout the world.... But in actuality that is a delusion (*mirazh*), a falsehood"<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, so it was, for at least two reasons: the pattern of alcohol consumption based on vodka, and the consumption never covered by official statistics.

A comprehensive statistical cross-section of alcohol and alcohol-related developments in the late Soviet economy and society was presented in a book published in 1982, well before Soviet social statistics went public, by US-based expert, Vladimir Gaevich Treml. Treml's estimate is that during the period from 1955 to 1979 the USSR had a "very high growth rate of per capita consumption of alcohol. The growth has been steady over the entire period and averaged 7.2 percent per annum for consumption of state-produced

<sup>14</sup> Calculated by this author on the basis of data from the following sources: National Yearbooks of Statistics for France, FRG (West Germany), Netherlands and English speaking countries; Nordic Countries Yearbook for Finland; Goskomstat SSSR Archives for the rest.

<sup>15</sup> Bekhterev 1912 p.59.

beverages and 4.4 percent per year if we were to add samogon.... Only Finland, Iceland and Denmark recorded... rates of growth higher than 4.4 percent"<sup>16</sup>.

#### The Issue of Samogon and Other Additions

A considerable part of Soviet alcohol consumption was from illegal sources and went unregistered. Ignoring the three major sources of the illegal supply, of which homemade vodka, samogon, was the largest, one would get a seriously distorted picture of alcohol situation in the USSR at any time of its history, particularly before the 1985 reform. All indications are the unregistered component of alcohol consumption in the Soviet Union, whether one measures it in liters of per capita intake or as a percentage, was greater than in any other country of the world where alcohol is legal. And in a vast majority of cases, it was greater by a factor of at least several times<sup>17</sup>. This, of course, means the reflection of drinking in official statistics was a gross understatement.

Important aspects of this distortion were at least three. The first was a distortion with respect to comparisons with other countries. The second was a distortion of the dynamics of domestic alcohol consumption. The third was a distortion, as well as a great difficulty, in comparing drinking at different times, for example, when one needs to compare the levels of consumption on the eve of the reform vs. a year after; or some current year vs. 1913 (the last normal year for tsarist Russia); or under prohibition vs. after its repeal.

In a broader sense, the amount and nature of illegal drinking is a characteristic of the amount and nature of illegal behavior and underground economy. It is also some indication of where the balance may be between state control and the illegal activities of population.

There is one crucial distinction between the Soviet underground economy and that of a modern Western country. Most of the supply in the Soviet case is home-made for self-consumption, with little or no

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<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Trembl. Alcohol in the USSR. A statistical study. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1982 p.70.

<sup>17</sup> See some data on that further in this chapter.

cash transactions. This is distinguished from market-oriented production common to Western countries involving some degree of organization, a division of labor, leasing a work-place, buying raw materials and components, and selling the end product, be it moonshine, or opium, or milk, or wood, or weapons. In the USA today, moonshining is for the most part a business and a profession, not a pastime, for those who brew it. As US experts believe,

Stills are usually run by hired help called still hands.... "For a lot of these people, this is all they've ever done".... Today's operators are a far cry from the old-time moonshiner who kept a 20 gallon copper still behind the henhouse and a jug on the shelf<sup>18</sup>.

These differences between Soviet and Western realities are routinely overlooked by Western economists and sociologists. They have no reason to assume that the "black market" or "shadow economy" in the Soviet Union is equatable with the underground economy in the United States (only smaller, less developed, technologically backward, etc.). There are, however, some happy exceptions.

With regard to moonshine or home-made wine and beer in the USSR, the underground alcohol economy included market-type action on a very small scale. It was not exactly so with industrial alcohol used as drink, since there one finds industrial enterprises where some transactions certainly did take place. Even so, that, too, was far from the American-type shadow operation. Suffice it to say that a vast majority of those transactions in Soviet socialist enterprises involved direct exchange of commodities or services (or I should probably say favors and considerations) with no cash payments. According to Trembl, "In the United States moonshine operations... produce for a market. In contrast, in the USSR, production of samogon is done on a small scale by a large number of households and with only a fraction of samogon earmarked for sale outside the household"<sup>19</sup>.

The level of unregistered consumption of alcohol in the Soviet Union was - for a country not under alcohol prohibition - indeed unparalleled. Samogon "accounted for as much as 65 percent of total alcohol consumed in the USSR in 1955 and... still made up to 28 percent in 1979", states Trembl<sup>20</sup>. His numbers for

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<sup>18</sup> New York Times 2 February 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. p.48.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit. p.70.

samogon are 2.87 liters of absolute alcohol per resident 15 or more years old for 1955 and 3.30 for 1979<sup>21</sup>. This 1979 estimate is equivalent to 2.5 liters of absolute alcohol intake a year per every resident. I will use this number later in this chapter for some further estimates (since I use per capita consumption levels that include all registered residents irrespective of age).

On the Soviet side, an estimate of samogon consumption leaked into the Soviet press; obviously, a censor's oversight. The EKO, a Siberian journal on socio-economic problems, waywardly cited "roughly half the level of vodka consumption", apparently for the early 1970s<sup>22</sup>. Unfortunately for the Soviet reader, this was not sufficient for a calculation of the amount of consumed samogon in absolute numbers. How much vodka people drank was for people a secret, feverishly guarded zakrytye dannye (classified data): they could only guess what 50% of the unknown was.

Now we are in an incomparably better position as both investigators and authors. For the years 1967 through 1974, the volumes of state-produced vodka purchased by the population stayed stable with virtually negligible fluctuations; if we chose the 1970 official statistical data for vodka (that first saw print inside the country at a late point of perestroika<sup>23</sup>) and accepted the 50% estimate, a calculation would yield 1.9 liters of absolute alcohol per capita a year as the samogon addition. Unlike Trembl, the Soviet authors of the article in the EKO, Strumilin and Sonin, did not explain (because they were not allowed to) where from or how they obtain their estimate for samogon<sup>24</sup>. However, having readjusted the 1.9 liters per capita into an index for population 15 years or older, one will find their estimate reasonably close to that of Trembl, that is, 2.63 deduced from the EKO publication and 2.99 for Trembl's average for 1970-74.

Another researcher who undertook an enquiry on samogon consumption in the USSR and Russia, including the pre-reform years, Grigory Zaigraev, also attests their estimate as plausible. Zaigraev further suggests that the ratio of samogon to vodka remained roughly intact through the 1970s<sup>25</sup>. On this assumption,

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<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. p.68.

<sup>22</sup> EKO, 1974, no.4, p.37.

<sup>23</sup> See Levine & Levine 1989.

<sup>24</sup> In Trembl, 1982, see Chapter 5 (p.47-66) on home-made alcohol and employed methods of estimation.

<sup>25</sup> Zaigraev G.G. Bor'ba s alkogolizmom [Struggle with Alcoholism], Moscow, 1986, p.12.

the figure for samogon in 1980 comes out as 50% of 4.4<sup>26</sup>, that is, 2.2 per capita in liters of 100% pure alcohol<sup>27</sup>. On the basis of Trembl's estimate for 1979, the per capita (including all age brackets) consumption of samogon in 1979 was 2.5 liters of pure alcohol.

Samogon consumption, particularly in the 1970s or early '80s, of course, is impossible to estimate without a probable error of very serious proportions; and it is not even possible to reasonably estimate how far those proportions might extend. One had no reliable data to start with, often no data at all; one could not even think of an assumption which would not look a priori questionable, if not altogether false. However, it may be better to have at least some estimate than no estimate at all. And of all people in the field, Trembl and Zaigraev are certainly those whom one can trust to do the best possible estimation<sup>28</sup>.

To be safe and conservative about this estimation business, one can rest assured that the samogon addition was quite sizable and the largest of the three major alternative sources of alcohol. The other two were, of course, ethanol which was meant for technological needs of the economy but was in fact utilized as a beverage, and home-made non-distilled beverages.

Trembl does not include "homemade grape, fruit and berry wine, beer and braga" in the statistical tables for the total of Soviet alcohol consumption. However, he does provide an estimate of it elsewhere. He states the non-samogon domestic source would add "at least one liter of alcohol to per capita consumption in the

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<sup>26</sup> Levine and Levine 1989 p.36.

<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, Stephen White in his deservedly widely known book misquotes (or perhaps he had misread the initial source?) these same data when he says that homebrew added as much as 50 percent to the reported figure for total consumption (Russia Goes Dry, 1996, p.32). Before 1980, 50% was the ratio of samogon to the reported consumption of vodka, and vodka accounted for about half of all reported consumption. Thus, the ratio of samogon to the total of registered alcohol consumption calculates as 25%.

<sup>28</sup> Trembl, who took every thinkable precaution against erratic assumptions and misinterpretations, states this: "The estimates [for samogon] made in this study, handicapped by an almost complete absence of summary statistical data, must be considered as first approximations with a significant probable error" (1982, p.48). Candid reservations like this are not customary for Soviet or even post-Soviet publications, in fact, I have never come across one. Usually, the author simply states "our estimate is so-and-so". With respect to samogon, however, everyone familiar with the field is well aware that the only possibility is to come up with "first approximations", or what some call "guesstimates".

1970s"<sup>29</sup>. In fact, the author means there the consumption per resident 15 or more years old; so the per capita level was, according to Trembl's estimate, about 0.75 by the end of the 1970s<sup>30</sup>.

The author also mentions "stolen industrial alcohol". Elsewhere, he estimates the amount of its intake in 1980 roughly equal to that of home-made wine and beer<sup>31</sup>. Based on the ample anecdotal evidence available to me (there are no data), ethanol for industrial (and also for medical and all other purposes, as in research and every other branch of the economy) has always been stolen and misused virtually all over the country. It was, and still is, called spirit, i.e. highly concentrated, normally 96-97% pure, alcohol. When someone said "We drank spirit last night", it could only be interpreted as "stolen industrial ethanol". One can safely assume that its intake for the country in the 1970s and early 1980s could not be lower than that of unregistered wine, beer and braga combined. My sense, in fact, is that in the 1970s it well could be several times as high. However, I will assume it was lower than that of samogon, so it does not seem unreasonable to guesstimate the spirit consumption per capita at about 2 liters per annum.

With all these additions, the USSR, and especially Russia proper, must have been placed much higher on the list of alcohol consuming countries. Indeed, on the assumptions and estimates made above, Russia proper in terms of per capita consumption of absolute alcohol in the early 1980s would have unquestionably been in the league with the world drinking leaders France, Italy and Portugal, if not ahead of them (assuming also that the unregistered consumption in these three countries was negligible<sup>32</sup>). This is an unbelievable feat for a country whose master drink is not wine but vodka<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. p.68.

<sup>30</sup> The ratio of population 15 years old and older in the USSR was 0.71 in 1970 and 0.76 in 1979. Both 1970 and 1979 happen to be census years. The relevant data were among the "open part" of the census' results published in the standard statistical sources.

<sup>31</sup> Trembl 1987 p.152.

<sup>32</sup> Which, very probably, it was not, but I am not prepared to work with estimates of unrecorded drinking in those countries.

<sup>33</sup> For the 26 countries on Trembl's list with an exclusion of the Soviet Union, Spearman rank correlation test yields a coefficient of -.87. As the statistician expresses it, "per capita consumption of alcohol is inversely correlated with the share of strong beverages". That fact, of course, has been undeniable for centuries, and  $S = -.87$  indicates "a strong inverse relationship.... The USSR is unique in this respect" (op. cit. p.68, 70). The obvious implication is that the Soviet Union was on the very top of the list wherein it must have been at the very bottom, had it been "a normal country".



In considering the unregistered component of the Soviet alcohol consumption, international comparisons are just as essential a point of reference as putting the overall consumption into perspective.

For 1980, the unregistered component will be computed as 2.35 (samogon; Trem1 for 1979; Strumilin & Sonin, and Zaigraev; mean) + 0.76 (wine, beer and braga; Trem1) + 2.0 (spirit; my guesstimate) = 5.11 (liters of absolute alcohol per capita per annum). Adding this to the official statistics number (based on domestic sales in the country) will drive the total up to about 13.8. Of this, the hidden portion comes to 5.1/13.8 or approximately 37%. The usually used ratio of unrecorded to recorded consumption will calculate 5.1/8.7 or approximately 60%, probably, the world record for the time (1980). But if it was a record, the Soviets managed to break it right next year, and set a new record every subsequent year until 1988.

As far as pre-reform years go, the ratio of the unregistered part must have been about stable in the USSR through the 1970s, possibly even through the 1960s and '70s. In 1984, the last normal Soviet year, that ratio was definitely higher than in 1980; on the assumptions I make, it was, as represented by the two natural indices, 6.0/14.7 or about 41% of the whole; and 6.0/8.4 or about 71% of the unregistered to registered consumption<sup>34</sup>.

For the USA, this hidden/visibleratio was estimated in the 1970s at about 2%<sup>35</sup>, for Canada 5<sup>36</sup>, and

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<sup>34</sup> My principal assumption is that the increase in consumption during 1981-84, as well as a smaller increase in 1980, was accomplished solely through the samogon component (which naturally covered the little drop in vodka trade too) while the other two unregistered components, spirit and non-distilled home-made alcohol, had stayed unchanged all time through. The other assumptions are that 100% of all of the increase in purchase of sugar by population over that period was used for increase in samogon production (see Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v ... g. for years 1970-84); that 1 liter of sugar yields 1 liter of 50% strong samogon; and sugar is used in 75% of samogon production (i.e. statistically an increase in sugar sales by 3 kilograms is the equivalent of the 4 liter increase in samogon production, or, which is the same, of the 2 liter rise in consumption of absolute alcohol) (Zaigraev, MVD experts on samogon - personal communication).

For the underlying reasoning, see Levine & Levine 1983a, 1983b, and 1989 p.57.

<sup>35</sup> Trem1, 1982, p.69.

<sup>36</sup> See Eric Single & Norman Giesbrecht, "The 16% solution and other mysteries concerning the accuracy of alcohol consumption", The British Journal of Addiction 74 (1979) no.2:165-173.

The latest report on unrecorded alcohol consumption in Ontario puts its probable scale at close to one-fifth of the total, i.e. 25% to the registered part in 1994: Scott Macdonald et al. Unrecorded alcohol consumption in Ontario: 1990-1995. ARF Research Document Series No.131. Toronto, Addiction Research Foundation, 1997. According to the authors, "... a marked increase in unrecorded consumption

for Finland around 10 per cent<sup>37</sup>. The latest available estimates for Finland, where the unregistered addition to official statistics figures has been comparatively high, also show striking differences between that country and the USSR in the composition of the unregistered portion<sup>38</sup>. Particularly, in 1984, less than 10% of the unregistered consumption was comprised by "illicit beverages"<sup>39</sup>, while for the USSR the corresponding percentage must have been somewhere around 90%<sup>40</sup>. It also follows that in the total consumption of alcohol in Finland, the illicit component accounted for about 1%. There, ...drinks imported by travellers... accounted for almost 60% of the estimated unrecorded total. ... Very little moonshine is made in Finland nowadays; illicit distilling has not been widespread for many years. ... Very few people use denatured alcohol, industrial spirits or similar unpalatable alcohol-containing substances<sup>41</sup>.

Countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway have continued with rather severe, by Western standards, restrictions in the field of alcohol control. Those countries are known to have higher levels of unregistered consumption<sup>42</sup>, although its nature, as shown above, cannot be compared to that in Russia. In wine-based cultures, where much of alcohol consumption is home-made wine, the ratio of home-produced drinks must be much higher than in other countries. However, the bulk of wine-making is not illegal in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal and, as I understand it, most of it finds its reflection in national statistics of these countries. Other instances of sizable drinking off the record are found in such former socialist countries as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and perhaps Romania<sup>43</sup>. However, available evidence, suggests that none of these had a level of unregistered, far less illegal, drinking comparable to that in the Soviet Union in the 1970s or early '80s.

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occured since 1989" (p.17).

<sup>37</sup> See Makela, Klaus. Unrecorded Consumption of Alcohol in Finland, Reports from the Social Research Institute of Alcohol Studies, no.126, Helsinki: The State Alcohol Monopoly, 1979, p.66-71.

<sup>38</sup> See Osterberg, Esa. Recorded and unrecorded alcohol consumption. In Finnish drinking habits, Jussi Simpura, ed., Jyvaskyla, 1987, p.23-35.

<sup>39</sup> Finnish drinking habits 1987 p.35.

<sup>40</sup> My estimate. The share of all home-made wine, beer and braga (see above) equalled about 15% (5.11:0.76). Even on the assumption that all of it was licit, the share of the clearly illegal component computes as 85%.

<sup>41</sup> Finnish drinking habits 1987 p.35.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Makela 1979, and Macdonald 1997. The latter cites the highest known estimates of this ratio for countries outside of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s: 36% for Norway, 30 for Sweden, 17 for Denmark and 15% of unrecorded to recorded consumption of alcohol in Finland (p.4).

<sup>43</sup> The post-Soviet newly independent states are not considered here.

The illegal component of the Soviet alcohol use and abuse is a very important part and aspect of the whole. It is obviously so with regard to its extent, but this is also one example of quantity which amounts to a new quality. That is to say, the extent of consumption of samogon and other alternatives to the state-monopolized production and distribution of alcoholic beverages is a comment on the alcohol economy and life of the country on the eve of the 1985 anti-alcohol campaign.

#### The Quality Aggravation: Sivukha and Worse

Five instances/reasons of why quality of alcoholic beverages should have been of special concern in the USSR will be briefly addressed in this section.

In the five-fold "problem of quality", two aspects are particularly grave. One is illegally produced samogon. The other is a particular class of wines, the so called fruit-and-berry wines that were legally produced and sold within the law through the Soviet Trade system. The remaining three instances of bad liquor are alcohol stolen from "the people's economy"; the increasingly deteriorating quality of vodka and other major beverages produced outside of Moscow and a few other chosen localities; and the drinking of liquids that were never meant for human consumption.

The word sivukha is an integral part of the Russian drinking vocabulary, and on the strength of that, of the Russian life. The word means bad liquor: bad smell, bad taste, bad hangover. From what the old books say, it appears the term was coined "by the people" in the mid-19th century, as a reflection of the sudden general deterioration in the quality of vodka. Later, it acquired a much broader meaning than just poor quality vodka. In Russian, sivukha is a popular word, unlike its equivalents in English or German. It is closely related to sivushnoe maslo, the fusel oil(s)<sup>44</sup>, which makes the worst part of the spirits' impurities.

The sizable amount of samogon consumption has serious implications for both quantity and quality

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<sup>44</sup> According to Christian, "fusel oil(s)" in the English language comes from the German Fuesel (Christian 1990, p.57).

of alcohol consumption in the Soviet Union. As mentioned above, one could call it home-made vodka, because that is what samogon is: liquid consisting of 1 part of distilled spirits (=alcohol) and 1 part water (vodka can be made 50% strong, too), and nothing else, unlike beer, wine or distilled spirits other than vodka (see Chapter 3). Literally, samogon means "self-distil", that is, you make it go through the serpentine of the still to obtain yourself the distilled product which is supposed to be vodka. However, nobody calls it that, probably because it is, as a rule, unmeasurably inferior to vodka in quality. Sivukha - ersatz-liquor, ersatz-vodka - is the most common generic name for a number of vodka substitutes, of which samogon is number one.

As Tremml, rather delicately, remarks, "Because of the primitive nature of home brewing, the final product, samogon, has more impurities than the standard ethanol-based vodka. Higher levels of fusel oils and of complex alcohols contribute to the strong and unpleasant odor and taste of samogon"<sup>45</sup>. Often it even looks bad: grayish, murky, oily. The smell is sickening for those unaccustomed to it; the impartial observer would probably say that "smell of samogon" or "samogon smells" will constitute improper word usage, that "stench" and "stinks" should rather be employed instead. The taste will not fail to convince one that sight and smell did not deceive the drinker. And if one persists in going against one's senses and does not stop soon, the next morning one will have a rendezvous with the mother of all hangovers.

Aversion caused by samogon is not the only problem with the hazardous material. Long-term consequences of its prolonged use are considerably more severe than those of drinking vodka, or any regular drink for that matter. Samogon seriously affects every major organ of the human body. Its toxic effects are harder for the body to bear and to overcome; time needed for natural bodily clean-up after its intake is much longer. It causes chronic alcoholism or alcoholic psychoses sooner and makes them more complicated; experts in treatment say samogon cases are much harder to treat<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Tremml 1982, p.47.

<sup>46</sup> Which appears to be the case with every mind-altering substance in its refined form. Home-made (and especially dealer-made) versions are as a rule more toxic, more addictive and result in cases that are harder to treat, as compared to standard, properly manufactured substances, be it morphine/heroin, or an amphetamine, or cocaine. There can hardly be a doubt that the very status of illegality creates, among other things, a low-quality market for a substance.

The second most obvious problem with quality of alcoholic beverages was the increasingly widespread production by the state and cooperative (v kolkhozakh) wineries of low-grade fortified wines. They were officially called "fruit-and-berry" (fruktovo-yagodnye), were cheap and easy to produce<sup>47</sup>, cheap to buy, and quite definitely had the worst effects on health among all the legal drinks. Many people thought that diluted industrial ethanol was better; some even thought samogon was better.

Usually about 16 to 19 percent of alcohol<sup>48</sup>, with sugary taste they were supposed to belong to the same variety that include strong portwine, or sherry and the like; but were a very sorry imitation indeed. A few of them became notorious, got bad press in the late 1970s<sup>49</sup>, and were taken out of production as a consequence. One brand was particularly disreputable; Solntsedar, literally "Sun-Gift", was commonly called "blow to your liver", probably in a recognition of its true qualities.

On the whole, I think, people who know would agree that quality of the fruit-and-berry wines should be rated overall as higher than samogon and (much) lower than even bad vodka. The share of these wines in alcohol consumption was, of course, another secret of the time; unlike some others, it was virtually impossible to figure on the basis of the open statistics. It was only possible at the time to say that those substandard products were around in quite sizable amounts.

The quality of vodka, vodka-based products and other regular beverages suffered too, which was happening over a long period of time before 1985. It appears that it was at least in part a consequence of economic problems the Soviet Union was experiencing, and also, of course, a consequence of the Party's uncontrolled rule. According to Trembl, "the pressures of shortages of agricultural inputs for the state ethanol

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<sup>47</sup> For that reason, this variety of wines was popularly known as fruktovo-vygodnoe; I would suggest fruit-and-profit as an English approximation.

<sup>48</sup> The natural brewing only allows to make wines up to 14% alcohol content. Any drink more potent than that indicates either distillation or mixing with distilled spirits.

<sup>49</sup> One article of the time, "Chernila", published in Literaturnaya gazeta, got particularly much talked about. Chernila, ink, was a popular generic name for that generic product. But the most popular name was bormotukha, which has to do with the Russian for mumble, hinting, probably, at both the mumbling as a result of its intake and the unintelligible origin of the mud. There were, of course, other funny names.

industry led to the use of low-grade malodorous ethanol distilled from molasses and sugar beets"<sup>50</sup>.

There was another quality related issue, which was also quite obviously related to ethical and economic issues. It, too, was addressed by Tremml:

Evidence available from different sources indicates that in the late 1950s and the early 1960s significant quantities of synthetic ethanol were used secretly in the production of Soviet vodka and wines. This unfortunate practice apparently had a disastrous effect on the health of the Soviet people and was sharply reduced or discontinued in 1964<sup>51</sup>.

The use of non-organic, non-food-based ethanol on a large scale for state-run manufacturing of alcoholic beverages for humans appears to be a proven fact. Tremml cites a testimony that it was Khrushchev himself who boasted to Kennedy at the Vienna meeting in 1961 about "a newly developed [in the USSR] process of making vodka out of natural gas"<sup>52</sup>. That type of secret could not and was not kept uncovered in a country like Russia. The drinking class knew by experience what they were drinking and, on the other hand, there were too many people involved in this comparatively large-scale innovation<sup>53</sup>, and, last but not least, the subject was far too important not to get talked about. The wood-based vodka (*iz drevesnogo spirta*) was soon recognized and nick-named *suchok* (wood-knot), as evidenced by the numerous jokes, anecdotes and songs about it. Older people, when asked about it, confirm that yes, under Khrushchev, vodka got worse.

The use of poor raw materials for the making of vodka, and particularly, as Tremml notes, "the use of... wood hydrolytic ethanol..., and the general public knowledge of this, played an important role in encouraging the production and consumption of home-distilled illegal beverages, particularly samogon", despite its poor quality that usually inhibits its use<sup>54</sup>.

There is, indeed, a two-way relationship between samogon and the standard Soviet trade vodka in terms of both quantity and quality. The impact of prohibitively high prices or scarcity of vodka and other regular beverages on moonshining is obvious and well-known: the higher the price/the more scarcity, the more

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<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. p.47.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. p.40.

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. p.44.

<sup>53</sup> See Tremml op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. p.45.

samogon. As for quality, it probably has a considerable impact on the consumer's decisions too. The quality gap between vodka and samogon can only be overcome by moonshiners in some exceptional cases, when they have high-tech equipment and quality raw materials and all the ingredients and so on, which is almost never the case. People will tell you stories about narodnye umel'tsy (handy men) who produce at home samogon "clear as a tear" (kak sleza) that will shame Stolichnaya and any other vodka. Instances of that cannot be entirely ruled out, but the law enforcement experts on samogon will tell you that that is almost always an exaggeration<sup>55</sup>. Normally, people would prefer vodka over samogon on quality considerations alone (that is, even if there were no risks with the law or inconveniences with making it). The prices or shortages of vodka must be severe enough to "force" people to look for substitutes. On the other hand, the quality of vodka itself is not a given; when it deteriorates, substitutes are likely to lose for some drinkers the status of being unacceptable. Trembl argues that it indeed happened in the USSR in the 1950s and 1960s:

the use of poorly rectified ethanol..., as well as the use of large quantities of hydrolytic ethanol, resulted in a significant lowering of the quality of most of the alcoholic beverages produced in the USSR. The quality gap between samogon and state-produced beverages was thus narrowed, making samogon a better substitute and contributing to its wider use<sup>56</sup>.

The quality of stolen ethanol varied wildly, because so many brands of spirit were stolen and drunk. There are, in general, two classes of ethanol: organic and non-organic (i.e. synthetic). The first is made of food products and can be used as food/drink; it can also be used for technical, industrial needs. When this was stolen, it was diluted with water and drunk as vodka. The truth, however, is ethanol and water do not mix evenly without special equipment which as a rule the drinkers do not have. The skill of the one who blends the two components also very much matters in this case, so that some will do it much better than others in terms of the quality of the end product. But even with the best human skill the difference between diluted spirit and vodka proper remains. However, generally speaking, this substitute for vodka was at the time probably the best among all available.

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Zaigraev 1986 p.150.

<sup>56</sup> Op. cit. p.47.

The synthetic ethanol category includes several subtypes, every single one dangerous and potentially deadly. This makes a link to the last of the poor-quality category of drinks below.

Finally, there was, probably, the smallest in size but the worst in quality addition to alcohol consumption in the USSR. This was the consumption of technical, non-food variety ethanol and liquids that were produced for technical purposes and contained some sort of alcohol or other, such as perfume or anti-freeze fluids.

These, of course, would not qualify even as high as the sivukha class beverages. The term sivukha historically came about, according to Pryzhov, toward the end of the otkup system: "Now some murky mud (mutnaya zhizha) was in the vodka's place; it was given a name by its color, sivukha"<sup>57</sup>. Samogon or extremely bad vodka can be called that; but the "beverages" in question have never been dignified with a name at all. These are the kind of beverages that range from extremely hazardous to poisonous in the literal sense of the word. There is a fine line between relatively safe ones among them, such as perfumes, and those that quite literally will kill everything alive, such as most of the wood-based spirt or technical liquids which include it, e.g. brake fluids. When taken in smaller quantities, the latter are very likely to blind the drinker; a larger intake will knock the drinker dead. Fortunately, as said above, this was not the biggest portion of alcohol consumption, and most of the population only heard about it. However, it was not negligible; there is no doubt millions of people had first-hand experience with this sort of drink.

In North America, the ersatz-alcohol consumption and its consequences exist too, and sometimes get coverage in the media. Journalists and experts tend to emphasize the scale of the problem is much greater than the public suspects. An Ontario paper, for example, mentions instances, some with deadly consequences, of drinking "bad moonshine, windshield washer fluid, nail polish remover" and the like. Further,

Ontario seems to be the "methanol poisoning capital of the world", says Dr. Michael McGuigan, medical director of the Ontario Poison Information Center. "We seem to have more fatalities per capita than any other

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<sup>57</sup> Op. cit. p.242. The reference to color implies that the name was derived from sivyi, a somewhat irregular word for gray.



place I've heard of"<sup>58</sup>.

This, indeed, seems to me a gross exaggeration<sup>59</sup>. In Ontario, unlike Russia, one has to work in a poison center or to be a genuine sleuth to get in touch with this slice of Canadian reality. According to some data, in 1995, 350 fatal alcohol poisonings were registered in the USA as compared to 43 thousand deaths of the same cause in Russia<sup>60</sup>.

### Paying the Price

The statistic which I consider more telling than any other as an indicator of alcohol-related trouble for a country is the ratio of expenditures on alcohol to disposable income of population. Besides, it is an index which helps to think of a credible explanation to a number of deep and otherwise inexplicable dissimilarities between Soviet and North American drinking landscapes.

The status of the index in question was quietly upgraded to zakrytye dannye (classified), it appears, in 1964, when the time came to publish the Soviet statistical yearbook for the last year, "The People's Economy of the USSR in 1963"<sup>61</sup>. In the yearbook for 1962, as for the years before, one was able to look up the table "Commodity Structure of Resale Trade Turnover"<sup>62</sup>, which included the item "Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages". That was easy to decipher because people had an idea that every kopek spent on syphoned water was matched by a ruble spent on booze<sup>63</sup>. But from 1963 on, the beverages portion was pooled together with the one which had been next on the list and, as it were, the closing one, "Other alimentary articles", which had

<sup>58</sup> The Hamilton Spectator 1 April 1997. The publication does not cite relevant data.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Room pointed to me that in North America, mainly, there is a good deal of exaggeration by the actors with a vested interest: in Ontario, the LCBO and the liquor industry.

<sup>60</sup> Novoe Russkoe Slovo 8 July 1997. These data in either country must include both deaths resulting from the intake of poisonous beverages and overdoses. According to Robin Room, the US data is dominated by straight ethanol poisoning (as opposed to the poisoning from fusel oils contained in sub-standard alcohol), i.e. dying of an overdose of regular quality alcohol.

<sup>61</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1963 g. Moscow, Statistika, 1964.

<sup>62</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1962 g., p.520.

<sup>63</sup> Which was close, yet not literally so in the early 1960s, and getting closer by the year. In 1980, one ruble (legally) spent on vodka was matched almost precisely by one kopek on mineral water. That year, there was sold to population about 2.5 times more, in physical volume, vodka than mineral water; the half-liter bottle of the former cost 4 rubles, and half a liter of the latter 10 kopeks; it follows, 400 kopeks/10 kopeks by 2.5 = 100, i.e. 100 times as much spent on vodka as on mineral water (see Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1980 g.).

in preceding years been disclosed in brackets as "coffee, tea, spices, etc." The single title "Other alimentary articles" now covered the line; the brackets and what they contained disappeared. Later on, that sort of solving social problems (alcoholism was just one example) was backed up by an invention on a lower plane. The yearbooks for 1963 and later years were getting thinner by the year but at least they remained easily available at major libraries. By contrast, those for previous years (much thicker and heavier) were moved to the archives (as in Lenin's Library in Moscow), thus establishing an extra barrier, ridiculous as it was, between the researcher and information. Yet, the operation left an awkward trace: the line "Other alimentary articles" stuck out because it showed an amount of spending that was by far the largest in the table.

And, quite obviously, one was in a position to estimate on the basis of what is said above the turnover of Soviet alcohol trade without the risk of going too far off. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the mysterious other articles represented about one third of the alimentary articles sales, and one-sixth of the total "Resale Turnover of Soviet Trade" That is, nearly one ruble of every six that passed from the population to the "Soviet Trade" was paid for alcoholic beverages.

In 1984, "Other alimentary articles" equaled 57.2 billion rubles, wherein about nine-tenths was money paid for drinkable articles of intoxication. In the same year, for comparison, the second-largest item of the resale trade, "Meat and meat-based products", reached the 24.0 billion rubles mark, and the third-largest, "Bread and bakery articles", made up to 8.8 billions<sup>64</sup>.

My own calculations, made in the late 1970s and early '80s, yield the number of approximately 13-14 per cent for 1980, and show a slow but steady increase over the 1960s and '70s<sup>65</sup>. Tremml's estimates, based on a slightly different method of calculation and with utilization of data unavailable to me then, are even slightly higher: 12.8% for 1955, 14.7 for 1975, and 15.0 for 1977<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1984 g., p.483.

<sup>65</sup> See M. Levine 1981, Levine & Levine 1984a and 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit. p.76-77. Both his and my estimates cited here refer only to the sales within the law and officially registered incomes. Adding the illegal transactions, Tremml arrives at this: "Accurate estimates... are impossible but the inclusion of some of the additional elements... would bring the share of expenditure on alcohol to over 20 percent of disposable money income. In the 1970s in most industrial nations consumers were spending between 3 and 6 percent of their household budgets on alcoholic beverages"

The financial and numerical enormity of this expenditure obviously could not but reflect a heavy overload of alcohol-related problems carried by the population, on the one hand, and the sorry anatomy of the public finance, on the other. It also speaks volumes about the intensity of the need for alcohol; in a sense, it is just an arithmetically clear expression of that need. I believe, it has also a far broader social meaning. Being the single largest expense suggests that alcohol is the single most essential item of consumption. And it may suggest that, in a sense, alcohol is the single most important human need, perhaps, most valuable pleasure in life, at least, among the things that are bought for money.

In classical political economy, and with only a minor modification in modern economics, the structure of the consumer's expenditure is normally viewed as an accurate representation of consumer priorities and preferences - implying human choices and desires. What does one work for? Much, although not all, of the answer can be read in the household budget, which shows what one does with one's earned money. In the Soviet case, the answer looks gruesome; too many of us worked mainly in order to have money for vodka.

Trying to be fair, one would have to make an adjustment in comparing "the disposable money income", on the Soviet side, against "the household budgets", on the American side. This involves another dissimilarity between the Soviet and Western worlds. In the Soviet world, minor details aside, there was far less to pay for what, I think, could be called quasi-involuntary expenses in the West. Namely, there was little to pay for housing and utilities, almost nothing in terms of mortgage, zero in unavoidable insurance plans; a hundred per cent free education and public health services, including dental work, were available to everybody, including foreigners; there were no social security/insurance deductions and no retirement plans<sup>67</sup>. In the early

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(p.77).

The 20% mark seems to me the upper boundary of reasonable estimation here, for illegal alcohol did not cost much, and there is every reason to believe that in most cases there was no monetary cost. Estimates that go beyond that mark, as, for example, 25-40% in Segal 1990, seem to me exaggerated. In fact, I doubt if this ratio was higher than 16% of the disposable monetary income: the illegal addition to legal expenditure could not be considerable.

<sup>67</sup> Critics of the (North) American way of life would go further to argue, among other things, that not to own a car, as a matter of fact, is not an option for many North Americans in much of North America, while the Soviets had to spend only kopecks on public transportation. For the economist, for a number of valid reasons, this would probably seem a piece of nonsense. As a sociologist, I think, I can and should accept the aforementioned argument, to a degree at any rate. On the other hand, critics of the Soviet way of life

1980s, about half of the disposable income (i.e. money income minus direct taxes) of the Soviet population was spent on "food" (of which, of course, about a third was spent in fact on drink); expenses on clothing and "durable commodities" were close to another half<sup>68</sup>; all the rest (books, medication, services, transportation, etc.) summed up to only several per cent of the family budget.

In other words, there is that part in the money income which people must spend with little or no choice before they can start making real choices in pursuit of their true priorities and inclinations. Let us call it effectively disposable income, or net-budget. In terms of net-budget, the Westerner was at a certain disadvantage - speaking, naturally, of percentages. The average North American had the household budget reduced by half or so because of the quasi-involuntary spending. For the average Finn, or Austrian the arithmetics were even more painful. The Soviet equivalent of this Western spending was tiny in comparison. But the Soviet consumer, innocent of the problems of the rich, had to face the curse of the poor: supporting our eating habit took a far bigger part of the income than in North America. Nevertheless, the Soviet net-budget was reduced not by half but only by about one third<sup>69</sup>. The net result of the above is that in terms of net-budget Westerners probably spent on alcohol not 3 to 6 but 6 to 12%. The Soviet alcohol-spending percentage will go up to about 20%<sup>70</sup>. This makes the gap relatively smaller. Even so, it remains rather impressive.

There are probable implications of the above. One is that a Russian is more likely to accept a low quality substitute for regular beverages, such as samogon or industrial ethanol. In the early 1980s, he had to pay between 8 and 10 rubles for 1 liter of vodka; the average salary was just above 200 a month, so he had to work a full work day to pay for it. Compare it to about \$27 a Canadian had to pay for 1 liter of hard liquor, would raise objections that are equally valid. That the Soviets, for instance, had to spend money on fur hats which Americans did not have to. Or that Soviets would much rather own cars than suffer the humiliation of the Soviet bus, but they did not, with very few exceptions, have that option. Or that in general American problems are nothing in comparison to ours.

<sup>68</sup> See Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v ... g.

<sup>69</sup> Based on the fact that 1/3 of disposable money income was spent on food (here, without alcohol expenses) and on the rough assumption that this expenditure constituted the no-choice zone for the Soviet consumer.

<sup>70</sup> The numbers above obviously should not be taken as an attempt to measure the respective ratios with any accuracy but only as a hypothetical illustration of the fact that numbers may have unequal meanings in differing realities.

or even less for its beer equivalent, with the average monthly income over \$2000. An American could buy that for as little as \$5. The fact is, the Westerner is not likely to drink bathtub liquor in order to save a tiny fraction of his money. For the Russian, the savings would be much greater, and moonshining would make a lot more sense on economical grounds alone. Besides, there was much less for him at risk in case he got caught; and he was not at all likely to be caught. This is a matter of difference in the threshold at which the search for alternatives may begin.

#### On the Objective Conditions and Social Problems

There were other indications of increasingly worsening drinking problems, like the number of people diagnosed and registered as chronic alcoholics, alcohol-related crime, traffic and industrial accidents to name a few. On the whole, there was a monotonous trend towards ever more drinking and related problems.

The authorities tried to hide the trend by suppressing the statistics and augmenting censorship. However, since anecdotal evidence of the worsening situation was there in abundance, public concern was growing. Moreover, the efforts to hide things were interpreted by critical thinkers as a sign of things getting worse - indeed, as shown in the chapter on the Soviet crusade for a dry law, it made many suspect and believe that conditions and statistics were even worse than they really were. It also, probably, gave some of the leaders a bad conscience, which became manifested in various ways when Gorbachev advanced to the position of the leader.

In terms of constructing social problems, this interplay between information, secrecy and common perception suggests that a social problem can be constructed, at least in a closed society, by the opposite of claims-making<sup>71</sup>. In this context, suppressing information and discussion, rather than amplifying them, may make a phenomenon so much more real to the audience<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Whether, and to what extent (or for how long), this may occur in a pluralist society, is a separate question. The information, for example, that the US government conducted medical experiments on people, as in the case of injecting syphilis in the 1930s and revealing the information decades later, suggests that some similarities are plausible, if rare.

<sup>72</sup> Robin Room helped me to clarify this point.

## CHAPTER 6. THE LEGACY OF ANTI-ALCOHOL MOVEMENTS

### The Crusaders and the Decision-Makers

"Secrecy is a long-standing Russian tradition"<sup>1</sup>, rightly remarks a foreigner familiar with the phenomenon. The fabled secrecy of Soviet top decision-making was unveiled to an astonishing degree during and after the collapse of the system. Even so, much of that decision-making was never documented, made public, nor will it ever be. Only partial, fragmented reconstruction of the events is possible in many cases. What follows in this part of the study - Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 - is a combination of facts and what those facts, interpreted on the basis of the "systemic logic" of the Soviet social and political order, suggest about the unknown part of the story.

During a few years preceding the 1985 reform, all concerned and the public, "knew" some alteration of alcohol policy was forthcoming. There were varying opinions as to what sort of alteration that should or could be - and they were unusually freely expressed, by Soviet standards. It was not hard to discern the radical and moderate approaches that clashed in the struggle for this decision. Inside the dry camp, however, existed degrees of radicalism, such as between advocating an immediate and unconditional prohibition vs. a step by step prohibition. And among the wets, there were hues of moderation, such as those favoring a hundred per cent pro-bureaucratic solution vs. a partly democratic one (at the time, a genuinely democratic anything obviously was not even hypothetically an option).

To prove their point, pro or contra the dry law, both sides generously quoted pre-revolutionary authors who had addressed the issue of drinking and alcohol control policies. The other used and abused sources of authority were, as usual, Party documents and "classic works of Marxism - Leninism", that is, quotes from Marx, Engels or Lenin.

The pre-revolutionary Russian anti-alcohol movement was a rather noticeable part in contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> White 1996 p.31.

social life from mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. It was intertwined with cultural, economic, ideological, spiritual battles of the time, and with the growing-up of the nation. Many parallels can be drawn between Russia and other nations with noticeable anti-drinking movements in the 19th - early 20th centuries<sup>2</sup>. Before World War I, Russia was very much part of the world-wide trends of the time and one of the countries characterized by a rich and spirited debate on alcoholism. The debate was fueled by the temperance movement which gained momentum in the closing decades of the 19th century and remained strong until the war, at which time Russian prohibition began.

It is essential to address, even if briefly, the legacy of the pre-revolutionary anti-alcohol movement(s) in Russia to comprehend the 1985 actors' parlance and the meaning of the Soviet polemics of the day. In that Soviet battle of words, in my view, neither side had anything genuinely new to say, with only one veritable exception. Details aside, both prohibitionists and moderates were repeating, frequently imitating even the old-fashioned language of arguments advanced about a hundred years earlier. The only difference comes exactly from that hundred years: both Russian-and-Soviet and international experience spoke against the dry law.

#### The Last Battle with the Otkup (late 1850s - 1862)

The inception of an anti-alcohol tradition in Russia can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century. Then, as the late otkup system of vodka trade (1827-1862) was increasingly perceived by virtually every rank and segment of society as a national disaster, the first wave of considerable anti-drink sentiment and action became, indeed, quite impossible to ignore.

Attempts to do something about alcohol abuse did have a prior history, but it looks rather unimpressive and obscure. One well documented episode of an anti-alcohol action refers to 1652, when Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich put in effect proposals of the ancient anti-alcohol fighter, Nikon. Both the otkup and the kabak were abolished by these measures. In fact, it appears the measures were so well designed and enforced

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<sup>2</sup> See, among other studies, I. Sulkunen 1990 on Finland, Roberts 1984 on Germany, Harrison 1971 on England, Gusfield 1963 and Blocker 1989 on the USA.

they started to bring major damage to the Treasury; hence, they were reversed in just a few years<sup>3</sup>.

Given the fact that what is called civil society did not exist in Russia at least until mid-nineteenth century, it only seems natural that no conscious popular movement could develop prior to that. Besides, in comparison to the democracies of the time, the autocracy was far less tolerant to opposition of any sort. Usually, though not always, it viewed anti-alcohol initiatives as potentially damaging to its interests. Besides, the general tendency for the tsarist government was to be suspicious of any initiative which did not come from those officially entrusted by the crown to take care of the state affairs.

The movement was historically represented most noticeably by a) societies of sobriety, b) anti-alcohol propaganda in the press, and c) peasants' anti-drink protests, including the famous liquor riots (piteinye bunty) in 1859-60. Also part of the movement were research, education and social practice, each of which attempted to enlighten both the masses and government - in studies of physiological harm from alcohol consumption, publishing pro-sobriety brochures and periodicals, teaching pro-sobriety classes at school or establishing alternatives to alcohol (e.g. tea drinking, healthy entertainment).

As said above, Russia saw an explosion of anti-drinking activities towards the end of the otkup in the late 1850s. They were manifested by two major phenomena: peasants' protests and attacks on the otkup in the press. The former went through two distinct stages: first, a peaceful boycott of vodka trade and, later, violent riots<sup>4</sup>.

1859 was the year of particularly wide-spread mass peasants' protests against the otkup with the clear demand to abolish that system or, at least, to restrict the otkup-runners' freedom to raise vodka prices without limit. Whole villages vowed an oath of sobriety and stopped buying vodka; local societies of sobriety mushroomed in a number of regions. Local boycotts of the vodka trade started on a considerable scale in 1858

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<sup>3</sup> See Christian 1990, Segal 1987, Zaigraev 1992.

<sup>4</sup> For a well documented analysis based on primary sources, see Christian 1990, part 4, especially p.255-353.



and soon rapidly gained momentum. No violence had been reported until May 1859<sup>5</sup>.

"The main reason for the refusal to drink", states Pryzhov, "was expansiveness of liquor"<sup>6</sup>. He was apparently quite excited about the movement. Pryzhov was, of course, a contemporary of the events and left a valuable account of them, even if the account was openly partisan and was not exactly first-hand.

Particularly, he states:

...By early 1859... the idea of temperance [vozderzhanie] and sobriety blows throughout the land.

...When the otkup reached its last limit, when every means had been invented and applied to entice the people to drink [spoit' narod]..., and the price for liquor still kept going up, then the people began to demand that vodka be sold at a decreed [po ukaznoi] price. Already back in 1858, in the Lithuania Territory, was made a society of sobriety.

Then in January 1859, it was heard from Ryazan and Ekaterinoslavl gubernias and then from everywhere about the oath to abstain from liquor [zarok pit' vino]<sup>7</sup>.

Pryzhov presents the way sobriety was established in villages as follows:

The newspapers published one report after another about collective [mirs'] decisions to punish by a fine and a chastising (up to 25 strokes) every instance of unnecessary [izlishnee] use of liquor. One half of the fine was due to the mir's till, the other half to the local church. To watch over the sobriety [dlya nadzora], they elected an alderman [starostu] in every settlement. In other localities, they organized no societies but simply... vowed an oath of no drinking. On rare occasions when they could not do without drink, they bought grape wine. The least of sobriety was found near the capitals [i.e. Petersburg and Moscow] and the most was far away from them. The consequences were most beneficial: drinking took place only when necessary, there were no drunks around....

In place Lukniki... [a peasant] got drunk, and when the peasants learned about it, they got him, glued a poster to his back: "Drunkard", and, to a drum beat, had him to walk twice around the village. In Vilenskaya gubernia, they tried to sell wine at 8 groshes a quart rather than the former 14; then six times cheaper and at last started to give it away free - and nobody drank. In Voronezh, vodka was offered for free...<sup>8</sup>.

The role played by government in the anti-otkup movement in its early, peaceful stage, I think, is sufficiently explained by a single sentence from Pryzhov:

The Minister of Finance gave the order to eliminate the decisions of town and village meetings to abstain, and to prevent any further meetings of that kind anywhere<sup>9</sup>.

Soon, however, the protests progressed to violence. In May 1859, first violence and tavern-smashing

<sup>5</sup> Christian 1990 p.294-305.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. p.245.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. p.244-245.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. p.245-246.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. p.249.

was reported. It spread out quickly in the following two months; liquor riots were reported in 15 provinces, and in 8 of them troops were called out<sup>10</sup>. In July, the newspapers discontinued their coverage of the events, presumably on the orders of the censor<sup>11</sup>. This, almost certainly, meant a blood-bath.

A public discussion of alcohol matters took place in Russia at about the same time. There too sobriety as such was not the central subject but only secondary to the otkup system of alcohol trade.

The educated class' attacks on the otkup were both social and economic in nature. It appears that most authors agreed this system of vodka trade was only beneficial for a small group of otkup-runners who made fortunes but not the rest of society<sup>12</sup>. It was bad for the economy since the farming-out represented the feudal past and was in the way of the development of capitalist markets (the core obstacle until March 1861 was, of course, serfdom itself which kept the potential wage-laborers unavailable for the labor market; however, there were other obstacles of which the otkup was one). It was not good for the treasury because even though the otkup did bring some huge revenue it left too much for the otkup-runners. It was not good for law and order because of the wide-spread corruption around the vodka trade. It was not good for the producers of alcohol since they were cheated by the otkup-runners. It had a devastating effect on the consumers, most of all, of course, on the lower class, on its economic wellbeing, health, morality and every other aspects of existence.

As for means to ameliorate the problem, that was a time of great belief in the power of free trade; the most influential authors thought it had to be applied to alcohol trade too. The reform-minded monarch, it seems, was inclined to think so too, and in 1863 the otkup gave way to the excise system. In this respect, the events and arguments in Russia were "remarkably similar" to those in England a few decades earlier<sup>13</sup>.

Neither the protests of the lower class nor the debate in the press were exactly of pro-sobriety nature. Rather, non-drinking for a limited time was a means used by consumers of alcohol to improve their position

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<sup>10</sup> Christian 1990 p.320-321.

<sup>11</sup> Christian 1990 p.320.

<sup>12</sup> See Christian 1990 p.259-267.

<sup>13</sup> See Christian 1990 p.275.

in the marketplace- somewhat similar to a labor strike in that work stoppage or drink stoppage is not in itself the end but only a means to get in a better bargaining position. As Christian remarks, "There was, as yet, no powerful temperance movement in Russia - and there would not be until the end of the century"<sup>14</sup>. However, there was a strong public sentiment against the abuse of the vodka trade and strong public awareness with regard to alcohol abuse.

The relationship between the lower classes' movement and, on the other hand, the educated class public discussion of drinking appears to be difficult to establish. A noticeable stream of publications on the otkup and other alcohol-related issues began in Russian journals in 1857 and especially picked up in 1858<sup>15</sup>, with the accession of Alexander II and the advent of laxer censorship policies on the eve of the abolition of serfdom and other major reforms. That is to say, the public discussion of the vodka trade and alcoholism began later than the first sobriety society was established (1854), but earlier than the boycott campaign began in Lithuania. Articles followed the events in the country, including the one by Dobrolubov (1859), the second most influential literary critic<sup>16</sup> of the time and arguably of all times. However, the subject of the discussion was obviously much broader than just the protests against high prices on vodka, and publications were only to a limited extent inspired by protests.

Whether the discussion had in its turn any impact on the peasants can hardly be answered in a definite fashion. If it did, it was an indirect influence through the clergy. Especially in Lithuania, but in Great Russia too, the boycott movement was initially influenced, if not organized, by local churches and priests (naturally, Catholic in Lithuania and Orthodox in Russia). The clergy may or may not have been influenced by the public discussion. In general, it appears that the public criticism in the press and the peasants' movement could be qualified as two autonomous forces, though somewhat spiritually united by a common enemy, rather than

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit. p.275.

<sup>15</sup> Christian 1990 p.261-275.

<sup>16</sup> In Russia, the literary critic was at the time very much a social critic. The tradition underwent a reincarnation in the USSR in the 1960s and is alive and well today.

component parts of a single whole.

#### Sobriety in the last decades of the Empire (1880s - 1914)

The 1880s saw a return of the drink question to the public agenda, this time, with a noticeable pro-sobriety ingredient. In 1885, the government ruled peasant communities had the right to close down local liquor shops and kabaks, and this right was exercised in thousands of villages<sup>17</sup>. At about the same time, sobriety societies were established; their number and influence grew slowly until World War I; according to some sources, in 1912, there were about 1800 societies which totaled half a million members<sup>18</sup>.

According to Segal,

...The activity and influence of the temperance movement were limited and its approach to drinking was rather naive and moralistic. However, the Russian temperance societies, like their American counterparts, were the major source of anti-alcohol activities among vast segments of society and played an important part in the development of public strategies against drunkenness<sup>19</sup>.

There was a curious movement for replacing vodka with tea. Both historically and linguistically, it can be compared to English teetotalism. According to Smith and Christian,

[The] enormous increase over the nineteenth century in the amount of tea available in Russia gradually came to provide an alternative to alcoholic drinks. ... As early as the 1840s... some of those concerned to eradicate drunkenness in Russia argued that tea, and coffee, had helped the wealthy in the rest of Europe in this respect. ... Yet there seems to have been no widespread advocacy of tea as a temperance alternative to vodka during the popular movement against drink in 1858-60<sup>20</sup>.

By the 1870s tea drinking had become sufficiently widespread among working people for it to be thought of as a means to replace vodka. "...It was even argued that tea, not spirits, should be distributed to troops in the steppe zone. It was in the late nineteenth century, too, that 'for tea' (na chai, na chaek), rather than 'for vodka', became the set expression for a tip"<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Ostroumov 1914 p.28.

<sup>18</sup> Zaigraev 1992 p.25.

<sup>19</sup> Segal 1987 p.342.

<sup>20</sup> Smith and Christian 1984, p.236.

<sup>21</sup> Smith and Christian 1984 p.237. Today, too, chaevye is the Russian equivalent of the English tip. Moreover, there is no expression in Russian, whether formal, colloquial or otherwise, other than na chai,

### The Anti-Alcohol Congress of 1909-10

The First All-Russian Congress on Struggle against Drunkenness (December 1909 - January 1910) stands out not only as the single most important event in the history of the movement but also as a major event of social and political life in Russia as she was rapidly approaching world war and revolution.

The Congress was witness to the radical politicisation of the debate in every possible way. Temperance, vodka monopoly and hardships of working life were central grounds for the battles fought there. As said above (see Chapter 2), the Congress was very much a political confrontation. Social Democrats fought the liberals, liberals fought the conservatives, financiers fought the medical profession, writers fought amongst themselves, and everybody fought the government.

According to Segal, "...Borodin's opening presentation [at the Congress was]... a provocative political speech..."<sup>22</sup>. This set the tone for the Congress. The Workers Delegation's input was rather noticeable. Here, it is important to note its position on abstinence. Segal contrasts the workers' view of anti-alcohol strategies at the time with those of the majority of the Congress as follows:

The Social-Democrats... claimed that total abstinence was impossible in the present lack of democratic institutions. ...But a resolution on the necessity of abstinence was passed by majority vote.

...The workers... persuaded the editorial committee to append a proposal stating that the monopoly was founded on the mutual interests of landowners, capitalists and bureaucrats<sup>23</sup>.

The sobriety movement in Russia was in no way united, knew periods of discontinuity, and often suffered from bitter inside feuds, interference from the government and, not the least, much ridicule from both the intelligentsia and the very people it attempted to save. However, it is hard, in my view, to deny at least the anti-alcohol movement was a very noticeable part of Russian life. A strong indicator of this is evidenced by the fact that quite a few of the greatest names in Russian history are found among those who contributed to the

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which is somewhat informal, or *chaevye*, which is both formal and informal, to present the very idea of the tip. *Na chashku chaya* - a calque from the English "for a cup of tea" - appears to be another trace of that era. In the late Soviet years, it was mockingly mixed with another popular expression, for a shot of vodka, and it was not unusual to hear, for example, "Stop by for a cup of vodka".

<sup>22</sup> Segal 1987 p.345.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. p.345-346.

cause of sobriety or to the discussion of the alcohol question; some of them were right in the middle of those disputes, including Dobrolubov<sup>24</sup>, Chernyshevsky<sup>25</sup>, later Leo Tolstoy<sup>26</sup>.

Another important evidence of the same is the anti-otkup protests were part of the crisis of society on the eve of the abolition of serfdom in 1861. So much so that, in Soviet and Marxist historiography, those protests were invariably interpreted as anti-serfdom and part of the "revolutionary situation". In fact, liquor riots accounted for over one half of all reported disturbances in 1959-60<sup>27</sup>. In any case, the anti-alcohol movement was strong enough to qualify for a place in Russian history.

#### Russian/Soviet Dry Law, 1914-25

Russian prohibition, introduced by the Tsar government and upheld both by the short-lived Provisional Government in 1917 and by the Bolsheviks, is the darkest part of Russia's alcohol history. So little is known about it, and even about the fact it occurred, even some well-informed international authors believe the Christian world has seen only two national alcohol prohibitions, American and Finnish<sup>28</sup>. David Christian, the leading historian of drink in Russia, had every reason to remark: "...No modern historian of Russia, either in the West or in the former Soviet Union, has yet tackled the subject seriously"<sup>29</sup>.

Yet, Russian prohibition was historically the first one, was maintained by three quite different political regimes, and lasted more than a decade. Potentially, it is an enormous source of data for historical and comparative analysis, especially valuable since it is one of only very few cases of national prohibition. But

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<sup>24</sup> His essay "Narodnoe delo" in Sovremennik was a big part of the public discussion in the late 1850s.

<sup>25</sup> See his "Otkupnaya sistema".

<sup>26</sup> Tolstoy wrote several essays on alcohol and human tendency to numb conscience. The best known essay is "Why people stupefy themselves?"

<sup>27</sup> Christian 1990, p.320-352, presents an excellent summary of that dynamics.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, H.Levine 1992. Another routinely unacknowledged instance of national prohibition is the year long one in Canada (1918-19). Prior to that, most Canadian provinces had much longer prohibitions of their own in the late 19th and early 20th century: see, for example, Cheryl K. Warsh, ed. Drink in Canada. McGill-Queen's U. Press, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Christian 1995 p.89.

exactly how much this information will ever become available to researchers remains to be seen.

The analysis in this section will be brief and not attempt to shed new light on the obscure matter of Russian prohibition. It will serve two modest purposes: first, to present most important known historical facts on this dry law as part of the country's alcohol history - naturally, with a view of how its lessons contributed to the shaping of perception of the alcohol situation on the eve of the 1985 campaign; and, second, to highlight those aspects which hold special significance for the sociological understanding of social problems and social definitions.

#### The chronology.

On 16 July 1914 (of the Russian calendar, 13 days behind Europe<sup>30</sup>) the government issued mobilization orders for the war with Germany. This also turned out to be the commencement of the dry law in Russia, since the orders included a ban on liquor trade in every territory under the mobilization orders, which was most of the Empire. The ban was soon extended and upgraded to full-blown prohibition<sup>31</sup>.

While every author approaches Russian prohibition as a direct relation to the war, there are at least two ways in which the nature of that relation is explained. One follows the letter of the mobilization orders which cited the necessity to ensure order for the sake of mobilization. The other interpretation links the government's decision to the concern about the coming harvest in the time of general mobilization and therefore total drunkenness.

According to David Christian, who represents the first school, the orders to mobilize invoked automatically the provision of mobilization regulations, revised by the war department early in 1914, that liquor trade "will cease immediately on the declaration of mobilization, ... until the closure of the assembly

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<sup>30</sup> The Soviet government eliminated the difference in 1918 by a ruling that February 1 would be February 14. The most common practice among historians has been to use the Russian (i.e. Gregorian) calendar prior to 1 February 1918 and the international one (Julian) from 14 February 1918 on. February 1 through 13 of 1918, thus, is a time void.

<sup>31</sup> Some authors have argued that there never was "a truly dry law". The issue is briefly addressed below.

points"<sup>32</sup>. One lesson learned from the previous war - with Japan in 1904-05 - was drinking during mobilization caused extreme disruption for the army and interfered with the public order in many localities. This is why in 1914 regulations were revised (ahead of time) and liquor trade banned<sup>33</sup>.

The other explanation has been presented as follows:

In order to ensure a rapid and orderly mobilization at the height of harvest, an order was issued on the first day of it [i.e. of the mobilization] to ban uniformly the sale of alcoholic beverages until September 1914<sup>34</sup>.

Where this association with harvest season comes from, the author does not clarify. Besides, even though the harvest season was approaching, July, even in the old Russian time-count, certainly was no time for harvest in most of Russia, while September was the time. For these reasons, the link to harvest looks somewhat doubtful. Besides, if indeed the mobilization regulations - issued before the war - included an automatic suspension of liquor trade<sup>35</sup>, whether war broke out in July or January, then the harvest considerations did not matter.

On the other hand, the Russian government was in a position to reconsider whatever regulations it had. It is not impossible some cabinet members had second thoughts when the time came to actually halt the alcohol trade. In that situation, given a concern about harvest season could become an argument. There was some logic in it. Traditionally, summer and especially harvest season were for the peasants a non-drinking time; once it was over, the drinking began and went on from October to the next spring. But drinking as part of the farewell to recruits custom would have precedence over the regular cycle and therefore would interfere with the harvest. Thus, the latter might have been a consideration, or it might have been cited part of the rationalization of the decision after the fact.

Unlike American prohibition which had a clear-cut beginning, clearly laid out regulations and a clear-

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<sup>32</sup> Cited in Christian 1995 p.91.

<sup>33</sup> See Christian 1995 p.91-92.

<sup>34</sup> Prot'ko 1988 p.46.

<sup>35</sup> Christian's reference to and quotations from official governmental documents leave little doubt about it (see p.91).



cut end, the Russian case was unintended initially as a prohibition, and later on was developed through a number of legislative and administrative acts, major and minor, issued by three governments in rather different circumstances, with many regulations changed over the 12 years of its span and many others unclear or contradictory. To outline its history, a chronological table is presented below.

1914, July:	liquor trade suspended in most regions for the period of mobilization;
1914, August-September:	the ban on liquor trade extended for the duration of warfare;
1917, March:	the Provisional Government <sup>36</sup> makes prohibition permanent;
1919, December 19:	the Bolshevik government outlaws the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages <sup>37</sup> ; introduces draconic measures against moonshining;
1919, December 19:	the same resolution allows an exception for grape wines up to 12% strong;
1921, November:	under the NEP <sup>38</sup> , sale of any wine becomes legal, up to 14% (the natural limit for non-distilled alcohol);
1921, December:	fortified wines legalized;
1922, February:	beer breweries and sale of beer legalized;
1923, January:	distilled liquor up to 20% legalized;
1924, December:	distilled liquor up to 30% legalized;
1925, October 1 <sup>39</sup> : (the SNK Decree of 28 August 1925)	the official end of the "dry law"; the official beginning of the full monopoly of the Soviet state on the manufacture and sale of alcohol; 40% vodka and up to 60% brandies are legalized <sup>40</sup> .

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<sup>36</sup> Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in February 1917; the Bolsheviks took power on October 25 of the same year; the months in-between were the time of the Provisional Government. The latter was formed and re-formed as a coalition of several parties, with a prominent role played by the kadety - Constitutional Democrats - usually characterized as a party of liberal bourgeoisie.

<sup>37</sup> Prior to that, the Bolsheviks had not lifted the previous government's ban on alcohol.

<sup>38</sup> New Economic Policy - an admission of private economic initiative, largely limited to small enterprises in light industry and services, including restaurants and entertainment. Was characterized by Lenin and the Party as a temporary retreat of socialism, a concession to capitalism. Was in effect most of the 1920s.

<sup>39</sup> Until the late 1930s, October 1 was the beginning of the "economic year".

<sup>40</sup> For a more complete chronology, see Christian 1995 p.117-118. Minor discrepancies between his chronology and mine are due to contradictions in various sources. See also Prot'ko 1988 p.46-50, 101-108;

As shown, a retreat from prohibition started before it was officially abolished, effective 1 October 1925. The regulation of December 1919, hailed by the late Soviet prohibitionists as "Lenin's Dry Law", can be viewed as the first step in that direction.

On the moral entrepreneurship.

*The Emperor Nicholas II was sympathetic to the idea of sobriety, and it was his personal decision, materialized in the Imperial decree of 22 August 1914, which extended the ban on liquor sales till the end of war. Indeed, "only in an autocracy could so momentous a reform have been introduced in so slapdash a manner"<sup>41</sup>. This shows - as the Soviet reform of 1985 does too - some limits of the perspective which assumes that studying claims-making activities is the way to explain social problems and their solutions.*

How should the figure of moral entrepreneur be understood? When a monarch or other supreme ruler tells his subjects "Do this, don't do that" - can he be properly called a moral entrepreneur? The answer obviously depends on how one defines the term. But this is the formal, technical aspect of the issue. If the essence of moral entrepreneurship is the initiative for moral innovation, which wins or fails to win in the process of competing with alternative claims, then, I believe, it does not make much sense to call a supreme ruler an entrepreneur. The purpose here, as in other instances of sociological investigation, must be to distinguish between cases which are representative of processes of dissimilar nature - as opposed to lumping them together.

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Marchenko 1990b p.27-38.

<sup>41</sup> Christian 1995 p.93.

## CHAPTER 7. THE SOVIET CRUSADE FOR A DRY LAW: THE INITIAL STAGE

### A Brief Overall Picture of the Movement

The Soviet crusade for a dry law was becoming noticeable around 1980. There were rumors, in the 1970s, of various groups or clubs organized by enthusiasts of sobriety - and closed by the authorities, many before they had a chance to open. I am inclined to believe that, at least in some of those cases, the rumors reflected facts. There are known cases of sobriety clubs which were careful to shield themselves with appropriate ideological cover and survived. One of the earliest was established in 1975<sup>1</sup>. Opened in Gorkii, this club was able to obtain an official blessing, headed by a young functionary of the Junior Communist League, Sasha Mayurov, and used heavily all the right ammunition of the official ideology. The existence of half a dozen clubs like this before early 1980s is a documented fact. No sobriety organizations, to my knowledge, were allowed in Moscow, probably, until 1983-84. To the public, sobriety clubs remained largely unknown.

An article by Pyotr Dudochkin published in August 1981<sup>2</sup> was the first noticeable declaration of the prohibitionist cause in the Soviet Union. It was brought out by Nash sovremennik, a monthly "thick journal" which had by that time established itself as the leading Russophile periodical. Even though Dudochkin himself was soon paled out by more extreme people in the movement, the article effectively started the most significant stage of the public discussion and considerably influenced the later debate. Its title, "Sobriety - norm of life", became in May 1985 the slogan of the campaign<sup>3</sup>; there are other parallels between the article and the Party Resolution of 7 May 1985.

The crusade reached its first peak in 1983-84, with a dissemination of the typewritten "Zhdanov's Lecture". The latter became the Sobriety Manifesto of the movement, with Akadem-gorodok ("Academia Village"), near Novosibirsk, where it originated, its epicenter. The lecture was read in 1983 and published, in

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<sup>1</sup> See Dudochkin 1981 p.145.

<sup>2</sup> See Nash Sovremennik 1981, 8:133-145.

<sup>3</sup> Whether it was a direct borrowing of the phrase, or whether Dudochkin had any direct influence on any part of the decision, I do not know. The direct link can be neither assumed nor ruled out.

excerpts, in a Russian emigre journal early in 1985<sup>4</sup>. At about the same time, a type-written lecture by Uglov, the true leader of the movement, was circulated too; in terms of popularity, his was a distant second.

Uglov's lecture, was prepared and read in 1981 but remained largely unknown until later. Xerox copies of it turned up in numbers in Moscow shortly before the appearance of Zhdanov's one. This is how Uglov presents the relationship between the two lectures in a book published in 1991. There, he comes back to the pre-reform battles to remind the reader that he, Uglov, was the first to open people's eyes to the alcohol threat. "My presentation," he refers to his lecture, "had the effect of a bomb explosion. Such numbers and data were all new to everybody, nothing like that was allowed in the press"<sup>5</sup>. The "bomb" was at once unfairly attacked by the defenders of the big lie about alcohol; fortunately, though, a group of honest young scientists headed by Zhdanov...

...Using computer calculations, examined all the data and confirmed their full objectivity. It was proved that I had allowed no exaggerations and the actual situation in the country was worse than presented by me. ...

As a result, people were learning the truth about alcohol.... Many [afraid of possible sanctions from the authorities] were reading my lecture in secret. ...

The second and final peak of the movement was the Party's decision to start the campaign in May 1985. After the movement's victory, which was, in my view, more symbolic than the passage of the 18th Amendment in the USA, their influence and presence in the public arena soon started to decline. Some of them still continue their struggle for sobriety today, but as a group of political campaigners they did not survive the actual Party-led campaign. It would probably be fair to say the Party lost interest in those people soon after May 1985, and in their cause some time by 1988. The public largely lost interest in the prohibitionist argument and in what anybody had to say about drinking somewhat prior to that, as the historic opening-up of Soviet society made everything else far less interesting. The period of an active public role for the prohibitionists lasted from approximately 1981-82 to about 1987-88.

The end goal of the movement, just as elsewhere, was the abolition of alcohol in society. The slogan, "Sobriety - the norm of life", which became in May 1985 official, is an accurate expression of the movement's

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<sup>4</sup> See Posev 1985, 3:39-41.

<sup>5</sup> Uglov 1991 p.34.

agenda. Unlike the temperance movement in the United States, this Soviet campaign never knew the stage of assimilative reform<sup>6</sup> which attempts to establish sobriety without prohibition. In the Soviet case, the two - sobriety and dry law - were inseparable from day one: a dry law, logically a means to achieve the goal of sobriety, was in itself a goal and was very much identified with sobriety.

Who were those people? There are no data on the social or demographic composition of these groups, and little is known about their individual members, except for several leaders. My answer as to who they were can only be tentative, and I will have to draw on anecdotal evidence and my own experience with them, which was part first-hand, part what I heard then from other people. One source was particularly valuable and close to me: I worked with Stanislav Sheverdin, one of the best known protagonists of the cause, from 1980 when I first started my career in the journal Molodoi Kommunist to 1985 when he left it to become the editor-in-chief of Trezvost' i kul'tura, the newly established official organ of sobriety. He never was part of the extreme wing of the movement which I address below, in fact, was an angry opponent of discrimination of any sort<sup>7</sup>, but he was certainly well informed about developments in the sobriety camp.

There can be little doubt that many or most Soviet prohibitionists were people with a personal experience which made them particularly sensitive to the issues and pains of alcoholism. Many of them were known as "former alcoholics", and this was badly exaggerated and overplayed by some of their foes. Certainly there were people who had come from alcoholic families, or had close friends suffering from alcoholism. On the other hand, noticeably represented were physicians.

There were among them people of some education, but in general, I think, they were not a group about which one could say they were educated considerably better or considerably worse than Soviet people on average. This, by international standards, was very high; but by the standards of Soviet intelligentsia and unofficial intellectual opinion-makers, it was low. The prohibitionists' leaders were educated, professional

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<sup>6</sup> See Gusfield 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Put by the Party into a high-profile official position, he took much of the blame, which he did not deserve, for the extremes of the official campaign. On the other hand, since he did not succumb to the pressure from the extremists, he was accused by them of selling out.

people. Only one though, Dr. Uglov, was a figure of some professional prominence (a surgeon with a name) - in sharp contrast to the pre-revolutionary warriors among whom we find some of the greatest Russian and world names, including Leo Tolstoy. Intellectually, morally or otherwise, the prohibitionists, including their leaders, also did not look good as potential opinion leaders in comparison to their contemporaries who campaigned for a different cause - human rights and democracy - the so called political dissidents. For a Soviet interested in social, political and moral matters, it was typical to look up to the dissidents and look down at the prohibitionists. Not only was there no Sakharov among prohibitionists, they, with a half-exception of Uglov, in fact, had no people on their side with impressive moral, civic, professional or intellectual capital. I wonder, however, what could have happened if Solzhenitsyn had not been deported a decade earlier from his own country. Unlike Sakharov, it is not entirely inconceivable to imagine him among the prohibitionists. But - history knows no "ifs".

The last observation one could make is many prohibitionists had a political agenda not limited to alcohol. It probably worked both ways: in some cases, alcoholism was just an excuse for discussing greater evils, in some others, concern about alcoholism made people politically active, which, in turn, made them think and worry about other things. Among the latter, by far the most outstanding issue was Russian nationalism.

It was not a large crowd. There were noticeable groups in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Novosibirsk (the one actually most talked about), Gorkii and a few other major cities. In all, the total number of hard-core activists numbered, I think, hundreds, with thousands of meeting-goers; but there were many times more sympathetic listeners. For a country of 280 million people, it was not a massive movement - nothing comparable with American temperance, nor even with the Russian sobriety movement of old.

Quite obviously, those people were not together for reasons of belonging to one class or a status or to any other social group. What brought them together was a concern about alcoholism.

Yet, they were not well organized as a single group. In fact, there were many divisions, conflicts, and many people who believed in both sobriety and dry law left those groups, or never joined them, because they did not like the methods and the whole atmosphere of the movement or the rhetoric of its leaders.

Before I address the subject, I would like to make clear, my analysis only refers to the most active and controversial stream of the sobriety movement. Some of the biggest advocates of both sobriety and prohibition, such as the aforementioned Sheverdin, never shared the political, ideological and chauvinistic extremism of that stream, and I know they would be insulted by a suggestion they were part of it.

#### The Focus of Analysis

Below, I address principal aspects of the crusade for the dry law. The argument for prohibition is examined in connection with how it was presented and what were the values and sentiments the prohibitionists appealed to. These sorts of activities represent what I call the building, or making, of a case - an important, and universal, aspect of the definitional process.

The chief representatives of the crusade and its ideology were a prominent Leningrad surgeon, Fedor G. Uglov, the spiritual leader at large; a rank-and-file researcher with the natural sciences division of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, N.G. Zhdanov, was the author of the single most important document of Soviet sobriety and leader of the epicentral Novosibirsk group; and, a distant third, B.I. Iskakov, an author from Moscow who called himself the statistician of sobriety and shocked the public with gruesome calculations. Dudochkin was not among the leaders of the actual crusade, but his article, mentioned above and examined below, was a noticeable part of the movement's history. Besides, a comparison between his article of 1981 and later writings by the three leaders is instructive with regard to the evolution of the movement from restrained extremism to wild extremism. The views of D.D. Vasil'ev, the leader of Pamyat', which went even further (and were usually characterized as open fascism), are not presented in this work, for the reason that even though he joined the movement for a time his principal agenda was nationalism and not drinking. The views expressed by Dudochkin (as a non-extreme basic argument) and later by Uglov, Zhdanov and Iskakov (as the extreme core of the crusade) were highly representative of the movement's ideology; in fact, they formed it, and are used here to show the crusade's argument. Among the crusaders, Uglov definitely stands out as the leader.

In examining their argument, I consider aspects that were most important and easy to identify. It is also easy to see they appealed to certain values. These were universal, Soviet, anti-Soviet, and Russian. They

and the two most important points in the prohibitionist campaign - called here the degeneration theory and the Judo-Masonic conspiracy theory - are examined in the respective sections below. Later in this work, I will argue the aspects of the case-making for this crusade that were specifically Soviet or Russian in detail have their equivalents in comparable cases from the history of the United States and other countries. In other words, these aspects of case-building are national in character but universal in essence.

### The Initial and Most Inclusive Presentation of the Case

The Dudochkin article touched upon most of the major opinions on the drinking problem that were in circulation at the time. They are summarized below.

#### 1. Harm and disruption (universal argument).

The author suggests to talk "about the consequences of drinking, about the moral health of people"<sup>8</sup>.

For example, a neighbor of his old friend, a village-dweller, drove a car when drunk:

[He] hit a truck, head-on. What a [great] mechanic we lost!... The sea is knee-deep with drunks<sup>9</sup>.... They maim themselves, children, they torment the wives. And when they dry out - what do they care about work?<sup>10</sup>

Women who suffer at the hands of their drinking husbands are the category of victims mentioned by the author most often. They are also the most natural and reliable allies for him. Men are slaves of the habit and public opinion which encourages drinking. Young men drink so much it is hard for a young girl to find a sober guy. The author cites a chastushka, village humorous folklore song, which, in his opinion, reflects life: mother gives the girl hell for going out with a tipsy suitor, and: "To my Mama, I replied: There're no sober ones!"<sup>11</sup>.

#### 1a. A special emphasis: alcohol as a dangerous substance.

It was, I believe, this article that started the tradition of Soviet prohibitionists playing up the

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<sup>8</sup> Dudochkin 1981 p.134.

<sup>9</sup> A popular Russian saying, meaning, basically, that people get utterly careless when drunk.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. p.134.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit. p.145. In the original: "Menya mamen'ka rugala,/ chto ya s p'yanen'kim gulyala./ A ya mamen'ke v otvet:/ potomu chto trezvykh net!"



classification of alcohol as an addictive narcotic drug by the World Health Organization<sup>12</sup>. This was supposed to greatly reinforce the case against alcohol<sup>13</sup>. What was made of it went far beyond the technical fact that alcohol is addictive. To tell Soviet people and their leaders that alcohol use could become a powerful habit would be telling old news: everybody knew it, everybody had heard of the disease called alcoholism. But the WHO's message, as it was presented, had a far more gruesome meaning for the Soviet public whose ignorance of illicit drugs was very nearly perfect. The word narkotik - narcotic, drug, addictive substance - was among the scariest, no comparison to wine or vodka. It was associated with the total loss of everything human by the user - from the very first dose and for the rest of his life. For most Soviet people all drugs, in any shape, amount or manner of administering, were the same. The image of the most advanced heroin addict came into people's minds. Only the worst of criminals used narkotiki. They were narkomany. This word was definitely much more scary than "criminal", and, very probably, worse than "murderer" for the overwhelming majority of Soviet people<sup>14</sup>. And now a respected international organization scientifically discovers that alcohol is narkotik too? And after the WHO's definition of alcohol, Dudochkin pictures kindergarten children being given that poison, narkotik. What is going to happen to those children?! It was this presentation and perception of alcohol as narkotik against which Babayan so carelessly objected in public soon after the reform began (see Chapter 2). Dudochkin did not have to spell it all out; the word narkotik did it for him.

## 2. Alcohol against things Soviet people hold dearest (Soviet argument).

The image of Lenin, and his old comrades, their time (especially "the legendary twenties") and their cause, is generously used by Dudochkin to prove that alcohol had no place in the Soviet society. In 1914, Lenin's journal published an editorial urging the workers to stay sober; Lenin said the Bolsheviks will never start a trade in vodka and other dope because such things would lead us back to capitalism and not forward to

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<sup>12</sup> See p.137.

<sup>13</sup> What it actually did is another matter. Most people probably shook it off as having no relevance to their experience; some people believed it to some degree; some others started to doubt that drugs were really as deadly as conventional imagery suggested.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of drugs, their control and perception in Soviet society, see M. Levine 1988 and Levine & Levine 1991. A comparable ignorance about drugs, as I have argued elsewhere, was earlier the case in most Western countries (see M. Levine 1991). See also Appendix A of this thesis.

communism; Lenin said the proletariat is an ascending class which does not need intoxication. In the Twenties, articles by Bolsheviks had headlines like "The Struggle with Drunkenness is a Struggle for the New Man", and the authors said the old image of the drinking worker "must be spiritually executed". In the Civil War, the Red Army was sober, "the use of alcohol by the military, especially the komissars, was punished by the firing squad; sobriety was our weapon - the White Army drank, and that undermined its combat efficiency...". The Revolution itself was won by sober workers, and nowadays, "let us not forget that the upbuilding of communism requires unanimous sobriety of the whole people"<sup>15</sup>.

The author expresses his deep belief that today, "our workers, the ordinary Soviet people" sense this Lenin's truth in their honest working hearts.

### 3. War on drinking<sup>16</sup> (Soviet and somewhat universal).

The author recalls a lecture on international relations he was listening to late in 1979:

When telling the audience about the laws introduced in Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, the speaker, in particular, remarked that in that country, for appearing in the state of inebriety, the penalty had been set - 60 strokes of the stick. The audience responded with hearty applause and loud voices: "They got it right! Good! The way to go!"<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, argues the author, "it would be wrong to see the solution in forgiving attitudes toward drunkenness"<sup>18</sup>. He very sympathetically cites readers' letters: "The drunkard is a ferocious enemy of the family and the state", and there is no justification for the misconception that drunkards are sick people and should be treated as such. Drunkards are "criminals, and should be treated as criminals"<sup>19</sup>. To the above, the author adds his own observation:

Where I was growing up, those who killed themselves were not buried on the cemetery but separately, aside. As is known, in the war [with Germany], those guilty of self-mutilation had to face the war tribunal. Is drunkenness not a self-mutilation, a suicide? With all the humanism of our Soviet system, the generous

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<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. p.137-142.

<sup>16</sup> (Ob'yavit' p'yanstvu boj - (to declare) a battle against drunkenness (or hooliganism, irresponsibility, etc.) - is the Russian/Soviet equivalent of the American "War on...". Another relevant slogan was pokonchit' s terpimost'yu - down with tolerance, that is, "Zero Tolerance".

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit. p.134.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit. p.136.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. p.140.

treatment of drunkards has no justification whatsoever<sup>20</sup>.

How does all this agree with the notion that alcohol is a narkotik? A substance that instantly turns the user into its eager slave with zero will power. Obviously, it does not. I am not sure the author ever noticed the contradiction<sup>21</sup>.

4. Hostile forces (Russian and universal).

a) Foreign forces (authentically Russian in detail and very universal in nature).

Compared to authors who came forth a couple of years later, Dudochkin says just about nothing about the enemies of and conspiracies against the Russians. However, he brings up the subject of foreign things being dangerous, a traditional Russian and Soviet subject (somehow compatible with the equally traditional admiration for everything foreign). In the midst of accusation addressed to domestic Soviet producers of liquor (see below), he, unexpectedly, adds there is also

a large quantity of alcoholic beverages imported from abroad on the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Trade (in 1979, in the city of Kalinin [where the author resides], instances were registered of poisoning with lethal outcome...)<sup>22</sup>.

b) Domestic hostile forces: the state-run liquor trade (anti-Soviet and somewhat universal).

The key passage is this:

Is there not too much eagerness on the part of our planning and other organizations to increase, year after year, the output of wines? Is there not too good care being taken of the liquor production?<sup>23</sup>

He next mentions the Ministry of Food Industry and other minor players as the culprits. But anybody could figure out it certainly was not the aforementioned ministry who decided the alcohol policy in the country. Could he not mean the real villains when saying "...AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS"? Living in the country of censorship, the reader knew this was one way to point the finger at the real policy-makers, i.e. the Party and its leaders who could never be mentioned in a negative context. Just in case the reader may have doubts as to

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<sup>20</sup> Op. cit. p.140.

<sup>21</sup> According to Robin Room, in North America, people would see no contradiction: the user's fault comes in choosing to use the enslaving substance in the first place.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. p.136.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. p.135.

what those other organizations could be, the author places on the next page another hint: he criticizes a professional journal of the distilling industry for publishing a report on the industry's plans to increase production of vodka and vodka-based beverages - "under the rubric 'THE DECISIONS OF THE XXV CONGRESS OF THE CPSU'"<sup>24</sup>. (The censor must have fallen asleep on the job.)

The article starts with a picture of village hospitality: old friends meeting and going into a house and bottles put on the table. The host then was "highly surprised" when his guests, including the author, "refused to drink both before supper and before breakfast"<sup>25</sup>. Dudochkin shows the host data about how much vodka was consumed in that region last year, how much money was spent on liquor and how little on other things. The host retrieves a book of Pushkin, looks at the price on the cover, and contemplates. Almost 200 rubles a year on drinking for every resident, almost 1000 per family - that would be enough to buy a good library of 1000 good books in one year.... Dudochkin pretends he does not know there was no way for ordinary people to buy Pushkin or any "good books", because they were cheap, true, but never available. Further, however, it becomes his chief accusation (expressed, of course, in Aesopian language) against "our planning and other organizations": there are no grapes for people to buy but there is plenty of wine<sup>26</sup>, there are no books of value, no decent cloths, no things that people really want - but vodka is everywhere.

The "deceiving profitability" of alcohol trade is another special issue, and it is addressed by Dudochkin. Many people had that question: If drinking, as they say, is bad - why does the state produce liquor and sell it to people?<sup>27</sup> Dudochkin, in indirect ways, tries to say to the planning and other organizations: This is a miscalculation; you lose more from the consequences of this trade than it brings to the till. As he states, The deceiving profit from selling liquor, as calculations made by scientists demonstrate, does not stand any

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<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. p.136.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. p.133.

<sup>26</sup> This became, in the actual campaign in 1985-87, one of its most criticized aspects: vineyards used for wine-making were destroyed, with the idea to use them for grape-growing "for children". In the end, people had neither grapes nor wines.

<sup>27</sup> Whenever, for example, a lecture on alcoholism was given, this was, probably, the most often asked question.

comparison against the colossal economic, political and cultural good which the society would acquire from growing productivity of labor, from reducing unnecessary expenses on medical, militia-wise and all other fooling around with drunkards, from many other economic and moral factors that support physical, mental and ethical well-being of our contemporaries and those generations that are to live after us<sup>28</sup>.

Toward the end of the article, Dudochkin remarks on another accessory in foisting drinking upon the people: literature, art, and cinema. "We writers, we engineers of human souls"<sup>29</sup>, he confesses, sometimes do not think what our work can do to the reader. Fellow engineers of human souls create far too many drinking and smoking characters and episodes:

..."The Green Serpent"... has "decorated" our everyday life, has become a subject (object?) of aesthetic admiration of sorts in literature and art. According to calculations of [a local teacher], in 111 out of 117 books, theater shows, and movies, which he has been able to read or see, scenes of veritable orgies were staged - interpreted as a phenomenon quite normal<sup>30</sup>.

In the Party Resolution of 7 May 1985, too, literature and art would be criticized for promoting drunkenness. For the next several years, all books, films or shows which portrayed drinking without clearly condemning it would be removed from circulation, or drinking episodes would be cut out.

##### 5. Drinking and Russian national character (Russian argument, universal in essence).

There is a common misconception, says Dudochkin, that Slavs have a passion for vodka, and that the creed of this people is not sobriety but idle drinking. This is a baseless accusation that cannot but cause indignation and should not be left unanswered. He cites a few old books, above all, the one on the kabak history by Ivan Pryzhov<sup>31</sup>, and concludes:

We could go on ad infinitum citing convincing testimonies and undeniable proof which confirm the truth that drunkenness is alien to the Russian nature. As a terrible survival of the past, drunkenness has been and remains shameful, it is a plague for the society, but there is no reason to consider this vice the "people's passion"<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. p.138.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. p.144. The claim was widely perceived by those concerned as a ridiculous pretense on the part of a mediocre author. And fellow writers certainly did not appreciate the call to augment censorship.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. p.144.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 3 of this work: Pryzhov's argument, in fact, is that drinking was a joy in the Old Rus' but became later a curse. In any event, his book definitely speaks against Dudochkin's claim about naturally sober Russians.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. p.143.

## CHAPTER 8. THE SOVIET CRUSADE: THE DEFINITIVE STAGE

### *The Radicalization of the Argument and Movement*

The relatively mild nature of the argument presented by Dudochkin, perhaps, made it more acceptable for the Party, but for Uglov and others it was not radical enough. They adopted, in my view, virtually everything advanced by Dudochkin, except the concern for women all but disappeared in their argument. The main additions, in my view, were three. They differentiated the more radical approach from Dudochkin and they were trademarks of the crusade. These were: (1) the falsification and manufacture of data and facts; (2) the degeneration theory; and (3) the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory.

In Dudochkin, outside of the emotional defence of the Russian national character and a bit of Soviet ideology (the latter must be due, at least in part, to the censorship requirements), which cannot be supported by data, we find little of (1), none of (2), and almost none of (3).

In the arguments of Uglov, Zhdanov, Iskakov and their less known comrades, all three features stood out. These and their most important particular extensions are examined with considerable overlaps that is inevitable. Especially the first point can hardly be separated from the other two; it is, in effect, best illustrated by both of them.

### Overstating the Case

As shown in Chapter 5, alcohol consumption in the Soviet Union was high and rapidly on the rise, and so were all perceptible indicators of related harm. Famous for gross falsifications of facts and data, the prohibitionists made the picture appear more grim than reality.

One trick used was the misrepresentation of official statistics for Russia as data for all the USSR. For example, people were told that the amount of alcohol trade in that country, i.e. the USSR, by the early 1980s reached the level of around 11 liters of absolute alcohol per capita<sup>1</sup> (in fact, it was around 8.5 liter p.c. for the

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<sup>1</sup> As stated in Chapter 5, everywhere in this work, unless stated otherwise, alcohol consumption is given in liters of 100% pure alcohol per every resident - as opposed to the population of 15 years or older.

whole Union). Assuming that, people would believe that in Russia proper it must have been, perhaps, 13, perhaps, 15 or more liters per capita.

Zhdanov cited 10.8 liters for 1980, which was close to the Russian Federation figure, but not so close to the USSR one, which was 8.7. Then he goes on to claim: "In 1983, we each drank 12 liters of absolute alcohol... per every Soviet resident - an infant, an old woman, an abstinent Muslim"<sup>2</sup>. The mention of every Soviet resident and the Muslims clearly implies that the figure included the "non-drinking" republics of the country. The actual registered level of consumption in the USSR in 1983 was 8.3 liter par capita<sup>3</sup>, hence Zhdanov added to the actual record by nearly 50%.

For the listener or reader of his lecture, it looked like with the addition of samogon and other illicit drinks, as everybody could figure out, the Soviet Union and even more so Russia would look easily in possession of all world records of drinking and alcoholism. This was definitely not true (see Chapter 5). But Zhdanov and others appeared to be making a point of proving that it was.

Starting with a larger number also helped to create a snow-balling effect of exaggeration. When you start with 8, the guessing about just how much greater was the number for Russia would, probably, have the tendency to round it to 10 (which was not too far off). But if you start with 12, it could be rounded to 15. The next routine step - adding estimates of illicit alcohol consumption - would drive the numbers even further from reasonable estimates, since it is more natural to add 5 or, perhaps, 8 to 15 than to 10 - to which an addition of 2 or 3 looks more credible. The sum would thus go up not to 12 but to 20 or more. The natural end of this process was to compare the inflated estimates of drinking in Russia (over 20 liters per capita per year) with officially registered levels of consumption in other countries (the record high was "only" 17 liters p.c.) - and to conclude that, "in reality", people abroad drank less.

In many instances, Uglov's statements, as well as those by his followers, are supported solely by reference to "scientific proof", "sociological research", "strictly scientific data" and "calculations by scientists".

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<sup>2</sup> Posev 1985, 3:39.

<sup>3</sup> For details, see Chapter 5.

In other instances, he refers to "sociologist I.A. Krasnonosov and others" - and nobody, except Uglov himself, knows who "Krasnonosov" is, or who "others" might be, or where their data come from. For example, Uglov states:

According to scientific data, after every intake of alcohol, even in moderate doses, there remains in the brain a whole cemetery of killed nervous cells, who never recover. After a few years of using alcohol, a transformation of the very structure of the brain occurs (the so called "shrunk brain").... According to modern scientific data, "shrunk brain" has been identified among 95 per cent of alcoholics and 85 per cent of moderate drinkers.

...

...After an intake of alcohol in any amount, the functions of the brain come back to normal only after 18-20 days; after a many-time and prolonged intake, the higher associations do not get restored<sup>4</sup>.

These "scientific data" look rather fantastic but the author cites them with not a single reference to a verifiable source or an expert which existed, with not as much as an imitation of supportive evidence. Which, after all, is not at all surprising. It would be incredible if any reference could be provided.

Uglov warns the audience that those who might question his statements are not to be trusted. By contrast, "As for me, I was never able to deviate from the path of the truth"<sup>5</sup>.

Uglov was also never able to stand anybody whose definition of the truth differed from his. Not only were enemies of sobriety included among his foes, but even those who shared his belief in sobriety but did not appreciate his methods of fighting for the cause. Here is Uglov's statement on Sheverdin, as unequivocal supporter of sobriety as it gets, even at the time when it was viewed as unorthodox:

The journal *Trezvost' i kul'tura*, too, did not live up to the expectations. A man well known for his views in favor of "moderate" and "cultured" drinking was appointed editor-in-chief<sup>6</sup>.

To call Sheverdin an advocate of drinking was, indeed, to call black white. An equivalent of this in American politics would be Mr. Goldwater getting upset with Ronald Reagan and calling Reagan a man well known for his left-wing radicalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Uglov 1987 p.151, 153. Here and elsewhere I use what was published in the post-censorship Russia but the essence of which, in some shape or other, was presented and discussed years earlier. Little of the most telling and explicit passages could be published before that. The core argument, if not always the wording, remained unchanged all the time through.

<sup>5</sup> Uglov 1991 p.18.

<sup>6</sup> Uglov 1991 p.50.



### A Particular Point: the Most Drunken Society

Returning to the issue of how much alcohol was consumed in the USSR, in Russia and elsewhere will serve here as an example of falsification and, at the same time, will depict an important aspect of the prohibitionists' argument.

Again, tricks were used at the level of a confidence game on the street. In estimating the level of alcohol consumption, Uglov cited, all within two paragraphs, data from official statistics for 1980 (which he cited incorrectly: 11.3 according to Uglov vs. 8.7 in fact); then estimates (by a non-existent "sociologist Krasnonosov") of the unrecorded to recorded consumption - "close to 100% of the alcohol produced by the state" for an unknown year (the year was important especially because past 1984 the ratio changed drastically, e.g. in 1986, it could be double of what it was in 1983); then the estimate of alcohol consumption in 1983: "17 to 18 liters of absolute alcohol per capita".

This was already an incredible estimate. Yet, apparently, the author thought he could do better. Uglov first states "a number of Orient republics where they drink less" must be excluded from the calculation of the average (although they were never included in his statistics in the first place), "so in the Slavic and Baltic republics, the level of per capita consumption was above 20 liters". Second, Uglov does not indicate clearly that these numbers included the unregistered part<sup>7</sup>. So the reader might have guessed the 1983 alcohol consumption reached 35 liters per every Soviet resident, and over 40 liters per capita in Slavic republics. In calculations which aimed to show how much the real drinker really drank (which, in itself, made some sense as rough estimates), this number was often further multiplied by four. First, by two - to exclude the (supposedly non-drinking) women, and then by another two - to also exclude the children, the elderly and the disabled. On such assumptions, the average adult male drank close to a half-liter of absolute alcohol, or over a liter of vodka every day. Accepting these rates, indeed, the end of all forms of life must have been near. As the common reaction expressed it, "We would've all been dead a long time ago".

More than anyone else, it appears, Uglov could not stand the idea there were nations consuming more

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<sup>7</sup> See Uglov 1987 p.150.

alcohol than the Russians. Even in 1991, when the formerly closed official data had already been published, thus making the "statistics issue" now a matter of public record, he could not accept the numbers as they were. Nor could he keep silent - on the issue where he had really no defence and could only be proved wrong. One more time, he attacks our publication that he and his allies viewed as the rebuttal to his and Zhdanov's lectures: ...The "lomekhuzes"<sup>8</sup> were never asleep.

On 13 and 14 March 1984, doctor of economics B.Levine and journalist M.Levine published articles on the alcohol subject....[According to the authors] we consume only half as much liquor as in France. We are way behind Italy and Switzerland - the Levines were shy to tell us what were the sources of those data<sup>9</sup>.

The sources were official statistical yearbooks of respective countries, and the numbers were all, including the Soviet one, cited correctly, although there was a problem with the reference to the Soviet yearbook (see below). It was explained in our article the numbers only reflected the amount of legal alcohol trade and excluded samogon, spirt and other additions. It was also explained that, for a vodka-consuming country, to have a lower level of alcohol consumption was not the same as having a better alcohol situation<sup>10</sup>. In another article, I stated in plain language: the fact that in Italy recorded alcohol consumption is 1.5 times as high as in the USSR should not be interpreted as less alcohol abuse and alcoholism in the Soviet Union<sup>11</sup>.

The only dishonest thing we did - and I am to this day proud of it - was pretending that the numbers for the USSR were calculated on the basis of published data. In effect, they were taken from closed sources, not allowed for publication - but were cited correctly. In 1991, Uglov could simply open the statistical handbook and look the data up. Curiously, he complains, that "few bother to open the statistical handbook"<sup>12</sup>. Another curiosity - an almost unbelievable one - is that in the same book Uglov uses essentially the same data

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<sup>8</sup> Alien insects who brought degradation and death upon the native population of ants. They are a special breed of bugs who penetrate ant hills and expose themselves to the ants. The ants lick them thus receiving a substance, produced by lomekhuzes, which makes the ants feel good. As a result, the ants become sick, die and produce defective offspring. Lomekhuzy is the title of this book by Uglov, on page 3 of which the nature of these insects is explained, with a reference to a book on the fauna. The word is not included in major dictionaries of the Russian language.

<sup>9</sup> Uglov 1991 p.34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Levine & Levine 1984a and 1984b. For a "condensed text" in English, see The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, XXXVI, no.11 (April 11, 1984), p.1-3.

<sup>11</sup> See M.Levine 1981.

<sup>12</sup> Uglov 1991 p.52.

that were published in that article of ours, which he has more than once furiously attacked as false; particularly: 8.7 liters of per capita (registered) consumption in 1980<sup>13</sup> (8.5 was the figure for 1981, published in Sovetskaya Rossia).

In our article (divided between two numbers of the journal), for the first time in decades, key statistics on the alcohol situation got published inside the country, and published in one of the most read journals which had a multi-million copy circulation. It was a de facto declassification of these data. The last time data on per capita consumption of alcohol in the Soviet Union had been published, was in the early Soviet years. Another key indicator, the size of alcohol trade, had not been published since 1962. It was a stroke of unbelievable luck that the censor overlooked (or, perhaps, was told to do so<sup>14</sup>) the publication of what then were state secrets. And it certainly was, at the time, a step toward presenting a more adequate factual picture of the alcohol situation in the country. Yet, Uglov, the warrior for the truth about alcohol, who just a paragraph above complains about censorship (and elsewhere complains about the KGB harassment), wants the authors to state right there (i.e. to warn the censor and make the publication impossible) they are smuggling state secrets into an open publication.

In any case, it is hard to understand why or how anybody can question a citation of 8.5 liters per capita as an official statistic when the actual official statistic is 8.5. Whatever the facts, Uglov could not accept alcohol consumption was higher in France, Italy, Switzerland and other countries. Perhaps, an admission of that would somehow undermine the pathos of his agitation and the making of a case for prohibition.

Frantic efforts to prove that Russians were the drinking champions of the world, it seems, were part of the prohibitionists' appeal at the time. Uglov's uncompromising insistence on Soviet leadership in drinking worked, for a time, for him and his cause. People did not have access to the data and, based on their own

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<sup>13</sup> See Uglov 1991 p.137 (the Table).

<sup>14</sup> Only now, as I study Uglov's writings and try to reconstruct the events, I realize that the publication might have been arranged from high places, and we might have been used to give an answer to the typewritten lectures which presented the situation in a far worse light.

experience and observations, found it hard to believe it was possible to drink more than Russians did<sup>15</sup>. Uglov actually did not need statistics to find sympathetic listeners or readers. When he asked sarcastically, "So, the French drink more?", he could count on a laughter of understanding. People expected that in drinking nobody could top us. The idea was somehow appealing to the eternal passion for running ahead of the world. Often, a suggestion that the French or Italians are capable of drinking more than "us Russians" is not well received - both by prohibitionists and those who enjoy drinking.

There is more to it, which has to do with how the alcohol problem was interpreted in view of the Soviet claim to construct a new, superior society - a society which was described as more efficient, ethical, attractive and capable of creating the best conditions for making people happy. The ulcers of capitalism were supposed to grow under capitalism and heal in the Soviet socialist country. After many decades and generations, the ever more observable alcoholism was an everyday evidence (among others) that the ideal was not getting closer. Bitter, self-destructive drunkenness was an everyday reminder that fundamental promises of the Revolution were not being fulfilled. The absence of sizable, or visible, drug abuse, prostitution, unemployment, "intracity slums and violence" of American type, were major symbols of the superiority of Soviet over American life, and of the socialist over the capitalist. The ugly reality of Soviet alcoholism was a symbol of failure.

To make the supreme decision-makers act, Uglov used this undeniable meaning of alcoholism for his advantage. If we were the first in the world in alcohol consumption, it would present an objective proof that we were losing, therefore, proof that the situation ought to be changed radically. If we were behind France, Italy, Switzerland and other countries, if we were not "the first and the worst", he, probably, did not believe he had a strong case.

Given the nature of the claims made by Uglov and Uglovites about alcohol and its consumption in

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<sup>15</sup> To take an example from my own experience, when I told people, whether a public audience or in private, that a number of countries had higher levels of alcohol consumption than the USSR, the response was not only that of disbelief (and sometimes suspicion that the speaker was covering up) but often disappointment: as though it was not what the listeners wanted to be told.

Russia, many thought inexplicable the fact that people were still alive. But that was exactly the prohibitionists' point: the Russians were fast approaching the line beyond which they would turn either retarded or dead. And people and their leaders were unaware of the danger.

### The Degeneration Theory

It is plausible that exaggeration of the relevant evil is common to all moral movements, and, perhaps, the Soviet sobriety movement stands out in this respect only by the degree of it. The dimension that truly sets this movement aside is, indeed, the so-called degeneration theory.

This was the ultimate conclusion and heart of the whole argument: a process of degeneration of the Russian people, due to alcoholism, was rapidly developing, it was approaching the point of irreversibility, and the end of the Russians as a viable nation was in sight. All facts and data, whether real or falsified or entirely invented, served the purpose of proving that the very existence of the people had now become a matter of accepting the dry law. Further procrastination with that would be a national suicide.

The logic was this: Alcohol as a cunning substance + Conspiracy to seduce the Russians into drinking and to corrupt them with alcohol = World Record Consumption = Degeneration in progress.

Uglov, it appears, was the one who re-introduced the long forgotten scare of a nation's disappearance caused by alcoholism. In 1987, his article (already cited above) was published in Nash Sovremennik; I believe, it contained most important portions of his 1983 lecture, although not all; particularly, the most odious statements were omitted (most likely, either by the censor or by the journal)<sup>16</sup>, and the conspiracy theory (see next section) was only hinted at in the article<sup>17</sup>. There, he re-introduces the threat as follows:

Growing consumption of alcohol affects in a most unfavorable fashion the intellectual level of this people, presenting a real threat of its degradation.

The lowering of the intellectual potential of the people goes along two lines: a) the mental deterioration of the drinkers, ... [and b)] the birth of mentally defective children. Scientists... Grazhdannikov and Detinenko<sup>18</sup>, by the way of analysis of published data, with precise mathematical calculation have established that 99 per

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<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the passages of similar nature were omitted by Posev when it published Zhdanov's lecture.

<sup>17</sup> At the time when his and soon Zhdanov's lectures came around, I had both but kept neither. All my recent efforts to recover full initial texts of the lectures have been unsuccessful. About this lack of historical foresight, I now regret deeply.

<sup>18</sup> These scientists, too, were never before and never after heard of.

cent of the defective and mentally retarded children are a direct result of the use of alcohol. ... In 1983, 16.5 per cent of all babies born in our country had obvious signs of anomalies.... If such a level of alcohol consumption is maintained for several more years, the process of degradation of this people can acquire an irreversible shape<sup>19</sup>.

Uglov indicates the origins of the theory. He quotes I.A.Sikorsky, an accomplished pre-revolutionary physician and researcher on alcoholism. Sikorsky is quoted to present a picture of "the disaster which hits this people when alcohol is freely sold" (Uglov). Sikorsky is used to speak for Uglov:

This people, drinking itself, in places, to death, is falling into an alcoholic degeneration. Some sort of a new breed of half-crazy people of criminal character is evolving; their nature lacks balance and cultivated restraint, and [their] mind is depressed by poison. Russia is saturated with half-crazy legions of idlers and hooligans.... This Treasury poison affects future generations. Daughters of the drunkards lose their ability to be mothers because they cannot breast-feed. [Drunkenness]... mortifies the thousand year tribe, undercuts the roots of its growth, its health and ability to bear fruit<sup>20</sup>.

Unlike the alarmists of old, Uglov did not have to guess where degeneration becomes irreversible. He had it figured with a... sociological precision. He also explains the why and how of it:

...According to sociological data, 25 liters per capita consumption is that catastrophic line past which the complete degeneration of a nation follows, for under such condition there are more defective than healthy babies born<sup>21</sup>.

Zhdanov particularly emphasized the devastation produced by alcohol upon babies who were born weak and predisposed to alcoholism and children who could not keep up at school because of parents' alcoholism:

The most scary result of this drunken frenzy over the last twenty years is the deepening degeneration of the nation, foremost the Russian [nation].... We composed a graph of the so called populational degradation of the nation. It is the percentage of children who attended special schools for morons.... It has an ideal correlation with the graph of alcohol consumption.

...

In Vologda Region, in 1960, there were only 2 such schools, now there are 18. In Donetsk Region, such schools were 4, now 38.

...Tragedies occurred before too, but a healthy offspring was born.... In 1983, we gave birth to so many moronic children, that in 1993 no less than 15% of all children will be attending such schools<sup>22</sup>.

The notion of a genetic pool damaged by alcohol became, somewhat later, widely known. As Uglov

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<sup>19</sup> Uglov 1987 p.151-152.

<sup>20</sup> See Uglov 1987 p.152.

<sup>21</sup> Uglov 1987 p.150.

<sup>22</sup> Posev 1985, 3:39-40.

stated:

If urgent and decisive measures are not taken soon, we will have grave consequences for the people and the country as a whole which will be inevitable and irreversible....[Alcoholism] is destroying the country, ruining the people and damaging its genetic pool.... If extraordinary measures are not taken now, the Russian people... in just fifteen or twenty years... [will end up] an obedient herd of half-wits<sup>23</sup>.

Iskakov, as restated by Uglov<sup>24</sup>, identifies the stages of degeneration and approximate levels of alcohol consumption per capita which correspond to them. The level of 6 to 8 liters a year is identified by Iskakov as the point of no return in this tragic journey; incidentally, dozens of countries have, at the present time, levels higher or much higher than that. Wine-drinking countries have had levels of 15 or more liters per capita, perhaps, for centuries. Iskakov's argument is presented by Uglov as follows:

Professor B.I. Iskakov, who has studied the impact of alcohol on the condition of society, writes that the moral losses begin very early.... at the level of 3-4 l[iters] per year. At 4-5 l... begins a latent development of the alcoholic-and-ethical collapse. A moral decline begins... [which] started the doom of all hitherto disappeared civilizations.

When consumption of this narkotik increases further - to 6-8 l per capita a year - then the internal alcoholization of nerve, reproductive and immune cells increases.... The chain reaction of degeneration and degradation of the people begins to the law "of three generations". Of the parents, a half remains relatively healthy, a quarter of the children, one-eighth of the grandchildren...<sup>25</sup>

#### Alcohol as Narkotik

"....[In that book] I prove that alcohol is the number one enemy of the people", remarks Uglov about one of his books, "and that as long as we do not stop its consumption we will never come to anything good"<sup>26</sup>.

"Who", rhetorically asked Iskakov, "is to be held responsible for the prolonged and systematic weakening of the Soviet people by narkotik No.1 - alcohol?"<sup>27</sup>

The reference to alcohol as narkotik was becoming, after the Dudochkin publication of 1981, ever more frequent in the prohibition argument. For Uglov and others, this was the concluding element of the triad which led to degeneration<sup>28</sup>. First, the consumption was record high of all times and nations. Second, alcohol

<sup>23</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1990, 7:3-4. See also White 1996 p.169.

<sup>24</sup> It appears that there exists only one publication by Iskakov on the subject. His unpublished pieces have been quoted or recited in the press or by other authors.

<sup>25</sup> Uglov 1991 p.15.

<sup>26</sup> Uglov 1991 p.126.

<sup>27</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.24.

<sup>28</sup> Not speaking here of the conspiracy - only about alcohol, its use and its consequences.

was a substance that severely, irreparably damaged the human brain and body, including the reproductive system, which resulted in unhealthy new generations. Third, alcohol was a narkotik which enslaved people and prevented them from ever getting their minds clear. All three granted, the very existence of the Russian people was threatened.

As stated above, the WHO's statement on alcohol as an addictive drug was in essence nothing new. To call it addictive was just another way of saying there was a phenomenon of chronic alcoholism. But the statement did give Soviet prohibitionists one more weapon: placing it into the league with cocaine and heroin was labeling alcohol an equatable evil (so to speak, by association<sup>29</sup>). Given the perception of illicit drugs by Soviet people, the label came handy for those who were trying to scare people to death in order to prove to them that the only salvation was in a dry law. They did not hesitate to use the label.

Zhdanov, for example, argued:

In 1975, a session of the World Health Organization recognized alcohol as a narcotic, just as marijuana, heroin and the like. Yet, here, alcohol is to this day considered "an aliment". The Chief Addictionologist of the USSR Babayan proves very elegantly in his book that alcohol is not a narcotic...: you cannot purchase narcotics in the store, while you are very welcome to buy alcohol!<sup>30</sup>

As the movement was developing, the word alcohol was more and more often replaced by "alcoholic narkotik" or "narkotik poison". The trend seems to have affected the perception of alcoholism as a disease by at least some authors and their perception of the scale of the epidemic. In 1983, Zhdanov stated:

In 1980, there were in our country 40 million alcoholics and heavy drinkers - and these are only those officially registered<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Although, on the other hand, just the opposite can be made of it. That is, such association can and has been used for de-labeling of illicit drugs. The prohibitionist argument is: Since other drugs are illegal, alcohol should be illegal too. The decriminalization argument, used regularly, for example, by the NORML, is: Since alcohol is legal, marijuana should be legal too.

<sup>30</sup> Posev 1985, 3:40. The technical (legal) definition of narkotik in the USSR was that it had to be a substance listed in the USSR State Pharmacopoeia under the rubric "Narkotiki". That, perhaps, was what Babayan was trying to elegantly explain to the lay reader. Robin Room's observation seems to support my guess: Babayan was well known in the context of the international narcotics control system and WHO for having adamantly insisted for years that alcohol and narcotics had nothing to do with each other; he did not try to argue for any pharmacological distinction, but simply that alcohol was legal and controlled drugs illegal.

<sup>31</sup> Posev 1985, 3:39.



The actual record for the early 1980s was around 4.5 million "officially registered", by the Ministry of Health, chronic alcoholics, and close to 5 million if one adds those with alcoholic psychoses. On the more inclusive Register of the Ministry of Interior, there were 8.5 to 9 million people. This number included, according to the rules of registering and keeping track of those people, repeated drunk offenders of public order plus all the alcoholics on the medical Register. It excluded though those in jail or in inpatient treatment programs (the amount of this deduction is unknown to me; it did not exist as an aggregate statistic). There was no other "official registration" than found in these two Registers, hence the sum total of all officially registered with any drinking problems, including those in jail and in treatment, was unlikely to be more than 10 million and plainly could not be even close to the 40 million cited by Zhdanov.

However, Zhdanov's exaggeration would look like a gross understatement in just a few years. Since alcohol was a narkotik, that is, instantly addicting in common Soviet perception, it was logical to regard every drinker as an addict. It appears, Iskakov did just that, although it is impossible to be sure because his text consists almost entirely of statements and hardly any explanations or supportive materials. In any event, he cited the following numbers:

50-60 million alco-addicts and 100-110 more trapped in alco-dependency cultured drinkers, i.e. 150-170 million... alco-dependent (those who would not mind to have a drink when possible)<sup>32</sup>.

The whole Soviet population of people older than 14 was at the time about 210 million, including, to employ Zhdanov's words, the non-drinking Muslims, old women and others who did not drink. That is, 170 million roughly covers the whole population of Soviet men and women of drinking age and drinking culture at the time.

According to Uglov's criterion - 25 liters per capita as the beginning of the end - Russia was close, based on his estimates, to the point of irreversible degeneration in the early 1980s. Now, in the late 1990s, it is past it - and getting further.

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<sup>32</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.25

The degeneration argument had also been advanced by a number of respectable physicians in the last century, in Russia and elsewhere. Particularly, the ideas of alcoholic degeneration were well developed in French medical research and widely accepted in France. The works by Dr. Morel and his followers, such as Magnan, were popular with Russian physicians and proponents of sobriety. Russian authors seemed to be especially impressed by the research by Magnan and Legrain who attempted to prove, based on clinical data, that the alcoholic's genealogical line would come to an end in three or four generations, with symptoms of degradation pronounced more profoundly in every next generation<sup>33</sup>.

Today ideas of degeneration theory are rarely discussed. The Soviet Union of the 1980s was probably the only country where people who spoke on behalf of science took this hypothesis seriously and managed to make it a public issue. Degeneration theory, where alcoholism was an interest, was often discussed in relation to eugenics early in this century, and was held true by the Nazis<sup>34</sup>. This fact alone made a revival of these ideas in any form quite difficult.

#### The Traditional Soviet Angle

When the "Open Letter" by Iskakov and a few, apparently, symbolic co-authors was brought out by Trezvost' i kul'tura<sup>35</sup>, it was mainly noticed for taking the movement's anti-Semitism to a new level. This was a reflection of the growing influence of Pamyat' on the movement. As one reader of the journal remarked, the Letter was in the tradition of "the Munich beer-pubs" - the "ferocious anti-Semites" in early 1930s Germany<sup>36</sup>. However, speaking of the building of a case for prohibition, Iskakov's argument presents an emphasis somewhat different from that of Uglov or Zhdanov or other crusaders. It emphasizes the harm done by alcohol

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<sup>33</sup> See Patricia Prestwich 1988, p.38-46, for an overview of the research on degeneration in France from the early 1850s until World War I. Another relevant work is Susanna Barrows 1981. The titles of some classic works seem self-explanatory: Traite des degenerescences..., 1857, by Morel; Alcoolism et degenerescence, 1874, by Magnan; Degenerescence sociale et alcoolisme, 1895, and Heredite et alcoolisme, 1889, by Legrain. According to Prestwich, this strand of research was directly influenced by Magnus Huss and his famous book (1849; published in France in 1852), in which he - the first to do so? - claimed that alcoholism resulted in the degeneration of people and nations.

<sup>34</sup> See Fahrenkrug 1991.

<sup>35</sup> See Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 3:24-28. I refer to this publication as Iskakov et al. 1989.

<sup>36</sup> See Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 7:25.

to Soviet Power and the cause of socialism and communism. It is an appeal to the ultimate values of Soviet society.

To be sure, this aspect was not forgotten in others' argument either. Uglov and everybody else often mention the economic losses, the damage to military potential, to Leninist ideals, etc, but for them the core argument is the threat of degeneration. For Iskakov, degeneration is extremely important too, but he links it to the society's grand goals and its historical mission.

Generally speaking, it was not a good idea to concentrate on human aspects of any problem, without making the good of the system a central point. As example, there was a problem of the October cold. The centrally regulated heat supply remained disconnected until October 15, when in Moscow and many other places there could already be freezing temperatures. The wrong way to try and change the rule was to cite people's inconvenience and infants' colds. The politically correct way was to argue that as a result of cold people get sick and do not go to work, mothers stay at home with sick children and do not contribute to the economy, etc. To argue the resulting losses were greater than savings on heat was far more effective than to argue people should not be subjected to inhumane treatment.

Iskakov's argument can be viewed as an attempt to follow this logic. Trained, unlike others, in social sciences, he could better illuminate the situation. His argument was, of course, extremely unorthodox but it appealed to the correct values and it used all the correct slogans and terminology of the time (perestroika almost in every line). Iskakov's "Open Letter" starts with bad news from the economic front:

... We have lost one of the most important achievements of socialism in which [we] always took pride - the 2nd position in the world as an economic power.

We sort of "drank away" [propili] our 2nd place... and have become over 30 years (1954-1984)<sup>37</sup> a society of "developed alcoholism"<sup>38</sup>. The more sober and dynamic Japan has delivered us the blow of "economic Tsusima". ...

Who is to be held responsible before the Soviet people and the world Communist movement for this immense

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<sup>37</sup> Why does the author chooses to begin with 1954? In terms of alcohol use, abuse or control, there was absolutely nothing remarkable about 1954. The only conceivable explanation is that, to the Soviet reader, 1954 is the beginning of the post-Stalin era.

<sup>38</sup> A barely veiled mockery of the official claim that Soviet society had advanced to the stage of "developed socialism".

defeat...?<sup>39</sup>

Further in the Letter, he consistently underscores the political, ideological and historical aspects of the struggle for sobriety which will decide the faith of the Soviet people and socialism. The resolutions initiated in 1985 by some unnamed (and now endangered) "wise and courageous members of the supreme leadership"<sup>40</sup>, according to Iskakov, stopped (only for a moment)

the sinister process of degradation of Soviet socialist society which was threatening... to turn out an alcoholic apocalypse of socialism as a social order, [and] therefore, of all Marxist-Leninist ideology as a whole, just as was promised us by the imperialistic propaganda<sup>41</sup>.

This, however, was no time for complacency, because:

...The ideologists of cultured drinking... objectively are forces of an alco-genocide, for they are pushing toward... a gradual loss of all of the achievements of the October [Revolution], toward... an apocalypse of socialism as a social order. With whom shall we accomplish the 3rd Program of the Party? With whom shall we go ahead in perestroika?...<sup>42</sup>

Before it is too late, we have to stop the pro-alcohol anti-sobriety counter-revolution, to stop the alco-genocide and the anti-perestroikadark forces. Perestroika cannot but choke in alcohol unless it is firmly based in sobriety and a sobriety movement which has become the Guard of the Party. Perestroika, as the Revolution, has to know how to defend itself<sup>43</sup>.

[Otherwise,] the historic chance for a renewed socialism and restoration of the Lenin norms will be missed<sup>44</sup>.

The last two items in the program suggested by Iskakov and his group are these:

33. An erection of memorials to the victims of the mass alco-genocide in Moscow, Leningrad... [and] the capitals of the most alco-oppressed Union republics. A removal of the casket of the Grand Alco-Inquisitor of all times and peoples Brezhnev L.I. from Red Square and its re-burial in a less honorable place.

34. A development... by scientists-patriots of a program for a restoration of this country, including the most expeditious restoration of the weakened genetic pool of the Soviet people.

The activists of the sobriety movement are certain that the Soviet Union of peoples led by the Russian people, under the leadership of the CPSU, will be able to solve all the problems of the strategic survival and all the tasks set forth by history, ..., to assure the flourishing and well-being of our socialist Motherland. The faith of the whole of mankind depends considerably upon the solving of problems in our country. We must prove to

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<sup>39</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.24.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. p.25.

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit. p.24.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit. p.25.

<sup>43</sup> Op. cit. p.26. The last sentence is a transparently implied reference to a Lenin's formula. On such occasions Iskakov reproduces well known phrases verbatim without quotation marks or reference - a legitimate technique since the formulae were common knowledge. Iskakov's style in general looks somewhat like an imitation of Lenin.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. p.26.

be worthy of the high historical responsibility<sup>45</sup>.

Again, like Uglov's insistence on Soviet society being the most drunken of all, with the implication that alcoholism was both the cause and symbol of failure, this argument by Iskakov was a message that drinking was destroying the utmost values and goals of society. Viewed in this light, the anti-alcohol reform takes on obvious symbolic connotations as a struggle for all Soviet society stood for.

#### The Judeo-Masonic Conspiracy

The second most noticeable prohibitionist claim - obviously related to the first, and equally an amplified repetition of a pre-revolutionary sentiment - was that the alcoholic catastrophe of the Russian people was not just occurring by itself but was being facilitated by some hostile forces, above all, the Jews. This seemed to become most virulent when the cause had been lost, unless it was a natural development of the ideology. The state itself was a culprit too, but, the further the crusade proceeded the more the situation was explained by the fact that, according to the extreme prohibitionists, the Soviet state was infiltrated and used by the Jews. The extreme version alleged a carefully planned international conspiracy which had been carried out with amazing precision over a time of several generations. This Zionist, or Judo-Masonic, or Kike-Masonic conspiracy, as it was routinely referred to, was directed from Tel-Aviv, where the headquarters were, and was sponsored by Zionist financial giants from major imperialist power centers. It had its agents inside the country. They worked underground and infiltrated the Party, the Soviet government, the agencies that controlled production and sale of alcohol, and the mass media. They were so secretive and clever, some of them were not even Jewish (which left Masonic). Slowly but surely, they polluted the naturally sober Russian mind with pro-alcoholic heresies, tainted society with germs of "alcoholic programming", enticed the naive, trusting Russians into drinking, thus, weakening the nation further and further, and now damaging Russian genes beyond repair.

The above, which may look like a grossly exaggerated presentation of the prohibitionists' argument, is, in fact, a mild rendition of it, especially mild if one takes into consideration the unpublished portion (which was the roughest) of the prohibitionist explanation of alcoholism in Russia. Uglov uses expressions like "a

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<sup>45</sup> Op. cit. p.28.

carefully planned campaign", "alcoholization of our people", "the alcoholic genocide"<sup>46</sup>. Zhdanov warns fellow

Russians:

They say the Russian people is an eternal drunkard. But this is a lie. We became drunkards only in the last 15-20 years. Prior to that, we were the least drinking nation of all drinking nations... We have to realize unequivocally that alcoholism is the program for wiping us out from the face of the Earth....<sup>47</sup>.

Iskakov goes further, back to the early days of Soviet Power, when "Lenin's dry law" (another routinely used phrase) was abolished. That, he argues, was done by the Jews in the leadership, which becomes clear when one uncovers their real last names under their deceiving aliases: Trotsky was really Bronstein, Zinoviev was Apfelbaum, Kamenev was Rosenfeld, and so on<sup>48</sup>. The fact of vast Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement was now widely used by "the patriots" as an explanation why things went wrong with the Party and Soviet state.

Stephen White makes a brief review of the later discussion of the subject in periodicals (when it had become possible to publish such things in the Soviet Union):

Russophiles had always claimed that drunkenness was foisted on Russia by Jews and other hostile forces, and the fight against alcoholism became a dominant theme in magazines with Russophile sympathies.... In Novosibirsk, a local sobriety society went so far as to merge with the chauvinist association Pamyat'....

For a lecturer in Irkutsk, the alcoholization of Russian society was the work of the "American CIA, working through its fifth column - Masonic-Zionist agents". There were even suggestions that the temperance society itself had been infiltrated, and that its journal incorporated "Zionist-Masonic symbols, emblems and numbers" on its front cover....

A Moscow branch [of the Society of Sobriety] chairman... agreed that drunken leaders had often been manipulated in the past by "national minorities" (that is, Jews). To a reader in Dnepropetrovsk, "zionocrats" had captured 70 per cent of leading positions in the media and other spheres, leaving Russians as "white slaves" in their own country.... The general tone of the correspondence, the journal's editor [i.e. Sheverdin] suggested, was reminiscent of nothing so much as the campaign against Zionism and "cosmopolitanism" of the late 1940s<sup>49</sup>.

Zhdanov cites concrete examples of the conspiracy and infiltration: the Minister of Public Health interpreting the growing rates of alcoholism as a good sign (because it showed an improvement in the diagnosis of alcoholism); the Chief Addictionologist of the USSR lying that alcohol is not an addictive drug; the lie,

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<sup>46</sup> Ugllov 1991 p.123. See also White 1996 p.169.

<sup>47</sup> Posev 1985, 3:40.

<sup>48</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 3:24-28. White 1996 p.184.

<sup>49</sup> White 1996 p.183-184.

adopted in planning and policies, that the state benefits from producing and selling vodka<sup>50</sup>.

Uglov, in his typewritten lecture, mentions - after a reference to somebody with a Jewish name - "the other-born and other-faith" people who at all times of Russian history forced drinking upon Russians. This is the first instance that I know of when it was transparently implied that Jews were to blame. However, Uglov was always shy to say it in plain Russian. I do not know one instance of his using the word Jew or Jewish. The Party-led anti-Semitic frenzy of the early fifties, too, was called "struggle against cosmopolitanism", never against the Jews, and was always accompanied by references to "the Leninist policy of socialist internationalism". Uglov, on one of the many occasions when he lashes out at well known "lomekhuz" Zaigraev, approaches the subject of alleged Zaigraev's Jewishness (sheer fantasy) as follows:

The author [i.e. Zaigraev] has been repeating it for years, "Drink, but moderately", but what that means neither he nor all those who implement that policy explain. They, perhaps, follow that rule [of drinking moderately] themselves, but that is their ethnic qualities, and attempts to push it upon society always cause suspicion about the reasons of this insistence.

In the Marx - Engels archive (M., 1938. Vol.5. P.348) one can read these lines: "As soon as the drinking of vodka spreads out, it becomes for them (the Jews), given their moderation, a means of enslavement of the people". In light of this phrase, naturally a question arises: Is not this insistent desire to promote "moderate" drinking, long condemned by Russian minds, a materialization of the policy of the "enslavement of the people"?

Two years into the campaign, Uglov, when those whom he and the Party assigned to the role of enemies of sobriety could not publish a word, was still unhappy with the mass media:

If they continue to curse drunkards and alcoholics (as the adherents of "cultured" and "moderate doses" used to do), to advocate the opening of more stations of detoxification help, but never mention the alcohol use as such, it indicates that the same old enemies are entrenched there; they are now just slightly redressing their propaganda<sup>51</sup>.

Further, how is it possible, inquires Uglov, that Zhdanov, Zagoruiko and their comrades - "heroes of sobriety" and "true patriots" - and the whole "potent patriotic sobriety movement" got excluded from the struggle, that is, from the Society of Sobriety and its journal? Why is it that, after all the effort, and now with the help of the state,

...the sobriety movement not only is not gaining strength but, to the contrary, has in a number of places stalled.

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<sup>50</sup> Posev 1985, 3:41, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

It is my deep belief that this is no accident; those same forces have worked here which directed for decades all the work of propaganda, trade, industry, the mass media so as to push people towards alcohol abuse and alcoholism. Stamping out their clandestine but, unfortunately, very efficient corruptive activities is the first and most necessary condition of the success of the whole cause<sup>52</sup>.

Uglov provides concrete examples which show that, indeed, the enemy did a very thorough job, never overlooking any big or small thing. Particularly, in sabotaging the Party Resolution:

By artificially causing waiting lines for wine, the "lomekhuzes" aimed to stir an irritation among people. ...

Using the fact that one of the factories which produced sugar was temporarily out of order, and sugar in the summer time was in high demand, the mafia<sup>53</sup> was hiding the reserves of this product in stocks and even, as was reported in the press<sup>54</sup>, disposed of it in the river - for the sole purpose for "lomekhuzes" to raise desperate screaming about no sugar in the country because of its use for making samogon...<sup>55</sup>.

Iskakov enlightens the audience with razor-sharp Marxist-Leninist insight into the essence of this social struggle and the nature of forces behind it:

The key issue of any perestroika, as any revolution, is that of power<sup>56</sup>. We have to realize clearly that if we today accept further cadre moves which strengthen the Judocracy<sup>57</sup> in the highest key positions of leadership in the directive organs, mass media, [government] Ministries and agencies, regional Party-and-Soviet organs - then tomorrow the Judocracy (and, via it, the Zionocracy), citing the struggle with the bureaucracy as an ostensible reason, will demand an overall overhaul of the political leadership of the Party and our country, and then perestroika and the struggle for sober life [otrezvlenie] will choke dead<sup>58</sup>.

This was item number one in his long program:

1. It is necessary to assure in deeds... a proportionate representativeness of the nations and ethnic groups (taking also into consideration mixed marriages and artificially changed family names, first names, patronymics<sup>59</sup>, as well as [changes in] the "nationality" item in the documents).

Above all, this refers to... the CC CPSU, USSR Supreme Soviet, USSR Council of Ministers<sup>60</sup>....

Any proportionate overrepresentativeness of... a national minority, which does not have its own working class or its own collectivized peasantry, automatically spells an underrepresentativeness of all others.... We are not

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<sup>52</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

<sup>53</sup> Uglov uses the word mafia interchangeably with "alcoholic mafia", "lomekhuzes", "the enemies of sobriety" and a few other terms.

<sup>54</sup> The author does not make a reference.

<sup>55</sup> Uglov 1991 p.52.

<sup>56</sup> Implied reference to another Lenin's formula.

<sup>57</sup> In the original, evrokratia - Eurocracy. The author uses this word all through the publication, but there is no doubt he means the forces of the Jewish and not European origin. In Russian, evro is the precise equivalent of "Euro-", as in evrocommunism - Euro-Communism. However, evreiskii, Jewish, spells and sounds similar to evropeiskii - European, which provides Iskakov with material for his weird pun.

<sup>58</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.26.

<sup>59</sup> Later in the article, Iskakov calls it "name mimicry".

<sup>60</sup> To this, Soviet leaders had every right to respond: This has been done a long time ago; we challenge you to find there one Jew.



against anybody, not against any nationality. We are for everybody..., just against disproportionate, undeserved, a priori assigned perks....

The alco-problem and national representativeness in the government and mass media are closely inter-related; representatives of the most alco-oppressed peoples, on average, have a far sharper, deeper, far more civic and patriotic sense for the danger of the alco-genocide and alco-degeneration, for it is their peoples, their brothers, fathers and children are burning in the alco-fire...<sup>61</sup>.

The publication of the above provoked readers' letters, some of which were published in the journal.

One of them criticizes the journal for a publication of the "drunken delirium" of a Black Hundred<sup>62</sup>. A reader from Odessa attempts to explain a couple of things for Iskakov and Co.:

Firstly, to claim that Jews... are foisting drinking on us Russians (Slavs) is to show that you are a total stranger to this people....

...In Odessa, there exists... a Jewish working class. At the factories and plants, Jews work on a par with Russians... and even - swear to God! - drink on a par with everybody...<sup>63</sup>.

The Open Letter was published at a peculiar time. The aggressively chauvinistic Pamyat' was at the peak of notoriety, and at the peak of its influence over the sobriety crowd. Moscow experienced waves of strong rumors, very detailed and coming from "independent sources," about coming pogroms<sup>64</sup>. This found a reflection in what some readers wrote to the journal:

The "reforms" [suggested by Iskakov et al.] would throw us back a hundred years in Russia or to the early '30s - in Central Europe... It is illogical the authors of the Open Letter were shy to include a call for anti-Jewish pogroms. ...

Stop this mud... before it's too late! Otherwise, the tragedy of Sumgait will be repeated<sup>65</sup>.

The turn the struggle for sobriety was taking obviously was a shock not only to branded enemies of sobriety and outsiders but also for those friends of sobriety who did not see alcoholism "as a result of Judeo-Masonic conspiracy"<sup>66</sup>. Sheverdin, judging by publications in his journal, was very worried, disheartened and angry about what was being made of the sobriety movement. To him, it could only serve to the discredit of the

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<sup>61</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.26

<sup>62</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 7:27.

<sup>63</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 7:26.

<sup>64</sup> I think, it started some time in 1987, and I am certain there was a big scare in the spring of 1988. This was one of those times when "everybody" was saying: This Saturday morning.... The last strong rumor that I know of was in 1990.

<sup>65</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 7:25. Sumgait is a place in Azerbaijan where the Armenian minority suffered a full-scale pogrom.

<sup>66</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura, 1988, 5, p.24.

idea of sobriety:

...They blend idiocy and crudeness, doomsday cry and chauvinism into the struggle for sobriety.... Why do people, who call themselves Russian patriots, initiate anti-Semitic, "Judeo-Masonic" tricks with capriciously taken and interpreted and made-up numbers and signs, facts and pseudo-facts?<sup>67</sup>

This question was often asked but rarely answered. In all of the Soviet crusaders' literature, I only find one instance of something which might have been their answer:

Public conscience, depressed by false stereotypes and many centuries of lies about alcohol... can only be turned open to sobriety through a loud alarm-raising [nabatnaya] cathartic propaganda...<sup>68</sup>

The old fictitious text, the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", resurfaced at that time and was especially used by Pamyat' in its war for Russian culture and sobriety. Sheverdin addresses in detail "the smoke and mirrors of the dreadful eight-numbers and other symbols of the Masonic kabala" "before a trusting audience of ignorant people"; then he remarks:

Hard to comprehend that these days again trick-masters of this sort are able to find a naive audience.

...I wish the sobriety movement activists were not among these simpletons. It is sad that in this respect they have not been sober enough<sup>69</sup>.

Sheverdin spells out in the press the impression about the crusaders which was by no means uncommon - namely, that they got high on their struggle<sup>70</sup>:

...Sobriety as only mere denouncement of alcohol presents as such nothing of itself, but only substitutes one cult for another. It would hardly make society more sober if the alco-mania were replaced by, let us say, a ziono-mania, behind which - let us be open - the authentic primitive Judo-phobia is hiding<sup>71</sup>.

It is remarkable that nearly everyone in the debate saw in the drinking issue far more than only drinking per se. As the eighties, and perestroika along with them, were coming to close, it was becoming increasingly evident. As Sheverdin stated,

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<sup>67</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1988, 5, p.24.

<sup>68</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.25.

<sup>69</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1988, 5, p.25.

<sup>70</sup> The euphoria of the struggle seems to have been a universal feature of social psychology of social movements of all peoples and times. At least, as far as temperance movements are concerned, some parallels look remarkable. As a last century WCTU member enthused, "The Crusade was a daily dissipation from which it seemed impossible to tear myself. In the intervals at home I felt, as I can fancy the drinker does at the breaking down of a long spree" (Kobler 1973 p.114).

<sup>71</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1989, 3, p.29.

Becoming sober [otrezvlenie - another word hard to translate: "soberization"] is one of the conditions of our life becoming healthy. Otherwise, what do we need it for, becoming sober?<sup>72</sup>

Uglov, meantime, exposed other conspiracies and dangers - which was another way of broadening the issue beyond drinking. Another danger was rock music, which, too, turned out to be a narkotik, which, too, was used towards unsavory ends:

Now, who supports and finances rock music and promotes its further dissemination?... The Illuminati are an old mystic Order, founded on 1 May 1776<sup>73</sup>. This society devoted to Satan sets as its goal a world-wide take-over of all economic, political, military, religious and other spheres with the purpose of forming a single world government. To get a full possession of the youth... the Illuminati initiated a mass-scale dissemination of rock[music]-production.... This is a component part of a world-wide conspiracy, of the plan master-minded by the Illuminati which aims to form the youth in the spirit of cosmopolitanism...<sup>74</sup>.

...  
 ...In their discotheques, they have been able to penetrate the listeners with messages of Satanic, sexual and other natures. This is achieved through special techniques: ultra-sound frequency transmission, ...<sup>75</sup>

...etc.

From about 1985-86 on, at prohibitionist meetings and street rallies, increasingly participants showed up wearing shirts with the rhymed slogan:

Kurish', p'yosh' vino i pivo -  
 Ty posobnik Tel-Aviva!

The verbatim translation is this: "(If) you smoke, drink beer and wine<sup>76</sup> - you are an accomplice of Tel-Aviv!" But it does not render adequately the spirit, the emotion and, of course, the cheerful rhyme of the original. I would suggest the following:

If you smoke and drink wine,  
 you're a Tel-Avivish swine!

"Swine", understandably, might seem to some too strong. Yet, "Tel-Aviv", in the prohibitionist as well as in the official and pro-official Soviet vocabulary, was strong too. In a non-negative context, both profanities appeared, probably, with about equal frequency, that is, hardly ever.

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<sup>72</sup> Trezvost' i kul'tura 1988, 5, p.25.

<sup>73</sup> No reference to sources provided.

<sup>74</sup> Uglov 1991 p.111.

<sup>75</sup> Uglov 1991 p.112.

<sup>76</sup> A regular outsiders' response was: No, I only drink vodka.

In the last century, anti-Semites had a much easier task proving a link between Jews and alcoholism. In the infamous days of the otkup, many otkup-runners, including the richest, were Jewish<sup>77</sup>. The late Soviet chauvinism and anti-Semitism does not have that excuse. The case is especially unbelievable given that it took place at the end of the 20th century, when everything there is to do, to say and to learn about it, seems to have long been done, said and learned.

#### *Special Emphasis: the Cultured Drinking Theory*

According to prohibitionists, the key instrument used by Judo-Masonic agents for the brain-washing of the Russian people and fooling the Soviet state was the pseudo-scientific "theory of cultured consumption" (of alcohol). The main target of the book by Uglov, cleared for publication immediately after the decision on the reform, as White remarks, "was the common misconception that there could be 'cultured' or moderate drinking"<sup>78</sup>. Iskakov, too, warned: "...The ideologists of cultured drinking are lethally dangerous"<sup>79</sup>.

The theory was most dangerous exactly because it was, ostensibly, against drunkenness. An open propaganda of alcoholism would not work: who wanted to become an alcoholic? But the theory which maintained people should not drink too much but could drink a little bit was effective exactly because it was seemingly so harmless and, seemingly, true. It got people started, and alcohol, the narkotik of the people, did the rest. Over time, people began drinking themselves to death, not knowing what they were doing. The theory of cultured drinking, according to Uglov and his followers, had been adopted by the leadership of the country, it guided the work of every institution, it penetrated every segment of society which was still unaware of the danger and the presence of alien agents. Fortunately, Uglov and other patriots were alert. They exposed the theory and saw through the conspiracy of agents - the "kultur-drinkers" (kul'tur-piteishchiki), the "alcoholizers (alkogolizatory) of the Russian people", as prohibitionists started to call them.

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<sup>77</sup> For example, see Johnson 1915 p.113-114. The author restates there how his Russian interlocutors explain pogroms: the whole Russian sentiment against Jews, according to them, comes from the role of Jews in the liquor farming.

<sup>78</sup> White 1996 p.169. The title of Uglov's book was Iz plena illuzii - "Breaking out of delusion". The book Uglov published just before the reform had the title V plenu illuzii - "Imprisoned by delusion".

<sup>79</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.25.

An important point was the alcoholizers favored drinking of non-distilled beverages, wine and beer, as opposed to vodka<sup>80</sup>. This, again, was another indication of their efforts to fool people. Uglovites did not use the term "gateway beverages" in describing wine and beer but that essentially was the idea - almost the same way as the use of marijuana is viewed by some as preparing the user for the future escalation to heroin and crack. The difference is that wine and vodka, unlike marijuana and heroin, are both versions of the same substance; here, therefore, Russian prohibitionists advanced a somewhat more logical argument than the theorists of the gateway drugs. Some publications, however, left an impression that beers, champagne or light dry wines were in themselves quite dangerous, according to some authors, even more dangerous than vodka<sup>81</sup>.

Uglov puts two facts together: there were authors arguing in favor of a policy oriented towards moderate alcohol use, and actual alcohol use was growing. He relates them as cause and effect:

It was not until the late fifties - when in all mass media, as though on a command, they began to advertise the harmlessness of "cultured", "moderate doses" and the good from dry wines - that alcohol consumption went up and soon reached threatening levels<sup>82</sup>.

...

Unfortunately, during a period of many years, our society was under the hypnotizing and corrupting impact of the propaganda of so-called "cultured drinking" and "moderate doses" of alcohol, to which an end was put by the Resolution of the CC CPSU that called things by their proper names. ...

It would seem, honest researchers had to reflect on [the question] why all the efforts to make people drink "moderately" had led to the opposite<sup>83</sup>.

That propaganda of moderate drinking, repeats Uglov over and over again, is not just a misleading concept, not even a blunder, make no mistake about it: it is deadly weapon used against the Russian people:

The many-year struggle for sobriety of the population convinces us that the main obstacle to a healthy way of life is the insistent propaganda by many "scientists" and journalists about the harmlessness of "moderate" and

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<sup>80</sup> In fact, this was only Zaigraev's position. I wrote many times against the policy (and hopes) to use wine and beer as a means to reduce the consumption of vodka (e.g. M. Levine 1981, 1984, Levine & Levine 1984a and 1989). Others, I believe, never touched upon the subject.

<sup>81</sup> There was a publication in *Izvestia*, "Bryzgi shampanskogo" (The Sparcles of Champagne), in the initial stage of the anti-alcohol campaign, which especially caught a mocking attention of the public; see also Globachev 1997.

<sup>82</sup> Uglov 1987 p.155. The first post-Stalin publication on alcoholism, after three decades of silence, was brought out in 1954. There, as in later publications, the author advanced an argument that drinking without measure had grave consequences. The increase of alcohol consumption did not accelerate in the late 1950s.

<sup>83</sup> Uglov 1987 p.153.

small doses. A more insidious and cunning propagandistic trick has yet to be invented, and this "theory" infallibly serves its<sup>84</sup> authors as the main weapon in the alcoholization of the population<sup>85</sup>.

Uglov exposes Zaigraev as one of the most dangerous saboteurs. In a book on alcohol abuse by Zaigraev, the word sobriety is not used a single time! More to the point,

In his [Zaigraev's] opinion, it would be ideal to achieve a reduction of alcohol use by 1.5-2% per year! That is, to drag out that struggle for 50-75 years, in the hope that after that time there will be nobody left to save<sup>86</sup>.

Uglov follows the time-honored Soviet slogan: "Know the enemy's face!" In the style of a provocateur, he provides the authorities and patriots, some of whom already were starting to look like a lynching crowd prepared to take justice into their own hands, with the names, as if tipping them off. The journal prints the names in bold, as follows:

The adversaries of sobriety could be called "blind guides", for they lead people down a definitely false path, if one did not have doubts about their doing it through a lack of thought. Here must be named B. and M. Levine, Zaigraev, E.S. Drozdov..., Babayan, Baloyan... and others. These people... have accomplished much in imposing [nasazhdava] drunkenness upon this country<sup>87</sup>.

By no means the search for public enemies was limited to the above. It was also evident in other aspects of the prohibitionists' argument. Among them, the relationship between alcohol and the state was of particular importance.

#### The State in the Hands of Conspirators

The question was this:

Why, in our own country, where all are literate without exception and most have a high school or higher education, why do we hitherto take so tolerantly the consumption of this beverage which is destroying us, [why do we] produce and sell it in monstrous amounts?!

The degradation of the people is a price too dear for the consumption of liquor beverages, a concession too great to the enemies who are dreaming about our destruction through the use of this narkotik poison! But most importantly: How can we produce and sell a narkotik poison which destroys the body, soul and mind of man? Are there any decent excuses for that?

No Marxist-Leninist could dream of a socialist society exploiting profits from alcoholic enticement [spaivanie] of people.

A high level of alcohol consumption, at the same time brings the country to ruin, weakens its [military]

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<sup>84</sup> "Their" in the original.

<sup>85</sup> Uglov 1991 p.127.

<sup>86</sup> Uglov 1991 p.127.

<sup>87</sup> Uglov 1987 p.154. This Uglov's publication, of which I had been unaware, was shown to me by a friend who quite seriously said: You're going to be on the list; you better go into hiding.

defence potential<sup>88</sup>.

Contrary to "insupportable speculations of some dishonest sociologists", argues Uglov, abolishing the alcohol trade would not hurt the budget. Uglov cites a Deputy Chair of a local Soviet who went public with her concern: "Suppose, we reduce the number of [liquor] stores and amount of [liquor] sales, but how shall we pay the wages to people?"<sup>89</sup>. Uglov's comment, even though he knows people in her position had little choice, is: "...Such actions of any local leader must be regarded as criminal, directed against the people..."<sup>90</sup>. Further, The enemies of sobriety attempt to use economic difficulties to support their opinion. Yet, in fact, these difficulties have been caused by them. ...

These people are either ignorant of the economic laws of society or alien [chuzhdye] to us and our [social] order, dangerous people<sup>91</sup>.

The above helps Uglov to establish the right criterion for unmasking the enemy, in local governments and elsewhere. Their behavior with respect to the alcohol trade is

...a litmus test of sorts which helps to unmistakably establish what kind of person is in charge of some region of the country or other. If the leadership is formed of true communists-patriots - they try to cut down alcohol trade and consumption and to quickly introduce "sobriety" in their domain [u sebya]. But if [they] re-open liquor stores, one can unmistakably tell that in the apparatus enemies of sobriety are entrenched. ...

The same can be said about the press and other mass media<sup>92</sup>.

Iskakov suggests a broader and more precise criterion for locating the enemy:

...One's attitude toward the alco-problem remains an unmistakable criterion for the test on the real degree of patriotism.... The short-sighted cultured drinkers... do not meet the sobriety-based criterion of patriotism<sup>93</sup>.

Not only was alcoholic poison available, thus making sobriety impossible in practical terms, it was produced and sold by the state. Meaning, "the high authority of the state" was viewed as giving a blessing to drinking. A few years later, at the time of unbridled criticism of the Brezhnev period (and no censorship), Uglov gives this general evaluation:

In analyzing that period of our country's life, which cannot be called other than the period of "all-round"

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<sup>88</sup> Uglov 1987 p.152.

<sup>89</sup> See Sovetskaya Rossia, 25 May 1986.

<sup>90</sup> Uglov 1987 p.154.

<sup>91</sup> Uglov 1987 p.155.

<sup>92</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

<sup>93</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.25.

alcoholization<sup>94</sup>, one can state without reserve that the Party and Soviet leaders knew it was a destruction of our people. ... Along with the leadership of the Party and the government, those in command of the mass media must be held responsible for the alcohol disaster.... Both the former and the latter were conscientiously taking the road of an alcoholic genocide<sup>95</sup>.

Why was it happening, how was it possible? According to Iskakov, people were starting to realize that those in the Kremlin might not be the true rulers of the country:

Soviet people are perplexed: Who is here the leading political power - the CPSU or the latent structures of alcomafia and alco-lobby?<sup>96</sup>

Among other things, this line of argument is a reflection of the old (and universal) sense of being threatened by "the liquor traffic" - powerful forces which facilitate drinking because it serves their interests.

#### A Time Bomb in Kefir: Baby-Food as a Means of Alco-Programming<sup>97</sup>

The talk and rumors about alcohol contained in kefir, kvas, pepsi and other seemingly harmless products began before the reform of May 1985. But Uglov was only able to publish his enquiry on kefir in the post-censorship era, in a book published by himself. Uglov indirectly indicates the approximate time when the subject became topical. He and several others tried, unsuccessfully, to warn the authorities: "In the early eighties, a group of scientists which consisted of F.G.Uglov, ... [6 more names] sent a letter of petition to the CC CPSU, Council[s] of Ministers of the USSR and RSFSR, Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR..."<sup>98</sup>.

Later on, and most particularly after May 1985, the kefir problem became a public affair. Iskakov, among others, demanded that

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<sup>94</sup> Sploshnaya alkogolizacia - all-round alcoholization - is an intentional paraphrase of sploshnaya kollektivizacia - all-round collectivization - the official Stalin's formula applied to the time when peasants were herded into collective farms. It is believed to be the worst of all Stalin's enterprises: millions of people were killed or died as a result of famine or exile to uninhabitable parts of Siberia. Prohibitionists occasionally make comparisons like this: "Even the dislocation of the peasantry by the forced collectivization in 1929-1930 did not ruin our economy as much as did the years of the 'all-round alcoholization (1965-1985)..." (Uglov 1991 p.90).

<sup>95</sup> Uglov 1991 p.31.

<sup>96</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.25.

<sup>97</sup> Kefir seems to be acidophilus milk - a fermented milk, unfortunately, not well known in North America. In the USSR, kefir was as popular as or more than yogurt is in North America.

<sup>98</sup> Uglov 1991 p.99-100.



The real information be published on the risk of alco-programming of millions of Soviet children by low alcoholic food products and medications (low alcoholic kefir, low alcoholic confections)...<sup>99</sup>

The decade, which had passed since the first known effort to solve the problem, changed the country but not the kefir habit. And Uglov continued to beat the drums of alarm (the quote will be lengthy but the subject deserves it; and it makes for a good reading):

In considering alcohol as narkotik which destroys the genetic pool, it is necessary to tell the truth about kefir as well; it is taken in the capacity of baby food and included in the standard ration of the pregnant woman and the breast-feeding mother. ...It is especially dangerous in the sense of its baneful impact upon the genetic pool of the people. And there the forces of evil saw an opportunity to make people alcohol-dependent from the childhood.

...

...The percentage of ethanol in kefir fluctuates from 0.12 in the one-day [old] samples to 0.88% in the three-day ones.

The yeast process in the stomach and intestines which follows the intake of kefir is a special phase; at 36 degrees Celsius, the process sharply accelerates, and after three hours of digestion, all the sugar contained in the milk already turns into alcohol.

...

The doctor's orders for pregnant women is to drink a glass of kefir on a daily basis, therefore, over the pregnancy period, the woman receives close to 1.5 l of ethanol; it mostly accumulates in the placenta.

...

During the breast-feeding period, the recommendation for the mother is 0.5 l of kefir a day, which doubles the alcohol intake, and 20% of the nutriment comes to the baby through its mother's milk. When babies are kefir-fed, ...they may receive 1.5-2.0 l of ethanol a year, or from 0.7 to 5.2 g a day.

...

Taking into consideration that during the digestion [more] alcohol gets produced from kefir, the actual alcohol content in kefir is considerably higher compared to the nominal, and can be as high as 2.5%.

In the USSR, over 1 mln. t[onns] of kefir a year is produced....

...

It was on somebody's orders that kefir was made the main nutriment for the babies. It would seem, what is so remarkable about it? But those who were making such decision knew full well that exactly in kefir the time bomb is planted<sup>100</sup>.

Uglov quotes a resolution by the Leningrad Soviet Executive Committee, of August 1986, to replace kefir by other, "non-alcohol-containing" baby-food products in the city of Leningrad<sup>101</sup>. Unfortunately, he does not present this reform in sufficient detail, and the facts on it are not presently available to me.

Some data suggest that a nation-wide ban on kefir was seriously considered as well. According to Ryzhkov,

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<sup>99</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.27.

<sup>100</sup> Uglov 1991 p.98-99.

<sup>101</sup> Op. cit. p.99.

Sometimes, it got patently absurd and was hardly explicable from the standpoint of normal logic. ... Great was my amazement when [Aliev] told me he had been instructed by the CC to look into the question if kefir (!) was or not an alcoholic beverage. ...

Such an assignment could be given to Aliev, and he was a Member of the Politburo, only by Gorbachev or "the second" Secretary<sup>102</sup>.

It appears that the problem did not develop further than that.

The above presents, I think, an interesting counter-illustration of the interpretation of social problems as claims-making activities. The claims made about or rather against kefir as a threatening condition clearly fit both the original concept of claims-making activities introduced by Spector and Kitsuse and the later practice of research. In essence, the anti-kefir claims look rather similar to scores of claims-making activities that have been addressed in the literature on social problems. The question is, can we call this a social problem?

The commonly adopted view is that as soon as some claims have been made there is a social problem; Spector and Kitsuse underscore that claims may be made "by any number of people"<sup>103</sup>, and the conditions about which claims are made, according to them, of course, should be of no interest to the sociologist of social problems. How does this kefir case agree with what people (as opposed to sociologists) define as social problems?

I do not think it does. This is a case of claims without a problem, just as there are problems without claims. To equate Uglov's protests against kefir consumption with a social problem would be contrary not only to the intuitive understanding of the term social problems (which is important) but also to the rationale of the perceptionist interpretation of social problems. It is one thing to pay attention to particular social definitions and the fact that definitions differ for different people, but it is another thing to insist that an individual creates a social problem as soon as he claims a problem. This is the case when not only the claimant was almost entirely alone in his perception but had no means of speaking out without being ridiculed and labeled a nut. His discovery could not be interpreted by people in terms of their experience and knowledge about the world;

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<sup>102</sup> Ryzhkov 1995 p.97. "The second" secretary was Ligachev.

<sup>103</sup> Spector & Kitsuse 1977.

they were not able to relate his claims to anything they knew, believed or could think about. Given this, the interpretation of individual claims as social problems seems to have no meaning<sup>104</sup>.

#### Why a Dry Law?

Part of the pro-sobriety doctrine - which should not be overlooked behind the emotions of the crusade - was "the usual" anti-alcohol argument, that is, the harm and disruption argument: alcohol ruins families, hurts children, affects people's health, ability to work and carry on with life responsibilities, it causes crime, immorality, domestic violence, industrial, traffic and other accidents, etc. This is what all concerned, by and large, agree on, whether they believe in prohibition or not; and this is always part of the case for prohibition.

The logic of pro-sobriety thinking, as everywhere else, was: as long as there is alcohol there will be people abusing it, there will be alcoholism and all that it entails. Hence, alcohol should be removed from society and human life. This logic can hardly be denied, and I would say generally prohibitionists have a better case than many other campaigners. It is hard for outsiders, for example, to understand the drive to ban abortion: if you are against it, do not practice it - but why do you want me to follow your rules? You cannot honestly object to the prohibitionist the same way. Because it is true that as long as alcohol is around, there will be trouble with it, and those who do not drink will be affected too, so we cannot tell them it is not their business. Not in any mental or ideological but in a very practical sense, they cannot quite go their way and let us go ours because, with alcohol, they do not have the road of their own uninvasion by the drinkers.

There are, of course, valid arguments against prohibition, such as the fact that most people want alcohol to be available and are willing to deal with the consequences. Or another fact - which follows from the first one - alcohol prohibition cannot really eliminate alcohol and the trouble. But the Soviet crusaders were not prepared to accept those facts as facts. They just did not believe it; they believed that a dry law could - at least, in the Soviet Union, a socialist country where things were under control, and the state could not be challenged by private capital or other alternative forces - be effective and would solve the problem.

This may seem, in one sense, arrogant, but, in another, the logic of total abstinence - whether for

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<sup>104</sup> A detailed analysis of the claims-making approach to social problems is presented in Appendix B.

oneself, for Alcoholics Anonymous or society as a whole - is, in essence, very humble: we humans should not touch things that might prove beyond our control.

The more specific argument in favor of a dry law in the Soviet Union in the 1980s presents, in my view, an adaptation of that general philosophy to the logics of the Soviet socialist system, Russia, and, least perceptibly, the time. Again, Uglov is the most natural representative of that school, although, in this respect, he is not in principle different from politically non-extremist notable protagonists of involuntary sobriety, such as Sheverdin, Dudochkin, Amosov and a few others who had addressed the subject some years prior to Uglov's impressive debut in the field.

The key statement, which reflects both the general prohibitionist approach and the specifics of the argument of the moment, in my opinion, is this:

[Alcohol] produces physiological and psychological dependence, hence steady "consumer demand". Therefore, without having discontinued the production of alcohol, one cannot expect heavy drinking be eradicated. ...

As long as wine is freely available to buy, anti-alcohol propaganda of any kind will be of low or no effect, as a result of the narkotik impact of alcohol<sup>105</sup>.

Uglov repeats on many occasions, as others do, the idea that as long as liquor is available it will be consumed and will cause problems. This is the only point he makes which, in itself, seems to me grounded in reality.

The insistence that as long as liquor is available it will be purchased and consumed appears to be the most consistent and universal argument for prohibition. The point was made, it appears, every time and place where the subject was raised. The alcohol trade, the liquor traffic is viewed here as threatening, evil and essentially uncontrollable. Those who make money on it are viewed as representing destructive, hostile forces. Alcohol is viewed as a substance (whether labeled narkotik or not) whose use is beyond human powers to control.

The argument, in general, seems to me reminiscent of Jack London's verdict:

...John Barleycorn makes toward death. That is why I voted for the amendment today. I read back in my life and saw how the accessibility of alcohol had given me the taste for it. ... The great majority of habitual drinkers

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<sup>105</sup> Uglov 1987 p.153.

are born... without desire for alcohol.... But they learned, just like men learn to smoke.... They learned because alcohol was so accessible.... The coming generation... will never miss alcohol<sup>106</sup>.

Sheverdin, too, names the alcohol trade as one of the three factors, actually, the first key factor of alcoholization<sup>107</sup>. So too did every other adherent of the dry law in the Soviet Union, and in the pre-revolutionary Russia, and, probably, in America and everywhere.

#### Why and How a Dry Law Was Possible in the USSR

One important reason, according to Uglov, was the majority wanted it. Whether he believed that himself, or was just trying to trigger the mechanism of a self-fulfilling prophecy, is hard to ascertain. In either case, Uglov cited the will of the people:

Numerous conversations with people of dissimilar social groups and educational statuses provide reasons to believe that this people, in its absolute majority, is AWARE OF ALL THE DANGER which is impending over it, and is prepared for a sober way of life. More to the point, [it is] not only prepared but cannot wait for such decision<sup>108</sup>.

The will of the majority, the absence of capitalism, and the unchallenged power of a socialist state backed up by its use without hesitation guaranteed success. The possibility of underground compensation, Uglov argued, was just another big lie:

Today, the disguised and open fans of the "cultured drinking" are holding desperately to the past, digging for at least some arguments against the law of sobriety; they are trying to frighten us [by saying] that a stopping of production lines and sale of alcohol would cause a proportionate increase in the distilling of samogon, therefore, keeping the consumption constant, if not growing.

Fantastic misrepresentations of that sort are nothing but wishful thinking on their part<sup>109</sup>.

Is not this a contradiction to the author's claim that the illegal portion of alcohol production and consumption was close to the state-run part (see above)? Not really. The new order was well thought out by Uglov. Using the right tools, that is to say, changing the law, its enforcement, and policies so that to create a system which would deserve the name of a war on drinking, it was quite possible to alter the proportion between the legal and illegal consumption from 1:1 to 0:0 (in this instance, unlike in mathematics, there was

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<sup>106</sup> See Jack London 1964/1913 p.34.

<sup>107</sup> See Sheverdin 1975 and Sheverdin 1985 p.7-15.

<sup>108</sup> Uglov 1987 p.155.

<sup>109</sup> Uglov 1987 p.157.

no uncertainty about 0:0). As he stated,

...Alcohol production and trade ought to be stopped, and the law which protects the population against narcotic drug abuse [narkomania] must be extended to alcohol<sup>110</sup>.

The law against narkomania was foremost represented by Article 224 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and its identical sisters in the criminal codes of other republics, such as Article 209 in Kazakh Republic. The re-definition of the legal status of alcohol as narkotik, suggested by Uglov (also by Iskakov and some others as well), therefore, would de-facto make consumption of alcohol a criminal offense, which spelled, as a first time offense, up to 3 years of jail time. Offering a drink to another person would then be interpreted as a sale, as was at the time the giving of any controlled substance; as a repeated offense, it spelled up to 10 years of incarceration<sup>111</sup>.

Uglov indirectly confirms it is exactly what has to be done. He cites as the example to follow the Decree of December 1919, often referred to by prohibitionists as "Lenin's law of sobriety". The Decree, according to Uglov,

...banned production and consumption of alcohol in all forms<sup>112</sup>. For appearing in an inebriate state in a public place, the guilty was incarcerated for a year, for production and consumption of samogon - 5 years of imprisonment and confiscation of all property<sup>113</sup>.

Of this, there was a vast agreement among prohibitionists. Iskakov wanted exactly the same: the "full restoration of the Lenin norms in the anti-alcohol policy"<sup>114</sup> by the means of extension of the anti-drug legislature to alcohol in general, and jailing the moonshiners for 5 years in particular<sup>115</sup>. He also suggested monetary incentives for the militia, "for example, up to 50%, as was practiced in the late '20s", of the value of the confiscated property and applied fines<sup>116</sup>.

The considerations of enforcement, more specifically of the task of spotting the offenders, were

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<sup>110</sup> Uglov 1987 p.156.

<sup>111</sup> See Komentarii k Ugolovnomu kodeksu RSFSR, p.425-426.

<sup>112</sup> In fact, the Degree re-legalized wine which was the first step toward lifting the tsarist prohibition. The rest of the quote cites the Degree correctly. See Chapter 6 for details.

<sup>113</sup> Uglov 1987 p.154.

<sup>114</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.27.

<sup>115</sup> See Iskakov et al. 1989 p.27, 28.

<sup>116</sup> Iskakov et al. 1989 p.27.

another reason why the dry law had to be complete and no legal trade in alcohol should be allowed. Otherwise, ...it is practically impossible to suppress samogon and other surrogates, because each drinker, whatever he has drunk, will use the excuse that he bought alcohol from the state<sup>117</sup>.

...  
If the state completely stops the liquor trade, so too quickly will the moonshiners (under a dry law, they will be exposed at once)<sup>118</sup>.

The question why the old dry law was abandoned was answered too: not because it did not work (that's another lie, according to prohibitionists) but because things did not go Lenin's way after his death:

The experience of 1914-1925 proved that even then the underground distillation of samogon did not present a serious threat to society, since a successful struggle was waged against it... under the conditions of a sober environment<sup>119</sup>.

The forced sobriety, both before and after the Revolution, was, according to Uglov, successful and had long lasting positive effects on all aspects of life. Above all,

...The main result of the eleven years of sobriety became the psychological attitudes of the majority of the population of our country which were directed against alcoholic beverages in any shape.

After eleven years... the Russian traditions were restored according to which "to sip of wine is both a disgrace and a sin"<sup>120</sup>.

On the other hand, the return to a legal alcohol trade

...in 1925 caused a serious indignation of the population. The old Bolsheviks wrote that the full liquidation of Lenin's prohibitive system was taken by many as a personal loss; in some factories and plants, women were wailing as if in lamentation for the dead<sup>121</sup>.

Uglov disagrees that American Prohibition was a failure and argues that "immediately after the introduction of the [American] 'dry law' in 1917, per capita consumption of alcohol decreased 10 times"<sup>122</sup>.

Nevertheless, elsewhere he explains why American Prohibition was a failure:

There, such a law could not be implemented on the strength of the exploitive conditions of life by which the state order is pillared. There, the capitalists have a stake in foisting alcoholism [*spaiivanie*] upon the people. On the other hand, here, the whole order of life [*uklad zhizni*] is based on the caring about the population<sup>123</sup>,

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<sup>117</sup> Uglov 1987 p.157.

<sup>118</sup> Uglov 1991 p.137.

<sup>119</sup> Uglov 1987 p.157.

<sup>120</sup> Uglov 1991 p.90.

<sup>121</sup> Uglov 1987 p.155.

<sup>122</sup> Uglov 1991 p.92.

<sup>123</sup> *Zabota o naselenii* - the caring about the population, the taking care of the people - was among the major official formulae. Theoretically, it was the essence of the Party's role in society; at the same time, it

and the discipline, the authority of the Party and Soviet Power, without a doubt, will ensure the putting of the law of compulsory sobriety into effect, the establishment of a sober way of life in the whole socialist country<sup>124</sup>.

Thus, the prohibitionists had answers to virtually every major objection to the dry law. The answers do not look to me convincing but they do look logical. Unlike the analysis of the alcoholic genocide and degeneration process, in my view, this part of their program was not devoid of any connection to reality.

#### On the Specific and the Universal

The heavy emphasis of the Soviet crusade on hostile alien forces appears to me a salient parallel to a few known episodes of American history. The race or ethnic component has been more than once mixed with campaigns against this or that evil, as though people need an outside enemy to get united and decisive. As far as substances are concerned, it appears to be the rule rather than exception. The empirical trend is obvious: in all Russian and Soviet and all North American cases an anti-minority campaign was a major aspect of the case-making. And there is no reason to not treat these cases as independent.

At some point in the Soviet crusade, it was hardly possible to determine what was primary and what was secondary: drinking or Judo-phobia? Essentially the same question is relevant - and, probably, difficult to answer - in North American cases of alcohol, opium, cocaine and marijuana<sup>125</sup>. For example, my reading of Gusfield's Symbolic Crusade is that the author's answer to this question is that alcohol was secondary for American temperance and Prohibition. Patricia Morgan's interpretation of the anti-opium politics in the last century California is even more explicit; and still more so is the story of the 1920s legislation on opium in Canada: opium was just an excuse for an anti-Chinese action.

The table below is an attempt to present a number of reasonably comparable anti-substance campaigns in terms of similarities and dissimilarities in some of their major dimensions. The particular traits I ascribe to the American cases, especially outside of the alcohol one, obviously should be viewed as (highly) hypothetical.

The table also includes some other aspects that are, in my opinion, important for an analysis of the 

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was a societal law of functioning of the socialist economy and society - the counterpoint to the law of exploitation in the pre-socialist formations.

<sup>124</sup> Uglov 1987 p.157.

<sup>125</sup> See Gusfield 1963, Musto 1973, Helmer 1975, Morgan 1978, Cook 1970, Goode 1989 and 1997.



definitional process; on some of these, I will comment in the concluding part.

Sample Cases of Campaigns for Substance Prohibitions

Substance	Alcohol	Alcohol	Opium	Cocaine	Marijuana
Country	USSR	USA	Canada\USA	USA	USA
Alien Agents	Judo-Masons	Italians, Catholics	Chinese	Blacks	Mexicans
Domestic Enemies	the state, moonshiners	Liquor Industry, Mafia	Drug Dealers	Drug Dealers	Drug Dealers
Conductors	the weak and deceived	the weak and sinful	lower classes	?	deviants
Substance Use by the Agents	do not use	use heavily	use heavily	use	use
Threat, danger	weaken native population, get power	disruption, life in sin	stupor, habit spread-out	attack women ?	misconduct, habit spread-out
Victims	the People, the state, Social Order, economy	society, National Character, economy, women	community, jobs ?	white men, women	community, youth ?
Public Response	concern	deep concern	outrage	extreme outrage	extreme concern
Values at Stake	nation's survival, Communist	Christian, American, well-being	Christian, well- being	white male, safety, Christian	public order, Christian
Vigilantes	patriots, good Communists	good Christians, patriots, women	community ?	community, police ?	community, police, ?
Moral Authority	patriotism, Marx/Lenin, the Party, socialism	God/Jesus, the Bible, patriotism	white race ?	white man ?	white race ?

Solution	prohibition	prohibition	prohibition	prohibition	prohibition
Decision	half-won	won	won	won	won
Long-Term Outcome	failure almost immediate	failure slightly delayed	success	success	relative, corroding success
Substance Cultural Status	quite acceptable	acceptable	totally unacceptable	totally unacceptable	unacceptable

An attempt to explain why the racial and ethnic component was so important in all these cases would certainly go far beyond the scope of this thesis. What follows rather is a search for areas where public prohibition campaigns seem to me most intimately related to the "playing the minority card".

Whatever the explanation, we should accept as an empirical fact that everything foreign, new, different is very likely to be perceived with caution and suspicion, often with fear and hatred. The unknown and alien are associated with danger or threat.

At the same time, anti-substance sentiments, too, are rooted in the perception of substances as dangerous. But substances are not human, in fact, are inanimate; it is unnatural to treat substances as enemies. Who is to blame? Someone - preferably, other than oneself - ought to be found to be held responsible. A search for enemies is never unsuccessful. The first candidates, of course, are those who either are different from "us" or do not behave like "all good people"; that is, either ethnic or behavioral aliens: ethnic minorities or criminals, homosexuals, and other deviant minorities.

There are other, domestic enemies. In the Soviet case these were identified as the state-run alcohol economy and the illegal producers of alcohol. In the American alcohol case, they were the liquor industry and the saloon (taken together - "the liquor traffic"), and later the illegal producers, as represented chiefly by the Mafia. In other cases, they mainly were, I believe, the drug dealers of various levels and kinds. In all cases, something was also wrong and had to be changed with the source of both the trouble and solution: the state

policy in the USSR and the law in the USA or Canada.

The argument against the state, therefore, against the Party was in the USSR particularly strong because the abundance of vodka and the scarcity of everything else directly resulted from the Party's line and the state's policies. Those concerned had every reason to say so to those less concerned. In fact, you could often hear something like that, including in discussions of drunkenness by drunk people. Life sucks - why? Because of the government. Who sells vodka? The same government, same Party perverts and hypocrites who preach "Don't drink, be a good boy". The government, the Party have taken everything away from people, except vodka. Look around: vodka is the only thing left in this bloody life.

In the actual crusade this, however, was subdued, even in the "not for the record" part. At some point, as we have seen (see especially Iskakov's argument), it was made almost insignificant by the claim that the Party was manipulated by the alien enemy (therefore, could not be fully responsible for its actions). If not for personal reasons, the prohibitionists had to be careful with this for the sake of the cause, for the decision rested with the Party.

In the American setting, naturally, far greater emphasis was put on the private vested interests and the law. However, both the law and the way industries and saloons are regulated (or non-regulated) had to do with the state. On the other hand, the notion of vested interests was visible in the Soviet argument too: the way the economy functioned created internal incentives to increase liquor production and trade, even though it was so designed by the state/Party and by the virtue of this was, unlike in North America, secondary. Yet, in either setting, whether it is the government which is bad or the law, the order of things need be changed.

On the whole, it appears to be universal that the reference to both alien and home-grown hostile forces is made in prohibition campaigns. These forces include an ethnic/racial minority promoting the vice, the state overlooking or promoting the danger, and vested interests making money or careers on it. In my view, this is key to making a legitimate case against the substance as a threat.

The perception of a substance as a threat, a danger - not only to values but also a physical threat - is always the centerpiece of any argument for prohibition. Exposing hostile human and social forces that work

against the native population can only enhance the perception of the dangers associated with substances. At the same time, the alleged presence of those forces has the social-psychological effect of increasing the solidarity of the victim-nation or community which gets united by a common enemy, as well as of neutralizing the sense of guilt and other self-destructive feelings. In brief, it makes the case for prohibition stronger.

The table also reflects variation in the severity of the argument. It is more severe in the alcohol cases than in the other cases: the level of danger, values and sentiments referred to is different. Naturally, an alcohol prohibition requires a more generous use of black paint to make a threatening picture than an opium prohibition; the case against alcohol has to be stronger, the crusade has to be more intense. Since most people are scared enough of opium and other foreign substances, with those substances, unlike with alcohol, it does not take much to convince people that prohibition is the way to go. Also, there is a variation, today, within the class of illegal drugs: the public fear of marijuana is not as readily available as that of heroin or crack.

Obviously, the common perception of the substance and its depiction by the crusaders in their case-making tend to go opposite ways. The less danger is associated with the particular substance, the less alert is the public and, on the other hand, the more effort is required from the crusaders to make a convincing case. They need to locate some utmost dangers, hidden dangers, mortal threats to the dearest things in life - from children to the National Flag and Anthem to the most cherished gods and ideals.

This finds a peculiar reflection in an unsolvable dilemma of the prohibition law-making and enforcement. Both Soviet (and now Russian) and American anti-drug authorities, as well as those in many other countries, have proved very reluctant, for example, to draw a clear distinction between cannabis and heroin. In the USA, the battle for exclusion of cannabis from the fabled Schedule I (which equals it with heroin) has been going on for decades now. This equation,  $H = MJ$ , makes little sense for the public - but a lot of sense for some people in law-making and enforcement. Exactly because heroin is more dangerous people tend to stay away from it, irrespective of the punishment; so it takes less effort for the agencies to control it. With marijuana, people do not believe it can do them that much harm, so to stamp it out, or at least to

reasonably contain it, a far greater effort is needed. Strictly speaking, from the enforcement point of view, the possession or sale of cannabis must be punished more severely than that of heroin; and to enforce an alcohol prohibition, still heavier tools of policing and punishment would be needed. For example, if, in the US, dealing in heroin is punished by 10 to 25 years, dealing in cannabis must be punished by a life or a death sentence. And to enforce an alcohol prohibition, the minimum punishment would have to be a Middle-Age torture prior to execution. Such tools, speaking realistically, being well out of reach, the prohibitionists bargain for at least as much as they can possibly get keeping marijuana on the level with heroin (and a level above cocaine) in the United States, and demanding a full legal parity of alcohol with illegal drugs in the Soviet Union.

Among other universals, a comparison between the Soviet case and American cases shows anti-substance crusades to be a manifestation - one of many - of the essentially identical roles in society taken on by nominal opposites. Marxism and Christianity, values of socialism and free enterprise, the Russian people and the definition of being American, Marx and Lord God, Lenin and Jesus, the Communist Party and the Church, and so on and so forth, came to be in the respective societies, where they became dominant, the same symbols and used to play the same role. The King of France and King of England can be enemies, but both still are kings. Likewise, national flags and anthems are all different in color and tune, but they are still flags and anthems.

The reference is always made to values. When interests are mentioned, as in "the national interests of the United States" or "the interests of the international communist movement", it is just a way to express values. Otherwise, interests appear mostly in the negative context<sup>126</sup>, as in the selfish interests of the liquor industry, tavern-keepers, conspirators, etc. A difference between Soviet prohibitionists and American temperance is that the latter seems to be more likely to make references to abstract values. The notion of sin and offense to the God, Flag and Anthem values looms large there. It may be a reflection of the difference in the epoch, since the American movement emerged so far in the past. But Russian sobriety movement of the

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<sup>126</sup> The only exception is accentuating the gains from reducing or abolishing drinking.

last century does not seem either to be so religious based or related as American. This heavy emphasis on sin, God and religion in America may be a reflection of the Puritan tradition and its specific language.

## CHAPTER 9. THE DECISION-MAKERS

### The Making of the Decision

In the Soviet Union, decisions of importance were made outside of any of the three branches of the government. Somewhat similar to decision-making by corporations, by families or individuals, the regular parliamentary procedure was not adopted. Problems were discussed and decisions made - only these two steps were constant in the process. In such a setting, voting may or may not take place; objections may or may not be raised; the interested parties may or may not be invited. Compared to the political and judicial process, for example, in the United States, Soviet top decision-making was greatly autonomous from the public opinion or any outside pressure. This means, on the one hand, that important aspects of the problem under consideration were more likely to be ignored or entirely overlooked; on the other hand, that unimportant, spurious considerations - what many Americans see as shallow political games, rhetoric, demagoguery and nonsense - were less likely to affect the net result of the process. In other words, the ultimate decision-makers' vision of the problem was more skewed by their particular view of life, but at the same time, they did not have to please the electorate or pressure groups at all cost. Within their vision, they were more likely to pay attention to the image of the problem itself and less to the reflections of it in various and distorted political mirrors of the day.

With regard to the options for an alcohol reform the Politburo decision-makers had on the table in March-April 1985, they were likely to consider them in terms of why the present situation was a problem for the country and the Party and how it could be changed - or, perhaps, why it could be wise not to change it. After having decided that, they would think how their decision would look and what "propagandistic back-up" (a Party lingo phrase) might be necessary to make it look best.

The arguments for and against taking such action which are addressed below are not theoretically-based generalizations, and were not intended as an illustration of a theoretical statement. However, it appears

to me that they happen to indicate an important stage and aspect of the definitional process. I call it making a (legitimate) case for reform/innovation. The initial stage of this - for the reformer or for the crusader - is the making of a case to oneself. This can result either in an acceptance or a rejection of the idea of reform. In the case in question, this means that the idea that something should be done about the alcohol situation had to be accepted inwardly by the Members of the Politburo as the right idea. Even though their power and unaccountability in domestic affairs knew no limits in conventional sense, they could not pass literally any decisions. For example, it was not feasible that they would order Soviet children to pray at school - not because they did not have the power to do so but because the idea would never pass "the conversation with self": Soviet leaders could not become convinced that ideas of that sort were right. This is a matter of world vision. To be sure, Soviet equivalents of ideological-and-spiritual meditation were firmly there - but they had to be Soviet. It had to be possible that a good case could be made in favor of those practices on the basis of accepted moral code: first, the decision-makers had to make a case for themselves, thereafter, for the rest. According to Gorbachev, the full-scale dry law option "was not even considered because it was unrealistic" (see Chapter 2), meaning, the option was not convincing enough to make a case for it, and in conversations with themselves the decision-makers killed it - before it reached the stage of actual discussion. This notion of making a legitimate case also has an aspect which, in my view, helps explain the success or failure of particular innovations in social rules, and even to foresee the fate of actual reforms.

On the following pages I address the major considerations for the Politburo for and against an alcohol reform. Obviously, it is necessary to distinguish between the arguments for some reform, whether radical or moderate, and those for the radical, "semi-dry law" version. However, the particular radical argumentation was based on the general one, and the difference between the two was in a few extra considerations. So, first, the considerations for and against taking action.

#### Pro and Contra for the Politburo.

The Soviet system had values and goals of its own. Speaking of the most important, they may be briefly presented as follows.



It was the first socialist country, and its ultimate goal was to build communism - a society where human beings are all equal, free (for example, the state, police, and formal legal system would not exist; no private predators would threaten people either), happy, capable, where everyone works to the limit of one's capacity for no reward, and everyone fully satisfies one's needs by taking everything one needs without limit from the infinitely rich public stocks, open to all and free of charge. By the 1980s, this was not taken literally by many people, but the Party was still determined to create a communist society which was better or, at least, more efficient and stronger than anything capitalism could create. The sense of superiority and the desire to prove it were easy to sense, and they very much shaped not only the Soviet mind but also the Party policies and Soviet practices. The USSR had to be superior to the capitalist countries because they were the adversary and eventually were destined to collapse. It had to be superior to the other socialist countries because they were allies, friends and "brothers", and the USSR had to be their leader and the example to follow. Superiority was also important for relations with the third world because that was the area from which to recruit allies and followers.

Communism and its upbuilding, according to The Program of the CPSU, was a dialectic unity of the triad: new productive forces, new social relations (above all, relations of production), and new personality (traditionally translated "new man"). The middle element is a matter so complicated it never was satisfactorily explained even by the aces of Soviet political economy. Suffice it to say that the eradication of exploitation was the basis of it and was said to have been successfully accomplished by the 1930s; in the future, under full communism, those new relations were supposed to develop to the point where the commodity and money discontinue to be necessary for the economy and pass away (otmiranie tovarno-denezhnykh otnoshenii). Otherwise, the issue of new social relations was theoretically obscure, practically did not seem to ever pop up, and was largely ignored in actual politics. Not so with the productive forces. These were the concern for the Party.

Lenin had maintained that a new social order beats the old, in the last account, by a higher productivity of labor. In today's world, this is called technological superiority. This was the basic point of

reference. Socialist economy must be more efficient than capitalist. In practical terms, it was interpreted as the Soviet economy must be more efficient than the American. Generations of Soviet people were busy solving the task of "catching up with and getting ahead of" (such was the official formula) the most advanced capitalist nations. In more practical terms, the chief indicators looked at were Soviet and US national incomes or GNP's. The gap had been huge all along, but the American economy was wasteful, it produced too many things that helped neither the army nor the industrial potential. Even so the enemy's potential was too imposing, and in the late Soviet years it became clear the gap, bar some miracle, was not going to become smaller.

The race and global rivalry with the USA was a real obsession and deeply motivated everything the Party did. Unfortunately, leading Soviet economists came to the conclusion that the so-called extensive sources of growth had been used up. In other words, economic growth could no longer be based on using more and more land, more oil and gas, more gold, more laborers and so forth - because the country was running out of all those resources that had long been used to compensate for technological backwardness. By the late 1970s - early '80s, this became commonplace to everyone concerned. And to everyone with eyes to see it was clear that *the only possible alternative - technological progress - was not practically feasible* if both the economy and society did not change. This brings us to the issues of the new Soviet personality, "human material" and drinking.

The new personality was a picture of the ideal Soviet being. Such a person was supposed to always have the interests of socialism and the Soviet state in mind, always put them before anything personal, always take the initiative, always grow intellectually and spiritually, be a role model, and an ideal citizen. Certainly, it was not an image of the drunkard. The actual new species - indeed created by Soviet Power, but not to the plan - were too far from the ideal. And drunkenness was probably the anti-thesis of the new personality. It was not what the Party wanted to see or would be proud to show for its efforts.

There were, of course, less idealistic considerations that made alcoholism an undesirable condition. Lenin, at the dawn of the Revolution, wrote about the Bolsheviks inheriting "bad human material" for their future constructive works in comparison with the advanced European nations. Most importantly, according

to Lenin, the Russian was a poor, undisciplined, unscrupulous worker. By the 1980s, the available human material was still of comparatively poor quality, and heavy drinking seemed to play a considerable part. It surely was true that people drank too much and too often, got unhealthy and undisciplined, did not care to improve their skills, and were unproductive workers. Also real was the fact that drinking resulted in a less healthy younger generation, which made the future look unpromising in terms of having able-bodied workers and engineers, soldiers and mothers of future soldiers.

Such, I believe, were the main reasons for the Soviet leadership in favor of doing something about alcoholism. In the Fuller & Myers' classification of social problems, it was ameliorative rather than viewed as a moral problem. It was, in the eyes of the Party, a matter of things not working and making them work - not a matter of disagreement between people as to how things should be.

It was the Party's and above all the Politburo's job - and nobody else's - to take care of the country. The Politburo considered itself and was widely considered by people, including those who had little respect for the Party, responsible for the country and every aspect of its life. They were responsible for and, ideally, had to take every care of Soviet Power, socialism, its good image and correct interpretation, the international workers' movement, everyday life and historical fate of a superpower and new social order.

The underlying perception of the USSR in 1985 as a country in bad shape certainly was a major consideration in favor of a "serious" approach towards alcohol troubles. There is, in fact, every reason to believe that it was the main consideration for those in the Politburo who pushed the decision through - and their main argument in trying to convince those who were unsure and neutralizing those who were opposed to the decision.

The "new leadership" in April 1985 was not, as further events proved, and memoirs published later witness, united by the idea of democratization or burying communism. What united the new people in the Politburo was the shared sense of badly needed repair of the system, which was increasingly losing ground as a superpower, losing influence as the pioneer of the socialist path, losing the support of its own people, who were still almost invariably silent and obedient but clearly disappointed (the KGB was gathering information

on a routine basis) and unhappy with their inept rulers, endless ideological brainwashing and the lack of improvement in standard of living.

In the very early age of the Soviet Republic, there was a slogan of transforming the republic into a "unified military camp". Meaning, the republic, being in immediate danger of a military defeat, was now to live as a single combat unit. It literally was a "kill or be killed" situation for the republic, and it made it such for its citizens too. This was a temporary measure, but the tendency to run the country as a military organization remained. The Bolsheviks "had to" - as long as they remained Bolsheviks - take care of the Army and its needs first. The rest could only receive the attention and resources that were left over, which was not much.

The Soviet Union was efficient in building and upgrading its military might, along with the heavy industry and science that served military needs. The Communist Party was equally efficient in destroying domestic opposition. But in nearly everything else the incompetence and inefficiency were wide-spread and often unbelievable; the lack of incentive and creativity were unparalleled and increasingly deepening.

Among the many consequences of para-military mode of governing was a cost of military and industrial achievements that no country could carry, not even the Soviet Union. Virtually every natural and human resource had been used up by about the 1970s: from land to ore to air to the willingness of the people for self-denial and sacrifice. Gorbachev later used the term zastoi to describe this dilemma, translated as stagnation. In Russian, it also has the sense of mire. To launch an energetic attack on drunkenness might not seem a bad idea for starters. It could help shake things up, to set the rusty wheel in motion and get out of the mire.

The above were all reasons for the Politburo to take action, as opposed to inaction, but it has no bearing on the question why the action had to be so radical. This is, indeed, a key question, for what is really interesting about that reform is not the fact that it happened but its extreme nature, which made it the closest thing to prohibition the Christian world saw since the 1933 prohibition repeal in the United States.

The difference between the moderate or general case and, on the other hand, the radical case may look

just like a small extra step - but it changed the nature of the reform from minor adjustment to a major challenge.

The chief pragmatic consideration in favor of the radical approach is probably well expressed in Juha Partanen's article cited above: "Serious drinking - serious measures". That is, the perception was that things had already gone too far and soft or medium-grade reform would not suffice to deal with the problem. Importantly, this was supported by recent experience when the resolutions and campaigns of 1972 and 1978, as well as price hikes of 1979-80, failed to produce any perceptible change in the dynamics of the alcohol situation, except that they caused a big increase in moonshining (see Chapter 5 for details).

The above is related to how the leadership and its actions would be perceived. A moderate reform, especially if it did not bring observable improvement, would certainly be seen as just an imitation of real change. This would look like another one, like a continuation of the Brezhnev line for which inaction and imitation of effort and progress were the trademark<sup>1</sup>. The new people in the Politburo, clearly, were determined to show they were not "like Brezhnev". Inaction, when a policy draft has already been prepared, is no longer quite an automatic option "by default". At a certain stage, inaction requires a more or less conscious choice; it becomes a decision which, too, involves making a case for it (and against action). In this instance, the case for inaction was unconvincing and weak.

How exactly they differed from Brezhnev was a point of disagreement. Ligachev, the driving force behind the semi-dry law, was a man of the strong-hand approach to the governing of the country. Among other things, he was a fanatic of discipline and felt strongly that it did not well go together with drinking. Stiff measures against drinking were, for him, one way to show what the new leadership was made of.

The new leadership had other options, of course. They could start with new incentives. They could

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<sup>1</sup> A joke of the Brezhnev time goes: Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev are riding in the train which advances to Communism. Suddenly, the train stops: there are no more rails ahead. Stalin orders to shoot the crew and use their bones to extend the road. Khrushchev comes with the solution to take the rails from behind and to put them ahead. Brezhnev suggests, "Let's draw the curtains, somebody rock the car; we're going to try and feel that we are advancing forward".

one more time try to re-instill fear, as Andropov in 1983 started to do with a noticeable success. They could start with a lot of other things. An anti-alcohol campaign was just one among several options, and there is no reason to think that it had greater promise than anything else. Why did they choose it? It appears, for two reasons that happened to be there by accident: the decision had been already prepared (by the previous leadership), and, second, Ligachev was promoted to the Politburo.

What were the reasons against the move? They were no mystery and had been well known prior to 1985. Among them, three were of exceptional practical importance: the prospective drop in revenue for the state; the likely increase in moonshining; and the risk of being unpopular.

None of the three was a strong contra in the moderate option. With the first two, there are known ways, both within and outside the field of alcohol, to compensate for relatively small losses in revenue or to deal with relatively small increase in illegal supply. The risk of unpopularity also did not seem grave because moderate measures would not greatly hurt the majority; besides, there was a concern about alcoholism, and the public was likely to support reasonable action against it.

The above, however, looked drastically more troublesome in case of extreme measures. There were no known ways to compensate for more than a few percent in lost revenue, no ways to prevent for any long time illegal supply when the market becomes extremely favorable for it, and measures that made alcohol near-unavailable for the majority was doomed to be unpopular.

The decision-makers were certainly aware of the probable difficulties. They had both Western publications readily available to them and home-written warnings meant specifically for their use: zapiski v direktivnye organy - analyses and proposals to the "directive organs", the euphemism for the all-Union decision-making bodies. There, the Soviet experts laid out much the same arguments as foreign authors did. Well before the rulers got the hard proof, in the course of the actual reform, that samogon and revenue matters were no joke, they could read analyses that predicted the outcomes. They after all decided they could offset the samogon threat by stiffer penalties for its illegal production, and could counter the losses for the budget

from the reduced alcohol trade by producing or importing other commodities, by increasing export revenues and other compensatory measures, which was termed "building a healthier budget". This idea never materialized.

A freaky act of the Politburo (On the elite hypothesis).

One paradox about the 1985 reform is that the actual decision meant a rejection of versions of reform that not only were more efficient solutions to the problem but would be far more beneficial for the Party. The Politburo made a decision against the interests of the Party and Soviet elite it was supposed to represent and serve. Moreover, the Politburo knew it; at the very least, it had all the information, expertise and experience which put it in position of being well aware of a disaster in the making.

There is a perception that the Politburo did what was good for the elite. It would be true if the reform were not radical. Or a perception that it attempted "to save the people". Again, this would be true in case of a moderate reform. (Besides, when did the Party care about the people?) What is interesting, is that the course of action ran against the interests of every group concerned, with no exception, including even the Politburo itself.

H.Levine calls the reform "an elite-led campaign"<sup>2</sup>. Was it? Not really, although it could appear that way from afar. What is "elite"? It is, by any count, more than just a dozen of top decision-makers. It is a social strata, or a class, depending on one's preferences in depicting social structures, but using any definition it must be more than a few people - must be a large social group.

In the Soviet Union, "the elite" was the nomenklatura, the most inclusive term designated to identify those in power, the country's ruling class. In George Orwell's depiction of pure socialism, it would be a slightly different category known as the Inner Party. The latter, of course, would largely overlap with the former; one should probably say that Soviet nomenklatura was the closest thing to Orwell's ideal type. In a narrow sense of only political elite operating directly in the Party (that is, with the exclusion from the nomenklatura of high-

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<sup>2</sup> See H.Levine 1992.

ranking officers in the military, law enforcement, industry, science, art, diplomacy, and others with professional or para-professional specialization) it would be apparatchiki, the professional Party functionaries.

The above are the broad and the narrow definitions of the former Soviet elite. Was either of the two, or some influential segments of the elite, pushing for an anti-alcohol reform, most importantly, for a radical one? Or, at least, was there a group in fair support of it?

There never was any sign that any such group was in existence. And what is known about the "elite" in the Soviet Union and how it was related to the alcohol issue, indeed, not only shows that the actual reform served no interests and met no concerns of the nomenklatura or its parts but also that no powerful group could or did expect any gains from a radical assault on drinking. Major considerations of the "elite" and its segments as related to the alcohol issue are briefly presented below.

Soviet ministries and agencies were important players, to whom the Politburo was inclined to listen (though, of course, it had no obligation to), when it came to deciding matters of their responsibility and expertise. Matters of alcohol economy were directly handled mainly by the USSR<sup>3</sup> Gosplan (State Planning Committee), the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Trade; the Council of Ministers was the supreme economic agency of the country and as such could not be unconcerned about the single largest source of cash for the till. There also were ministries of wine-making or spirits-and-vodkamaking industries and the like, but, compared to the above, their influence was negligible (and they all were frantically against the reform anyway).

All of them, especially the three directly involved, were strongly opposed to any measures that jeopardized their performance. The Gosplan, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Trade have been called by their critics "the three whales of the alcohol economy"<sup>4</sup>. A radical reduction in the state-run alcohol production,

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<sup>3</sup> Everywhere in this work, I refer to all-Union establishments, formally indicated by the ending "of the USSR" in their official names, as in the Gosplan of the USSR or the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. All of them were duplicated in every republic, with the ending becoming "of the Ukrainian (Georgian, Kazakh, etc.) SSR"; the only exception was that there was no Communist Party of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. I drop the endings to avoid linguistic awkwardness.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, White 1996.



sale and revenue was clearly a nightmarish scenario for them. It would make impossible a successful accomplishment of their tasks, and they knew the Party had never been keen on excuses. This desperate and hopeless struggle for "making the plan" jeopardized job security for them and handicapped career-making. And their worst fears, of course, came true in the course of the actual campaign. One manifestation of their resistance to the radical draft of the anti-alcohol campaign was Prime Minister Ryzhkov's energetic opposition to it.

On the other side, the two agencies assigned to directly deal with drunkenness and alcoholism were the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (of Interior - the MVD). Potentially, they could be supportive of a more efficient alcohol policy. However, even with respect to moderate measures, their perception was not, in effect, motivated solely by the concern about public health or order. Their performance was judged, mainly, by the indicators of chronic alcoholism, alcoholic psychoses, and their treatment, for one agency, and by the numbers of the detained for public drunkenness and processed through the detox system, for the other. Increased efforts against drinking were likely to increase the rates (except the indicators of treatment efficiency which were likely to go down), thus presenting the respective agencies in unfavorable light. Besides, both had many other and no less important tasks to perform and did not need any extra strain which an anti-alcohol campaign would cause for them. Especially the militia knew that any such campaign would be performed mostly by their hands and be, at the same time, most frustrating and unrewarding for them. Certainly, a radical campaign was not in their interests, and both agencies, in fact, happened to be against it. In 1986, when everyone was expected to by all means praise the reform, the Minister of Interior had the nerve to publicly claim that "administrative methods" could not solve the problem. In the Ministry of Health, too, the official who was in charge of these matters and very much shaped the Ministry's policy in the field of alcohol and addictions, Babayan, was frantically against the reform, and exactly for that reason eventually lost his job<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2 for details.

This leaves us with no major part of the officialdom which was involved in shaping and implementing alcohol policies, interested in their drastic change. This was reinforced by an overall dependence of the Soviet system, its economy and governance on alcohol. Alcohol was an important part not only of finance but industry and agriculture, labor relations, local budgets, and many other aspects of the system's functioning<sup>6</sup>. In this respect, even a limited anti-alcohol campaign was going to be disruptive for the system.

We should also take a look at two other major institutions, who definitely could have all the attention of the top leadership - the army and the KGB. Alcoholism did not properly belong in the domain of the either, but the army was affected by its consequences (deteriorating human material, quality and quantity of the draft, and imperfect performance of duties by drunken officers and soldiers), and the KGB was concerned with the erosion of support for the Party among the population. A curious phenomenon was that, contrary to the belief that alcohol makes people happy - but in agreement with the belief that alcohol makes people careless - drunken Soviets were reported to ever more openly curse "the bosses" (nachal'stvo), Soviet life and values. Both agencies were said to be in favor of "doing something" about drinking. But, again, neither, as far as the facts are available today, was pushing for the half-prohibition decision which was made.

Among other things, the army, including its heads, was among the heaviest drinking segments of the population, and abstinence was no virtue there. To create any serious inconvenience with drinking would not be their choice.

Much the same can be said about the KGB position. The difference is that we happen to have some historical evidence, though indirect, of their approach. Andropov had been Chairman of the KGB for decades before he became for a moment the Gensek, General Secretary of the CC CPSU, in 1982-83. The organization was his child, and, in particular, its approach to drinking was his approach. The latter became evident when, in 1983, vodka changed labels and became a little cheaper - and was immediately christened "Andropovka". He too thought drinking and discipline were connected, and something had to be done about both. But he did

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 5 for details.

not make any attempts to take the bottle away to make people work better; he tried to scare them and penalize for inefficient work and low discipline to make them, among other things, drink less.

Thus, on the available evidence, the apparatus of the CPSU, as well as the rest of the "elite", was very much against any extreme anti-alcohol campaign, and was not particularly supportive of even a moderate one. A great many of them were very much into drinking themselves<sup>7</sup> and did not want any inconvenience for themselves and their drinking buddies. On the other hand, everything we know about them suggests that they did not believe that combatting alcoholism in a radical way had a "common good" value or that it could help to rule the country.

One cannot but conclude that the elite hypothesis is a misleading impression as to what really happened. The campaign was not an enterprise accomplished by or for the Soviet "elite". The Politburo decision was made against the nomenklatura's opinion and interests; it was made "in the interests of the country" according to an understanding of those interests by a couple of individuals in the Politburo.

L'etat, c'est moi (The principle of small numbers).

What happened - speaking of it in terms of events, as opposed to interpretations - was that several people who were in a position to ignore any opposition, even if it were coming from the elite they supposedly represented, simply and solely felt it was best to do what they did - for reasons that largely escape sociological analysis. Sociology tends to deal with processes wherein individual unpredictabilities get mutually annihilated by the law of large numbers. The only observation the sociologist can and must make is that in the Soviet-type pyramid the top decision-making is a one-man business. Only occasionally and to a degree, it may become - when, and only when, the one allows it to - a game for a tiny group.

Another euphemism, used both inside the country and abroad, was "Soviet leadership". This, indeed, could be a small gathering. At times, it could mean a group larger than the Politburo, at other times, and the most important ones, it was a fraction of the Politburo. For example - to take a well-known fact which has been

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2, for example, on Gorbachev and Yeltsin. By now, this is a well documented aspect of the Party unofficial tradition.

made public - the decision to go ahead with the Afghanistan operation in December 1979 was made by four people: Brezhnev, Andropov, Ustinov and Gromyko. And among the four one was more important and had more power than the rest combined. The fact is that - contrary to what so many sages of the social science propagate - the single person on the very top had enough power to have it his way, whatever was on the table: Afghan, or Poland, or keeping people inside the barb-wire enclosure or outside, or -- well, absolutely anything.

Why, for instance, did everybody call the 1985 reform "Gorbachev's"? Why is one of the Soviet Constitutions known as "Stalin's", and another one "Brezhnev's", though neither one was the author? The American Constitution is not "Washington's", and Prohibition is not known as "Wilson's"; why? Perhaps, because Wilson reportedly did not want to sign it into law. But on a more general level, the answer is: because not everything that occurs in the USA has to agree with the President's opinion or taste.

The terminology is a reflection of the brutal fact that, deep inside, everybody, people on the street and pundits alike, recognizes the Soviet leader as some kind of monarch. The word Gensek (General Secretary) meant the ruler, the final word, the Supreme Being. The Secretary-General of the CC CPSU was not in any meaningful way accountable to anybody or any political body; nor was there any group which could to any degree counter his power. This is the case of an appearance not being deceiving when it truly is what it appears to be. And it was as such perceived, knowingly or intuitively, by everybody (everybody, that is, except the keen sociologist). So, quite naturally, everybody assumes that what happened under Gorbachev (Stalin, Brezhnev, Hitler, Pol Pot, etc.) was decided upon by Gorbachev (Stalin, etc.), or, at the very least, was allowed by Gorbachev to happen.

A sociologist is at liberty to ascertain why a historical personage committed a particular act. But the sociologist should not look for a generalized sociological explanation of that sort of "why". In general terms, the only answer to this "why" is: Because he wanted to. History is full of instances when unaccountable rulers did things that denied not only statesmanship wisdom but ordinary common sense, defied every interest of their own, every bit of logic. The Gensek could act for the common good or against it, could be cruel or liberal, clever or idiotic; he could do or be anything - nobody and nothing could stop him. He could, of course, be

stopped by a turn of events, as in Afghanistan; or by a coup-d'etat, as in 1964, when Khrushchev was dethroned; but not otherwise. A powerful man's actions are as unpredictable as anybody's.

### The Crusade, the Decision and the Problem of Relatedness

A natural question now is this: What was the link, if any, between the prohibitionist movement and the preparing of the decision in the Politburo? The question has obvious sociological connotations in terms of the rule-making process. According to the classic formulation, wherever the rules are made, we should look for a moral entrepreneur who initiates the process. And in the Soviet case, it looks like all the classic aspects of the process are there and easy to identify. There is a group actively campaigning for a revision of social rules about drinking, and there is a policy reform which is moving in that general direction. But was it indeed so or only looks like it was? More specifically, do we have good reasons to view the decision as a result of the crusade? In Becker's terms, was the decision a case of a successfully accomplished (by the prohibitionists) enterprise?

On the available evidence, not quite. It was not so much the crusade which explains the reform as the inside Politburo considerations. However, before addressing this aspect of the process in any detail, it is necessary to examine the possible inter-link between the crusade and the decision as a matter of facts.

Hypothetically, there are four major possibilities:

a) no clear cause-and-effect link existed between the two, each being an autonomous consequence of a mutual cause;

b) the crusade led to the decision (i.e. Becker's scheme fully applies);

c) - a reverse of (b) - the decision-makers fabricated a bogus public campaign for a decision which had already been made - in the tradition of Soviet "ideological theatrics";

d) - a hybrid of (c) as the leading scenario with (a) as a convenient accidental circumstance - the decision had been made prior to or irrespective of the campaign, but the crusaders happened to be out there and were used by the political decision-makers who thought the actual, genuine campaign made for a good

show they needed.

A decision which is not a result of a public campaign, as in (a) and (c), or in the case when there is no public campaign whatsoever, does not, in itself, indicate the absence of an entrepreneur. For those cases have two ways to materialize: with no entrepreneur or with an inside-bureaucracy entrepreneur who is publicly invisible. Becker, of course, does not consider the possibility of a rule being made in the absence of an entrepreneur and moral enterprise. The scenario of no entrepreneur splits (a) and (c) into two sub-cases each.

Below, I will argue the Soviet case had most to do with (a) and (d), less with (b), and least - very atypically for the Soviet system - with (c). As in many actual cases, this one was not pure. Namely, to claim the decision and the campaign did not at all affect each other would be a denial of the obvious. The wording and spirit of the Party Resolution of May 7, 1985, especially an open lash-out at the opponents of the prohibitionists; the slogan "Sobriety - norm (law) of life"; the reference by Gorbachev, in retrospect, to the "powerful pressure on the directive organs", all bear unmistakable marks of the crusade's influence. Uglov, the leader of the movement, claims that "the prohibitionists won a resolution of the CC CPSU and the Government on struggle against alcohol abuse and alcoholism in 1985"<sup>8</sup>. Even though in the next line he, for obvious reasons, calls the Resolution "half-hearted", there is no denial it was a victory for him and a defeat for the moderates, and that, at least, in some ways to some extent, the prohibitionists influenced the supreme level decision. My sense is that Uglov and other crusaders provided the inside entrepreneurs, Ligachev and Solomentsev, with ammunition for presenting their case in a more convincing fashion. And, secondly, the very fact that a genuine grass-roots crusade was developing, probably, reinforced the symbolic considerations of the decision-makers in that it made it easier for them to believe that a radical reform would look as though the leaders were "listening to the people" and "doing something for the people"; at least, this must have softened the fear that people would not "understand" severe anti-alcohol measures.

Yet, that influence, whatever it actually was, should not be overestimated. It would be still further

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<sup>8</sup> Uglov 1991 p.136.

from the truth to suppose that the decision resulted from the crusade. As such, by no means did it make the decision imminent. The crusade did not create a situation wherein the decision-makers were forced into doing something or felt obliged to. Far more precise would be to say that, first, they allowed the crusade to develop, and thereafter they volunteered to go as far as they went.

As for (c) and (d) above, they merit close attention because were typical of the Soviet political theater, even though were not clearly present in the case.

Positively, the prohibitionists' campaign was not fabricated. The case, then, had largely nothing to do with (c) - except that an unauthorized public campaign for prohibition was allowed and tolerated (before Gorbachev and his perestroika and glasnost'), while typically such attempts were aborted long before they had time to develop in anything noticeable. This suggests the Party saw reasons of its own to make an exception. The fact that the decision-makers were working on some anti-alcohol measures since 1980 or earlier explains why: the Party was preparing a reform, and a public concern, discussion and campaign "from the bottom" were conveniently there. This was perfect for making things look the way the Party thought they should.

The typical Soviet scenario for major political decisions was (c): the Party prepared the decision and organized a bogus "initiative of the working people" for that decision. With respect to the relationship between Soviet reality and American sociological theories, the most amazing thing is that for some reason the Soviet leadership arranged things as though in an effort to confirm Becker's depiction of rule-making. They did not make their decisions to meet the popular demand - but, in many cases, they took particular care to stage a performance which would make it look as if they did. Both the campaign and the entrepreneur were in such cases fabricated and assigned by the Party for image-making, theatrical purposes, and had little or no actual significance - but they were there. The fabricated campaigns can be called ritualistic, and the assigned entrepreneur was a frontman of sorts and can be called front-entrepreneur, as opposed to the possible presence of a true, publicly invisible entrepreneur. These features were typical for the Soviet political stage; they still are for today's China, Cuba, Iraq and quite a few other places. They were not typical for Western democracies,

but, I believe, in another shape and smaller scale, can be identified there too<sup>9</sup>.

The actual Soviet case was a combination of (a) and (b). The exact details of that combination are not known as hard facts to this day. What is known are some general facts. One is that the campaign did influence the decision at least in some ways - probably, at the last moment the campaign made the decision more radical and crude. Another fact is the Party started preparing the decision before the campaign gained any momentum. The last relevant general fact is that the crusaders had no power and the Politburo had all the power. So if the Party partly gave in, it was because it was prepared to. This happened, in my view, because there were enterprising insiders in the Politburo. Initially, it was Solomentsev who had been assigned to work on the alcohol policy in the pre-Gorbachev time; in the last stage, he was joined by Ligachev who, very probably, was the decisive influence in the shaping of the decision and definitely was the one who shaped its implementation. Thus, the decision can be viewed as a joined work of public entrepreneurs and inside entrepreneurs, with a far greater role of the inside ones in determining and deciding what was right.

#### The Decision to Reverse the Initial Decision

There was no crusade, no publicly visible campaign and very little even in the way of invisible inside-bureaucracy enterprise. In terms of rule- or definition-making, it was an undoing, accomplished inside the bureaucracy. This was not processed as a case, as an initiative of some group, but as a problem which spoke for itself and needed no particular whistle-blower to get addressed.

Speaking of the publicly visible (outside the bureaucracy) action for the recall of the policy, not only was it not there but was made impossible by the Party Resolution of 7 May 1985 and the resulting paranoid censorship. One must keep in mind that the Resolution labeled the theory of cultured drinking harmful, and nearly everything which was not unquestionably pro-sobriety fell into that category. At the time of retreat of the anti-alcohol campaign and even for some time after, a virtual taboo on any principled criticism of the

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 10, Appendices A and B.



campaign<sup>10</sup> or frivolous depiction of the subject of drinking was in effect in the mass media, in film-making, literature, art and everywhere else<sup>11</sup>. To give an example, the most talked about victim of the pro-sobriety censorship was the very popular movie "Nice Bath Steam"<sup>12</sup>; it had been aired on New Year's Nights for a number of years, until 1985; the tradition resumed, I believe, only as late as the 1990/91 night<sup>13</sup>.

The only article published before the policy got officially denounced<sup>14</sup> was brought out by Ogonek, commonly recognized as the flagship of glasnost, in September 1988<sup>15</sup>. This almost coincides with the CC CPSU resolution, passed next month, which decreed to eliminate the waiting lines for liquor, effectively ending the campaign. It was too early in September 1988 even for Ogonek to criticize the Party in the literal sense, but the article transparently urged the decision-makers to reconsider the policy. It went so far as saying:

It is unfortunate that we tried to solve the alcohol problem overnight, by administrative fiat, in a poorly thought-out campaign. ... Should we admit that the anti-alcohol resolution of May 1985 was a mistake?<sup>16</sup>

No other publication came anywhere near that sort of criticism until, probably, about another year later. In other words, one article, published when the campaign was already breathing its last, is all we have in this case for a crusade.

Ryzhkov presents an account of events and activities that were at the time known, probably, only to

<sup>10</sup> Later in the campaign, its minor details were publicly criticized, but even such publications were few and far between.

<sup>11</sup> Again, this, rather than public campaigns, was typical for the Soviet decision- and reform-making.

<sup>12</sup> S legkim parom! An untranslatable phrase which is used to greet someone who has just taken a bath.

<sup>13</sup> The movie is not about drinking; it is a love story unfolding on a New Year's Night. However, the characters do some serious drinking; what's worse, the good, lovable guys really have quite a time, while on the other hand, it is the boring, well-to-do, unattractive nerd who does not drink (in the first half) and raises his unpleasant voice against irresponsible behavior.

<sup>14</sup> The decision to reverse the policy, according to Ryzhkov, was made by the Politburo already on 8 September 1988, and was in no way influenced by outside anti-prohibition campaigns: see Ryzhkov 1995 p.100-101. See also analysis below.

<sup>15</sup> See Ogonek, 1988, no.39:20-23. For an abstract in English see the CDSP XL (1988) 43:15-16. ["How Much Is Sobriety Costing Us" by Lev Miroshnichenko] The author was not one of the branded enemies of sobriety.

<sup>16</sup> Miroshnichenko 1988 p.22.

about a dozen of insiders: how the Politburo decision to abandon the policy was made. The account has all the marks of a moral enterprise; nevertheless, it is another instance, in my view, of a change in rules which the moral enterprise does not explain. Ryzhkov tells the reader the following story:

My repeated verbal pleas to Gorbachev to reconsider the current situation in society were left unattended. He agreed with me that the course needed to be corrected, he promised to call a Politburo meeting on the issue, yet, time was passing but things did not change. I sensed that somebody "worked" on him. ...

In my behalf, [the Minister of Trade and Minister of Public Health] submitted to the Council of Ministers their memoranda....

September 7, which was the next day after I received these documents, I wrote an official letter to the Politburo.... Already on the 8th... the question was discussed on PB<sup>17</sup>.

During the five years that I worked in the Politburo, I saw various meetings - some tranquil, some adversarial and some amusing. But none of these rubrics would apply to the meeting in hand.... I demanded to stop the irrational anti-alcohol campaign, which had failed because of impermissible administrative excesses....

We... insisted that the humiliation of the people and local leaders be stopped immediately. ...

Ligachev and Solomentsev frantically defended their position, and accused us of renegading decisions made by the Party. Those gathered at the long table of Politburo meetings split sharply in two opposing groups. The discussion turned into yelling and downright cursing and personal accusations. Our opponents were in veritable tremens; it seemed as though they were about to begin grabbing us by the chest. ... But Gorbachev had no choice other than support the majority<sup>18</sup>.

The above explains a few details about how it happened; perhaps it explains why the Ogonek publication was allowed. But it does not explain in the least the recall of the campaign. The policy had been failing already, alcohol sales had already been on the rise for a year, the campaign could not be saved. With or without Ryzhkov's enterprise, new rules had no chance to survive for much longer.

The problem for the leadership was not so much moral but managerial. It was a problem of the situation with alcohol becoming ever more unmanageable: in terms of finance, enforcement, work of the apparatus, public relations, and current politics. There was too much pressure of all kinds on those governing the country. The pressure was coming from "things" - situations and spheres of governing, as opposed to the pressure from people organized and lobbying for a cause. Like a crisis or an emergency situation it made it unnecessary for anybody to push for taking some measures. When, for example, a financial crisis breaks out, or an oil crisis, or a cholera epidemic, or war, the governing system starts reacting to it on its own accord.

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<sup>17</sup> On PB (na PB) - at a meeting of the Politburo.

<sup>18</sup> Ryzhkov 1995 p.98, 100-101.

In the published memoirs of the decision-makers of the time, too, one finds no discussion of public pressure to reverse the policy, although there are many remarks about people being unhappy with the policy which made alcohol barely available. For the Politburo, the policy simply did not work - meaning, it created problems for the Party and government in terms of doing their job but not in terms of opposition, which did not exist as a political force. Clearly, its own mistake was what the Politburo had to deal with - not any entrepreneurs or claimants. The only account where the author cites an "anti-anti-alcohol campaign" is that of Ligachev, but what he says reads like a bitter outpouring of a defeated politician rather than an evidence of such a campaign. Besides, even he does not claim alleged attacks on his policy and his persona were most important in defeating that policy. As he states,

The slogan "For a sober way of life" was put into circulation - as it turned out, prematurely.

But the insight came fairly quickly; the battle with drunkenness is a long-term, gradual task. ... Particular attention should be paid to the fact that protests against it coincided with an aggravation of the political situation in society. The protests were far from universal (the majority of people were solid backers of the battle against drunkenness and alcoholism), and came primarily from the "foremen of perestroika" and the government<sup>19</sup>, for which it was easier to patch up the budget by selling vodka. I don't mean they had no reasonable arguments; they did. But the pseudodemocrats were clearly pursuing a political agenda in the "anti-anti-alcohol" campaign, primarily against its "initiator", Ligachev. Reproaches for destroying vineyards became widespread, and then, of all things, for disrupting the monetary system<sup>20</sup>.

What the author means by "protests" and especially by "anti-anti-alcohol campaign" he does not say and it is not easy to figure out. There was one publication, by a well-known economist (and one of the "pseudo-democrats" hated by Ligachev), which claimed that the anti-alcohol measures triggered inflation<sup>21</sup>, largely unknown in the Soviet Union in normal Soviet times. But that was after the reversal of the policy. As for any other democrats and "foremen of perestroika", they had hardly any interest in the issue and were indeed consumed by far more general and important agendas; Ligachev's complaints in this regard look rather made-up. He cites just one instance of an attack on the alcohol policy, namely, "'vineyard' reproaches at the Russian

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<sup>19</sup> N.I. Ryzhkov, head of the USSR Council of Ministers, and Member of the Politburo himself, can be the one meant here by Ligachev. Ryzhkov was in open opposition to the anti-alcohol initiative from day one.

<sup>20</sup> Ligachev 1993 p.337-338.

<sup>21</sup> See N. Shmelev. Novyi mir, 1989.

Communist Congress"<sup>22</sup>, but even this sole example refers to the post-campaign and could by no means account for the change in policy. Ligachev took any word of criticism very personally and very defiantly, and his rather strong words appear to be a reflection of his own perception rather than any actual "protests":

...I do not shirk responsibility for the excessively harsh approach during the initial stage of this struggle. But I have no intention of covering my head in ashes. We are talking about saving the people's health.... This is a sacred goal, and even failures along the path of its attainment will also bring benefits, will save us from similar mistakes in the future. And if any are guilty before the people, it is precisely those who completely buried the battle with drunkenness for purely political goals.

...

The initial mistakes of the anti-alcohol campaign should have been corrected, the prohibition softened, educational work intensified. Everything can be forgiven except the malicious glee at the failure of one more attempt to cope with a chronic national ailment. Drunkenness is our misfortune. He who attempts to accommodate this national pain to his own political goals commits a crime against society<sup>23</sup>.

Neither in Ligachev's own account, nor elsewhere there is any illustration of the alleged political machinations which "buried the battle". He does not seem to distinguish (and for him, in contrast to the sociologist who studies the case, it is not an important distinction) between the alleged activities against the policy in effect and the hindsight attacks on him which, true, came in abundance when the policy had become history (and the ban on criticism had been lifted). In fact, some of his statements can be interpreted as the Politburo, including Ligachev, correcting its mistake in the course of a trial-and-error search for an optimal policy - as opposed to a retreat under political pressure of a counter-enterprise. He states, for example:

...The insight came fairly quickly; the battle with drunkenness is a long-term, gradual task. This made it necessary to change tactics, to switch the emphasis from prohibition... to educational work.... I see nothing terrible in this evolution...<sup>24</sup>.

This is a description of finding a more efficient way of dealing with the problem, not a description of alternative claims that force a redefinition of the problem.

The reform proved to be a full-scale political disaster. The semi-dry experiment, with its new

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<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. p.338.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. p.338-339.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. p.337.

definition of drinking, just did not fit anywhere, whether we think of the way of life, or ways of balancing the budget and all the local budgets, or the ability of the apparatus to process a certain number of situations and make decisions within a given amount of time, or the ability of the Politburo to explain to people, to the functionaries and to themselves why all this was so necessary, especially when it did not seem to be working. This unmanageability of too many things caused by the new alcohol policy became the chief problem, and this problem reminded the decision-makers of itself on a daily basis. It interfered with the tasks and everyday work of governing. No crusade was needed to make them aware of it, and it was only a matter of time before they did something. This time, the "something" was a very definite thing - return to essentially the pre-reform system of alcohol trade.

None of the classic rule-making elements can be identified here. The ban on discussion was the immediate, ostensible reason for that, of course. But, irrespective of the ban and speaking generally, the abandoning of efforts to promote a new rule is not a variation of the process of making a rule. In the American case too, although less obviously, it was not the campaign for Repeal<sup>25</sup> but the failure of the new rule to fit into society's life and cultural norms which defeated Prohibition.

Several reasons of unequal importance can be identified with regard to why and how the ultimate decision-makers came to view the situation as in need of fixing, that is, to give up on the campaign. I see the most important of them as follows:

1. Most importantly, the new, pro-sobriety definition of alcohol was a total stranger to Russian and Soviet life. In Russia and most other republics, there was no strong tradition of sober life, no significant population of abstainers and an even smaller quantity of active antagonists of drinking. Most people quite certainly were neither alcoholics nor problem drinkers, but alcohol was a big part of life. It would be true to

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<sup>25</sup> See, particularly, Kyvig 1979. The author states and shows that, contrary to what even the best known authors on Prohibition have assumed, to repeal an Amendment to the US Constitution was a formidable task to accomplish. This, however, does not change the fact that Prohibition had no chance to survive. To the contrary, if even formidable difficulties were quickly overcome, it only supports the point.

say that people did not realize just how big it was until alcohol had been made scarce. With no or not enough or bathtub quality liquor on the table, a birthday party or a New Year's Eve celebration was not as joyous as it was meant to be, even for those who did not care much for alcohol per se.

To generalize, it is also true that almost everybody and everything were against the experiment and too few and too little were in favor of it. The points below represent particular manifestations of this.

2. The human material to which the policy was applied happened to prove far more resilient than had been expected. People did not want sobriety and, unfortunately for the policy-makers, they had, in this instance, ways to insist on their natural right to drink.

3. The implementation of the policy was only possible on the condition of continuous, direct and close and detailed attention of all levels of the governing apparatus, including the highest, to matters of the campaign. This, in fact, was the main mechanism of implementation. As soon as attention shifted elsewhere, production and sale of alcoholic beverages rebounded.

For two reasons, the anti-alcohol reformers in the Politburo, Ligachev and Solomentsev, had to keep focus on the campaign. First, the lower levels and local authorities could not control the big agencies that handled the financial and other aspects of the alcohol economy. As shown earlier in this chapter, they could not be interested in reducing the alcohol trade; when ordered to do so, they could not use the order as an excuse for not making enough money or not making the plan. Only direct and constant control from the very top could make them refrain from doing what their job demanded, that is, increasing the alcohol trade. Angry resolutions of the CC CPSU and the Party Control Committee on transgressions of that sort<sup>26</sup> show this was an ongoing battle all the time through.

Secondly, the lower and especially local levels of the apparatus, with few exceptions, were not themselves eager to go on and on with the struggle which they did not think necessary, which promised no easy or close victory and which took too much of their limited time and resources, especially when the perestroika

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 2.

and democratization of the country made life increasingly difficult for them.

It must have been increasingly more difficult for Ligachev to explain to fellow Politburo members, including the Secretary-General, why this had to continue, why he and Solomentsev were still right and why all the growing evidence against the policy and actual problems it caused had to be forever ignored.

Viewed as processing units, all levels of the apparatus, including the central processing unit, were overloaded with this struggle. To be effective, the struggle had to be permanent, non-stop - but permanent it could not be because it was more than the system could handle on a daily basis.

This can be called fatigue of the system. The fact that most people in the system inwardly could not make a case for the new policy made this fatigue especially acute. The more time passed, the greater grew the fatigue.

4. Enforcement of the police regulations, similarly, was hampered by the fact that these regulations did not make sense to people, from the street militia-man to the chief of the agency, who had to enforce them - day after day, month after month, year after year. The Soviet experiment, knew no heroic dry agents, no enthusiastic Eliot Nesses. And similarly, the scale of the problems the Ministry of Internal Affairs had to face, notably with samogon, was far beyond its processing capacity (again, this agency was not relieved from its other duties either).

5. As the pro-sobriety argument and the semi-dry law decision were put to a test, they soon, after the initial euphoria, supported by the initial success in reducing drinking and drunkenness, started to look less and less convincing. What seemed feasible in a preliminary discussion did not work and did not go without consequences. What sounded good before the test turned out to be a disappointment in reality. What did not seem to matter, for example, the little white lies of the prohibitionists, now became more important. What was ignored, like small things about balancing the budget or moonshining, now was felt worse than the enemies of sobriety had predicted.

The case built by the prohibitionists now looked like a piece of nonsense; Uglov with his apocalyptic vision was becoming a public enemy and a nuisance for the Party leaders; and their own decision looked ever

more like a mistake which was hardly possible to deny.

#### The Case-Making, Case-Processing and Definition-Testing

These three - the case-making, case-processing and definition/solution-testing- are main stages of the process of social definition-making or social problems solution. In other words, this represents a three-fold natural history of the process. The three stages appear to be rather universal and "unavoidable" (not speaking now of cases that never advance past the first or second stage), although variation in key parameters of each stage looks very considerable. I see two major dimensions responsible for this variation. One is that determined by the nature of the given political system. On one end of the spectrum, is the fully developed democracy based on the popular vote and separation of powers; the system governed by a ruler, or small group of rulers, with unlimited and uncontrolled power is the opposite pole.

The other major dimension, or variable, which determines the variation in the process is the problem/behavior being a central or periphery for society; in reality, the dimension, of course, is not as dichotomous as presented here for analytical purposes.

There is, though, an overlap between these two dimensions. In a Soviet-type society some participation<sup>27</sup> on some issues may sometimes be the case, as it was at the time of perestroika or, to take a different example, in the early Soviet years. In democracies, on the other hand, participation on some issues may be limited or entirely insignificant, although this is unlikely to occur on central issues (many issues of deviance, by the way, are not central).

The first two stages - the case-making and case-processing - have been many times addressed in literature, both theoretically and in substantive research. The third one - the testing of the adopted definition or solution in the aftermath of the decision on the case - has not been viewed as part of the natural history of definitions. This is based on the assumption that once the legislation or policy which represents the new

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<sup>27</sup> I use here the term and concept suggested by Alford & Friedland 1985.



definition is adopted, we have a new moral order which has to be investigated anew if another change in it occurs; a repeal of the law in question thus comes to be viewed as but one particular instance of such change. A finding of this study is that this assumption is erroneous.

The change in definition, as this study suggests, is not complete until the new formal rule has passed the test of time and become accepted culturally. A failure to pass the reality test is a distinct possibility for any new formal rule; when it occurs, the process is hardly separable from the preceding stages and cannot be comprehensively examined other than in relation to them. In other words, a return to the previously rejected or modified definition is a development distinctly separate from other changes in social definitions. It is unique in both meaning and process.

The case-making has been addressed earlier in this chapter. Now I will briefly address the other two in general terms.

Once a case is made about the problem and reaches the stage of visible activities which draw a response from the decision-making system, the processing of the problem (or processing the definition of a behavior) is likely to take the shape of a case-processing. It starts with the consideration of suggested solutions (that is, cases made by group A, group B, etc.), available resources, politically acceptable options, and ends with the making of a decision (which can be A or B or C, etc., or a combination of two or more of them, or something different from all of them, including the decision to let the problem take its course). I call this case-processing.

In the Soviet-type system, the two stages of making and processing of the case can be and usually are reduced to one where it is made and processed inside the bureaucracy, often both made and processed by the same officials and agencies. Further, it can be reduced to only making a case for oneself when the supreme ruler(s) personally initiates the change.

In either version, public campaigns may or may not take place. If they do, they follow and result from the decision, rather than the other way around. They are staged by the decision-makers in order to inform and

convince the population, which has no vote in the process, that the decision is important, good and must be accepted.

In a democracy, when peripheral issues are processed, the process can, and I think has the tendency to, follow a near-Soviet scenario; and the more peripheral the issue, the more so. The difference is that, in a democracy, officials are more likely to be investigated legally or by the mass media, there are more and clearer procedural rules, and bureaucrats have more to fear from the public or competing agencies which may, for whatever reason, develop an interest either in the issue or in the way it is (or was) processed.

Definition-testing starts with the putting of the new policy into effect. If the decision is based on one of the suggested solutions as the main case, it can be called case-testing, since a particular case, associated with a particular group of entrepreneurs, undergoes the reality check. If the decision is not associated with a particular group, it is likely to be seen as a decision-makers' case, which often is a government's case. Naturally, the test ends either by a rejection of the new rule or by its cultural adoption, as, for example, the relatively new redefinitions of homosexual behavior or gender roles seem today to have passed the test and become adopted, at least, in North America and most of Europe.

The key question is whether the definition supported by the new formal rule is compatible with the existing moral order, the general direction of its evolution and culture of the society. If it is not, there will be numerous signs of all kinds of a basic response of people and social institutions to the new rule being negative. There will be a sense that the situation today is worse than it was yesterday, and it would be better for everyone to return to the old state of affairs.

The three stages of the process are related through a number of parameters. How the case is made affects its fate and development in various ways.

Some are parameters of the argument advanced for the case. Two seem to me most important: the content and the intensity of the argument. The relationship between them develops along with the process

which the case undergoes.

Initially, the content may not matter much. It only has to be good enough to elicit some sympathetic attention from the public and/or the decision-makers. The intensity of the argument initially is likely to be more important than its content. The moral, emotional appeal and not so much the rationale is what matters for the case-making to gain momentum and, probably, to win.

However, when and if the case is won, the situation quickly changes. Once the actual policy, based on the argument, is in place, the content of the argument becomes much more important. On the other hand, the intensity becomes unimportant, because the success of the policy is judged on the basis of its results.

For the same reason, political skills of the entrepreneurs are very important before, and for, the decision, but become secondary at the stage of its implementation.

To win, the campaigners also need the right political moment. The same case can be won today and lost tomorrow, and vice versa.

Other important parameters differ in the democracy and non-democracy.

In the former, the amount of public support is obviously crucial. In the Soviet Union it was not. There, crucial was a certain affinity between the crusaders and the decision-makers. For Uglov, for example, it did not matter so much whether he had five hundred or five million followers. It did matter that one person, Ligachev, was inclined to listen to Uglov and people like him and, on the other hand, disinclined to listen to people who were not so Soviet, Russian, patriotic, were too particular about details and numbers, and did not have a clear-cut, simple solution. In fact, they had difficulty explaining what to do with the problem, while seeming to know only what not to do. Such people were virtually at once recognized by their ways as strangers in the world of those who served the Party, and there was a special label for them: "Not our man. Not our people". Uglov, on the other hand, was "our man". If he was a demagogue, it was only good; if he was a Russophile, it was not too bad either; if he suggested to put people in jail for drinking, he meant business: nothing ever gets done in Russia without blood or, at the very least, putting people in jail. Ligachev and other Party people could understand Uglov. On this condition, Uglov did not need any public support to win the

decision.

All of which was drastically changed as soon as the real test began. People were not prepared to accept the new rule, and this, in only two or three years, turned the victory into defeat.

## CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION

No one-dimensional, single-factor explanation of anti-alcohol sentiments, movements or reforms is possible. Drinking itself is a very complex, multi-dimensional social phenomenon, and its explanation requires an analysis of a multitude of dimensions, factors and circumstances. A case study may serve to demonstrate that a particular dimension is relevant; however, every thorough case study, given it puts facts first and theories after, should reveal the impossibility of a one-dimensional exhaustive explanation.

The major factors relevant to the Soviet alcohol reform in 1985 that follow from this study are listed below. Taken together, in a dynamic interrelationship presented especially in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, they are my explanation of the Soviet case. Each of these factors contributed to the reform taking the shape it did. The order in which they are listed has no bearing on their relative importance.

1. The disruption caused by alcohol, with a steady upward trend in its consumption.
2. A noticeable genuine public concern about alcohol abuse and alcoholism.
3. A vigorous pro-sobriety public campaign. The presence of an outside entrepreneur.
4. A historically special social moment: a society in crisis.
5. A unique political moment: a change of guard in the leadership, with new leaders eager to distinguish themselves from the old guard and to demonstrate a willingness "to listen to the people".
  - 5a. A crisis in leadership. The old ways of ruling the country proving themselves increasingly inefficient and the whole Soviet social philosophy increasingly being in doubt, coupled with the absence of a new design ("mode of operation") for moving forward.
6. The association, in the public's mind, between the alcohol problem and the role of the state in alcohol trade and policies promoting drinking.
7. The power of the Politburo to make decisions on its own, without consideration for society or the "elite" of which it was part.

8. The presence of an inside entrepreneur in the Politburo (Ligachev and, secondly, Solomentsev). In factual terms, Ligachev played the decisive part in shaping the reform.

9. The relative insignificance of the alcohol issue for Gorbachev combined with his perception that something should be done about alcoholism and the issue could be used for political purposes. For Gorbachev, the reform probably was a way to please frantically anti-alcohol "reactionary reformers" in the Politburo in exchange for a free hand in the far greater social reform effort he had in mind.

#### After and beyond the Making of a Law/Policy

The tradition in some case studies of this type is to end the analysis of a law/policy innovation at the point where the reform was adopted. But the process of making social definitions does not necessarily stop where the reform begins. The Soviet case is a good illustration of that. Similar to American Prohibition, the Soviet reform intensified anti-sobriety sentiments ("made people thirsty"), which started the second round of the battle - this time, to change the definition of drinking back to what it had been before. In the narrow sense, the reform was only ended in October 1988, with its after-effects still obvious in today's Russia.

With the distinction between the formal rule and the underlying cultural definition of right and wrong being made, the Soviet case suggests an explanation (probably, not a full one) of the variation in fates of moral reforms. The new Soviet definition of drinking was short-lived because it was attempted in complete disregard of the cultural norm, which never changed<sup>1</sup>. This, it appears, happened with every other effort to prohibit alcohol in a Christian country, and very likely will happen with any such attempt in the future. It did not occur - due to a compatibility between cultural and formal definitions - with cannabis, opiates, and cocaine prohibitions. They all have lasted. This may change for marijuana, but is not likely to do so in the foreseeable future for heroin or crack.

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<sup>1</sup> Chauncey 1980, addressed in some detail in Chapter 1, presents an example of a comparable development in the US setting. In his case, a federal agency failed to convince the public that there was a teenage drinking crisis because public perception was more relaxed than that of the agency.

To last - to pass the test of time - a formal rule needs a base. It can be a cultural norm, or a change in cultural norm, which, in turn, can occur in a number of ways and for different reasons. The process is different for different substances - which corresponds to the difference in status of substances.

### The Soviet Case in Light of the Analytical Models<sup>2</sup>

#### The symbolic dimension.

The reform had a host of symbolic meanings. They are interpreted here more broadly and somewhat modified from those initially introduced by Gusfield<sup>3</sup>. This is not theoretically new, given Murray Edelman's works<sup>4</sup> and the vast post Symbolic Crusade literature<sup>5</sup>. There is, however, one modification necessary. Gusfield assumes that the symbolism of Prohibition was the same for both parties he considers. The Soviet case shows that such an agreement cannot be assumed<sup>6</sup>. For Ligachev and his allies, the reform was, by and large, one way to tell people: "New is better" - in Partanen's words, a sign of "moral superiority" of the new leadership over the old<sup>7</sup>. For ordinary people, however, it was different. As Moskalewicz objected to Partanen, for people it was "another humiliating interference of the state"<sup>8</sup> into their private lives. In this respect, too, the reform was a gross miscalculation on the part of both Ligachev and Gorbachev.

In my opinion, it is necessary to consider two or more parties for whom symbolic meanings may differ. For the "new leadership", there were aspects of symbolism where alcohol was primary and other aspects where it was secondary. The former ones came from the popular perception - of which the new Members of

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Gusfield 1963 and 1967.

<sup>4</sup> See Edelman 1964, 1971 and 1977.

<sup>5</sup> By this literature I mean not so much explicit revisions, as in Morgan 1980, but mostly the ad hoc use of the notion of symbolic in much broader sense by many authors.

<sup>6</sup> When Gusfield refers to the labeling of Prohibition and prohibitionists (by anti-prohibitionists) as "irrational, self-righteous, idiotic", etc., he, in my reading, acknowledges himself, though indirectly, that there was no such agreement in American case either.

<sup>7</sup> Partanen 1987 p.511.

<sup>8</sup> Surveyor 22 (May 1988):61-62.

the Politburo were obviously aware - that the state and the Party were, in more than one sense, alcoholically corrupt. The first charge was that the "elite" drank heavily. Ligachev's response was a virtual dry law for all public occasions; there was to be no drinking or celebrations, regardless of the occasion, not only in offices but also in restaurants, and no drinking with co-workers even at home. In effect, no visible drinking; better still, no drinking at all. Infractions were punished often by firing individuals from their jobs. The Party and other "responsible workers" were supposed to lead the people to sobriety by example (reinforced by more material forces too, of course). In a broader sense, this was viewed as a restoration of moral health in the Party and society.

Secondly, to a certain extent, the actual alcohol policies of the old leadership were viewed as "trafficking in liquor"<sup>9</sup>. Many believed that enticing people to drinking was a conscious policy. There is no evidence that it was so<sup>10</sup>, but contemplating the first of the old "damned questions of Russian life"<sup>11</sup> made the Party the main culprit. The Soviet state was not corrupt, in the alcohol field, in the classic sense of taking bribes for services or considerations (as in Clark 1976, in the *otkup* system, or in the illicit drug trafficking). Yet, it was corrupt in the sense that it could not resist the "fast and easy money" it made selling vodka to people. And vodka was the only joy the Soviet state supplied in abundance, everywhere and non-stop. Everything else people valued was scarce. This made the perception of alcohol policies in the late Soviet Union akin to the perception of the old *otkup*-runners or modern crack dealers: in Clark's words, the drunkard-making business "that drew a fat and filthy profit from the predictable failures of personal morality"<sup>12</sup>. The new leaders wanted to dissociate themselves from that image. An anti-alcohol campaign would deliver the message that the new

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<sup>9</sup> See Clark 1976.

<sup>10</sup> As well as there is no evidence to support the other romantic perception - that drinking was a protest against the government. See also Trembl 1991 on that.

<sup>11</sup> This first one was "Who's at fault?" The second one was "What to do?" Both were titles of the books published in the mid-nineteenth century which shaped much of the soul-searching agenda for the Russian intelligentsia. "What to do?" was also used by Lenin as the title for one of his earlier works. The questions and a renewed soul-searching came back to the Soviet intelligentsia since the 1960s.

<sup>12</sup> Clark 1976 p.4.



guard shared the indignation about the dirty money and was determined to clean up. In fact, there is every indication that both Gorbachev and Ligachev, each in his own way, did view the old guard as generally corrupt.

The new leaders needed a reform agenda - any reform. They needed to be able to show that they were full of energy and initiative, that they were active, responsible and caring - in contrast to Brezhnev and his people who were none of those things. A draft for alcohol reform was conveniently available; all they had to do was adapt it appropriately. This was why some of the new leaders were suspicious of the moderate version of the reform: it was not sufficiently different from previous reform efforts, full of empty words and deeds<sup>13</sup>.

Another significant factor was the desire to demonstrate a "strong hand", to re-instill the somewhat eroded fear of the Party's iron grip. This was not Gorbachev's project, but he allowed Ligachev to play with the old Soviet ghost. For many Soviet people the reform symbolized Stalinism - in the broad sense of using human beings with no consideration for their feelings and weaknesses. The reform will go down in history as a fragment of Stalinism at the dawn of perestroika<sup>14</sup>.

It is ironic that, only two years earlier, the true strong man from the KGB, Andropov, who did not have to make an effort to convince people that he should be feared, showed his kindness, when he became Gensek, by lowering vodka prices. It might be more than just a coincidence that each one tried to show that he had enough of what people suspected he could be lacking.

The symbolic aspect of this reform was, on the one hand, to present a favorable image of the new guard, and thus to help establish its legitimate authority. On the other hand, it was meant to boost the morale of the human material. Both can be viewed as symbolic means towards instrumental ends.

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<sup>13</sup> Ryzhkov's account of the decision-making in the Politburo provides an amazingly strong direct support for my interpretation of the leadership's mood and considerations: see Ryzhkov 1995 p.89-93.

<sup>14</sup> See for details Chapter 2, particularly quotes from Alexander Yakovlev and the former head of a primary unit of the sobriety society.

It is noteworthy, I believe, that when, for example, tobacco smoking was banned in Toronto restaurants some commentators labeled the City Hall heads "Nazis". This is a very similar perception of a policy inconsiderate of "human weaknesses" - in a country that never knew totalitarian rule.

Definition-making as moral enterprise.

The key elements of the process first presented by Becker and later broadened through the notion of claims-making activities can be identified in the Soviet case, including even those which, logically, it would seem, should be absent from the Soviet setting, especially the moral entrepreneur's presence and the public campaign. The moral entrepreneur is represented in this case not only by the state mobilizing for a new definition of alcohol but by a whole host of entrepreneurs. The crusade for a dry law and the state's claims with respect to sobriety as norm of life feature obvious essential similarities with moral crusades in a pluralist society that have been described in terms of claims-making activities. However, this study suggests additions and revisions of the classic framework that are, in my view, considerable<sup>15</sup>. On the one hand, as could be expected, the Soviet setting modifies the process. On the other hand, some of the findings with respect to the Soviet case suggest revisions of the process in the American setting and universally.

There are four essential themes here: the moral entrepreneur, the public campaign for public support of the cause, the inside-bureaucracy campaign (political lobbying) to enlist support of key insiders<sup>16</sup>, and, finally, the power considerations as a major determinant of the definitional process.

Power is not on Becker's list of key elements but is prominent in his analysis as a major force behind the process of making social definitions<sup>17</sup>. The category of power will be addressed in its relation, on the one hand, to (group) interests (Becker on the MTA case; and Gusfield - non-material interests), values (Gusfield) or other possible formations that prompt and direct (and are used to explain) social action. On the other hand, power will be addressed in its relation to the definitions as an outcome of the process.

The moral entrepreneur.

In the Soviet case both of the two prototypes suggested by Becker are found: the enterprising

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendices A and B.

<sup>16</sup> The two campaigns, public and internal, were so intimately interrelated, it is difficult to separate their analyses. At some points, there is no choice other than discussing them together.

<sup>17</sup> See especially "Whose rules?" in Becker 1963, Chapter 1.

bureaucrat and the crusader. They initially worked independently, they were never allies, yet, the end decision was somewhat influenced by the public campaigner's argument.

Further, the internal entrepreneur was effectively embodied in two individuals. Ligachev clearly corresponds to Anslinger in the United States, alleged by Becker to be the entrepreneur for the Marijuana Tax Act. This version of the entrepreneur can be called the bureaucrat with an agenda: the bureaucrat who takes the initiative for his own reasons, without being asked or forced to. His agenda may be based on values, or interests, or social or political philosophy, or skills, or other things; and can be selfish or altruistic; and can be personal, group, class, nation or humanity oriented.

The other character, Solomentsev, is of theoretical interest because he was different in that he was assigned to work on alcohol control; preparing a draft of the new policy was part of his job. In so far as his role was limited to that, he was not taking any initiative, was not blowing the whistle, was not enterprising. Solomentsev does not represent a pure case because he apparently went much further than just working on the assignment. However, it is easy to see that this was a feasible scenario, and it is, in fact, a precise description of the role of his predecessor Pelshe who did strictly what he was assigned to do. Namely, it is part of the bureaucratic routine to monitor particular spheres of social life, to be alert to the possibility that things may differ from what they ought to be (meaning, there is a problem), and to correct the discrepancies within one's prerogative, and report to the top about those corrections.

I am not sure if this can be called entrepreneurship, because both the initiative and competing claims are absent from this scenario. A soldier or a serf should not be called entrepreneur. Besides, in most cases, such activities remain invisible to anybody outside the tight circle of involved officials, which makes it inaccessible as a case of entrepreneurship for any practical research purposes.

We have two figures here. One is the ideal bureaucrat who routinely performs his job which may include changing rules as part of his job description. This also indicates the class of cases where rules get changed without a (visible) entrepreneur. Soviet rules (and changes in them) on prostitution, homosexuality, drug use, abortion, religion, political dissidence, etc., can furnish illustrations of the case. In these cases, it

appears we should probably look for a situation which prompts the change<sup>18</sup> rather than for an entrepreneur who initiates it.

The other figure, somewhat closer to Solomentsev, is the assigned entrepreneur. He gets an agenda other than his own as part of his assignment. The latter includes not only the routine part but also some active promotion of the reform.

Outside the bureaucracy, "on the people's side", we find in the Soviet case the crusading reformer to whom Becker's depiction (with a reference to Prohibition and Gusfield) applies perfectly. Nevertheless, the crucial difference was that the Soviet reform, in contrast to American Prohibition, cannot be viewed as resulting mainly from the crusader's activities. The crusade was but one of a number of considerations for the ultimate decision-makers. Logically, it well could be the least important one, although the measure of its actual influence remains unknown.

The related more general difference is that there are scores of instances in Soviet law- and rule-making where there was no entrepreneur at all (see just above), neither an insider nor an outsider. There are many other instances where we find a frontman acting as crusader. Earlier in this work, I called such character a front crusader; a pawn crusader could be another name for it.

Perhaps, the most famous instance of that in the Soviet history of deviance-making was Lidia Timoshuk, a rank-and-file woman who wrote a letter of indignation accusing a group of physicians of Jewish nationality of murdering their patients. Immediately, many other groups like that were exposed all over the country, including the doctors that treated Stalin (whose end was near). The last class of deviants created by Stalin was "physicians-saboteurs" (vrachi-vrediteli) or, less formally, "physicians-murderers" - effectively, Jewish doctors. It was Stalin himself who got suspicious of his doctors and generalized the case (could we call Stalin a moral entrepreneur?); but his name was not mentioned in this context. The letter by comrade Timoshuk

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<sup>18</sup> Such situation is mentioned in Becker 1963 but receives no elaboration or illustration.

was quoted and referred to at every meeting, in every newspaper article and every discussion of the problem.

If she was approached by some unknown real organizers of the campaign and was made to sign the letter written for her in some office, she was an example of the assigned pawn crusader. If she happened to have written it on her own and was later used by those who pulled the strings, she was a crusading pawn. Many people believed that there never was such a person. There was. But if she were a fictional character (a ghost crusader), it would hardly have changed anything.

In the case in question, we find genuine crusaders, like Uglov; crusading pawns, like Sheverdin of the official sobriety journal (though not a pure type); and scores of assigned pawn crusaders, like people of the Society of Sobriety, from the ground level to Chernikh (somewhat different from Timoshuk in that the assignment was to crusade not for a new policy but for its implementation).

#### The public campaign.

It is hard to separate the crusaders from campaigns, hence, much has already been said about the public campaign when discussing the crusader. As stated earlier, the Soviet crusade was genuine. I, however, believe that, for theoretical considerations, it is necessary to bear in mind the general nature of public campaigns in the Soviet Union. In fact, I cannot think of another unauthorized public campaign in all Soviet history. They were all ritualistic, a puppet theater. It is not only the past. Other societies, where essentially the same goes on and on, still exist. To some extent and in another form, it must also exist in the US and any other political scene.

The theater of Soviet ritualistic campaigns and near-fictional crusaders poses the question of why it existed. The conductors knew it was all false; people knew it at first glance; and the conductors knew people knew. Then, why was it done? The question seems to me too complex and difficult to be answered in this thesis. There is a mystery in this other-worldly materialization of Becker's claim that crusades and crusaders must be present in the making of social rules. What follows is an attempt at only a partial explanation, and even that is preliminary and highly hypothetical.

It probably has to do with the mechanism of establishing and maintaining the legitimate authority of

rulers. It is commonplace that no regime can exist for long without some social base and without at least some support, some minimum of social integration. Some communication is needed between the top and the bottom of society. Things must be explained. And they must be explained in Russian for Russians; and for Soviets they must be explained in terms of Soviet values, categories, habits and realities. People cannot live without explanations. Even less can they make sacrifices for their country and put up with injustice and miserable life they are being reduced to - if they do not know why or what for. Given this, ritualistic performances might provide an excuse for the rulers to start talking about things and to do the explaining. Both sides know that campaigns are bogus, crusaders are pawns, and it is just a theater in bad taste. But it puts in motion at least some communication, it starts an interaction and provides the decision-makers with an opportunity to try to convince the audience that the right thing is being done, or that there are invisible enemies to confront, or that the circumstances are such that there is no choice, or the times are desperate, or it is a temporary measure, or all things at once. This is better than just making rules and enforcing them without saying a word as to why or what for. Even supported by force, the silent rule-makers will not get very far.

In view of the above, ritualistic campaigns are an excuse for and part of making a case. The decision-makers have to make a case and to present it in legitimate terms for themselves, for the ordinary people and for those in between. There are many levels, institutions and people in between, and they are important. The apparatus which works for the big boss has to know what they doing. In turn, they must explain those who work for them what they are doing. And the same is true all the way down to the bottom. For all those bureaucrats, for people in enforcement, etc., a case must be made. Of course, when you do not depend on those people but they depend on you, the standards are low, and the show is poor. When and where the standards are higher, the theater is much better. But in all cases, the entrepreneurs have to make a case. Without a human touch, any system will stop dead.

Even the Soviets, including their leaders, could not be perfectly protected from non-Soviet thinking, from the ideas of the time and of the modern world, which hampered the explaining of things by the leaders

even for themselves. This is an important reason why power in itself does not guarantee a successful enterprise. Particularly, it is the underlying reason why the Soviet system "did not work" and eventually collapsed. To be more exact, why Gorbachev's enterprise of dismantling it was successfully accomplished.

The internal bureaucracy campaign.

In the case in question, the only important insider for whom Ligachev had to make a convincing case was Gorbachev. If Ligachev were not "number 2" but "number 1", there would have been nobody but himself to convince. Such a case - generally speaking, not uncommon for the Soviet-type systems - would leave no room for an inside campaign. As it were, the actual case, it appears, was close to that - because Gorbachev was more interested in other matters and, probably, decided it would be best to leave drunkenness and alcoholism to Ligachev and his ally Solomentsev.

That is to say, in the Soviet system the process of making or changing policies and rules could be reduced to the conversation of the ruler with himself, with the only possible, but not inevitable, addition of a ritualistic campaign after the fact. This makes the social process heavily affected by the personality of the ruler, which cannot be explained in sociological terms; therefore, particular innovations in Soviet-type systems become far more difficult to explain for the sociologist and even for the historian.

Processing problems and solutions in his own head, indeed, was the way major policy shifts were made by Stalin in the Stalin period. So were many, if not most, of those past his time by his successors. But Stalin is a pure example. Historians are to this day puzzled by many of his decisions. The same is, probably, true about Hitler, Saddam Hussein and other charismatic, enterprising dictators.

The above seems far from being possible in democracies, and this is where Soviet and American cases differ most.

Power.

The notion of power shaping social definitions and rules of behavior in society is prominent in Outsiders and more prominent still in followers of Becker, such as Schur. It also seems prominent in Merton's conceptualization of social norms creation; where we do not find consensus about the norm, he says,

disagreements about what is right and wrong get solved by the greater power. Consensus, of course, is not a good word for Becker, and even worse for Schur. According to the latter, definitions and their creation have always to do with power, and those with greater power have a greater say on the rules by which we live.

There is a problem, however, with how the notion of power shaping rules could be applied to the most significant innovations in rules and definitions of the last few decades. Though power may indeed have played a role, it did so in less than obvious ways. A good example is the Affirmative Action: how does the power differential explain that rules are made to protect and promote the least powerful - blacks, women, the disabled? And why have those in a position of power (i.e. the white male society) not used their power to make those rules more advantageous for themselves? There are rules or noticeable attempts to make or change rules designed to protect groups on the fringe of society, such as homosexuals or children; future or prospective members of society, such as future generations and the unborn; non-members of society, such as animals, plants or landscapes; and non-existent creatures, such as Santa Claus or vampires. How does this all reflect power relations?

This study, I believe, provides an illustration of the fact that the powerful use their power selectively. In the Soviet case, the decision-makers used their power against the elite they belonged to. In the general case, the powerful may use power in their own interests, may use it in the interests of those who are dear to them ("our women", "our kids", "our planet"), in the interests of the disadvantaged (poor homeless, poor addicts, poor bastards), in the interests of all (the common good), or of an abstract idea (to please the gods, to build a just society, to be politically correct), or for a great many other reasons.

In the general case, first of all, what reasons do we have to assume - and all statements that power makes rules involve this assumption - that the powerful have an interest in making their particular moral rules and imposing them upon society? Do we have any evidence that, for example, the capitalist class, or political elites, or even a communist party in power, are - as such and in counter-distinction to other groups - interested in promoting or demoting alcohol, drugs, prostitution, adultery or abortion? Viewed as classes or social groups - what difference does it make for them if people use alcohol or marijuana? Or if abortion is allowed or not?



It is simply hard to see where their proper interests lie here. What General Motors is likely to be concerned about is corporate taxes or import tariffs, but not definitions of right and wrong<sup>19</sup>. Much of the recent public moral debate in North America has been about abortion, breast-feeding in public, date rape and other issues which do not appear to affect the interests of the powerful in the least. They live with any moral rules a society happens to have; it does not matter for groups with power whether or not this or that is viewed as deviant or non-deviant. (It can, of course, matter a great deal for individuals that comprise those groups, but this is not an issue here.) It has been shown by Adam Smith, in a study published in 1774, that it does not matter for the capitalist what goods to produce as long as the goods can be sold and bring profit. Generally speaking, I think, the same is true about definitions of deviance: the content does not matter as long as the rules are not in the way.

There are also other filters and screens between power and its actual applications. In sociological terms, there are intermediating variables which determine how or if power will be used. Making a case which is legitimate "here and now" is the crucial one. The power configuration *per se* is a very poor predictor for the rules made on central issues in an open political stage. These days, the public is very much aware and watchful of the evils of self-centered powerful groups or interests, and big corporations, governments, the rich and others with power have to carefully watch what they are doing and saying.

Abuse of power is an everyday occurrence in closed societies, like the Soviet one was, as well as in those areas of life in open societies which are hidden from the public eye and where the less powerful are not organized - such as fast food restaurants, small businesses, and most of the underworld, for example, the drug scene. There, one can say, he makes rules who got the higher position, or the money, or the muscle. On the central political stage in democracies, rules are not made today if they look like serving selfish interests/goals of the powerful. American society, for example, has learned that the money-makers are dangerous, the state is oppressive, that those in power cannot be trusted and have to be vigilantly watched, and rules are needed to

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<sup>19</sup> I want to thank Robin Room for asking me a good question about this.

control them. On the other hand, this generation of Americans is learning that political correctness can be excessive, oppressive and abusive too, and there is little doubt that in a foreseeable future the rules based on it will change, although the society will never go back to what the rules were in the old days.

To effectively use their power those who have it need "a good case". Even in the Soviet Union, the Politburo had to make a case for itself before taking action, and to serve at least some public explanation after. Even Stalin or Hitler felt that they had to make cases for their major decisions. In a democracy, there are much harder to pass tests of public opinion and the rules and procedures designed to protect the public and the less powerful. These filters make a barefaced, openly selfish use of power extremely problematic. If the powerful cannot convincingly explain that a certain rule will serve the common good, or the community, or some other cause which is widely enough accepted, "here and now", as legitimate, they are very unlikely to find sufficient public support, without which no rules on central issues can be made.

The powerful are virtually always a minority, they need the majority to support their definitions of right and wrong, but manipulating people is becoming increasingly more difficult. Today less than ever can the powerful impose their rules upon society. If a rule is made by some political "trick", which makes the public feel it was deceived, the rule is unlikely to last.

Making a case is an integral part of the process of making rules and, probably, any major social innovation or political decision. I believe, it allows, in particular, to explain why the moral constitution of modern society is not a reflection of its power structure. To me, this is one of the most important conclusions of this study and at the same time an important revision of the present view of the definitional process.

#### Disruption caused by alcohol.

Anti-alcohol movements and policies are a reaction, a social response to drinking. It emphasizes, in the moderate version, the excesses of drinking or, in the radical, prohibitionist version, the risk of moderate alcohol consumption escalating to excesses. Both the excesses and the risk are not work of imagination and cannot be honestly denied. They are real and constitute what society responds to. The response differs in shape

and intensity from culture to culture, and from time to time, but its presence is universal and found in all times.

The peak of reaction may not be at the same time when the disruption reaches its peak. One appears to be in closer link with the other in Russia than in the USA, England and Finland. The discrepancy does not prove, nor does it even suggest, that there is no link.

It is easy to see that there is no automatic link between the amount of disruption and reaction to it. The alcohol situation in Russia is today, in the late 1990s, far more acute than it was in the early 1980s, when the reform occurred; yet, there are no signs of another reform in the making or of a resurgence of the sobriety movement. The disruption in itself does not explain away the reaction, but the latter cannot be quite explained if the potentially disruptive nature of alcohol use is ignored.

## BEYOND THE CASE: THEORETICAL APPENDICES

Is it only in the saliently non-American social setting that formulations which seem to dominate studies of deviance and social problems fail to be of assistance in exploring social reality? Is it possible that the Soviet setting makes certain weaknesses of the perspective just more evident? I think yes.

It is not absolutely necessary to be a stranger and to do research on foreign subjects in order to arrive to conclusions presented below. But it has been helpful for me in my work, and I will use illustrations from the Soviet setting as "extreme cases" which are helpful for posing questions and making the argument clearer.

The relationship between the case and two pieces that follow is two-fold. The latter are necessary part of the preliminary analysis of theories pertinent to the case, and were initially intended to serve that purpose. This study, however, prompted me to go further than that, thus, it is now impossible to say where exactly these two pieces contain prefatory statements and where conclusions. I view them as the most valuable products of this study in terms of theory; at the same time I make references to them in Chapter 1 the way one makes reference to publications.

### APPENDIX A. THE MARIJUANA TAX ACT AND THE CREATION OF DEVIANCE IN SOCIETY: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP, IF ANY?

The controversial case study of the passage of the 1937 US Marijuana Tax Act by Howard S. Becker has more than once been a subject of the post-*Outsiders* publications. However, since the critique presented by Galliher and Walker (1977; 1978), the subject has fallen into neglect. For example, a December 1998 SocioFile search on the subject "Marijuana Tax Act" showed only two papers (both unpublished) thereafter. In the not so recent publications by Dickson (1968), Musto (1973), Bonnie and Whitebread (1974), and Galliher and Walker (1977; 1978), serious flaws in Becker's depiction of the case have been shown and many moot points clarified. Yet, most important implications for theory have not been drawn, and the passage of the Act has hardly been explained.

The question about the relationship between the passage of the Act and the hypothesis of rule-making in society as a moral enterprise reads two ways. On the one hand, the case, as it appears not only from the subsequent critiques but also from some of the material Becker himself provides in Outsiders, does not support Becker's theoretical claims. Should the latter be dismissed? Revised? Put in perspective? For the most part, these questions have not been addressed. On the other hand, the puzzle of the case itself remains unsolved.

However, during the last two decades, as if no problems were ever detected, references to Becker's rendering of the case have been a routine practice in the literature, for example: "This first federal law against marijuana was the result of a 'reefer madness' scare orchestrated by the quintessential moral entrepreneur, Harry Anslinger... chief of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics... (Becker 1963)"<sup>1</sup>. Other authors acknowledge disagreements over the case but not any mistakes on the part of Becker: "...but the case does illustrate the way in which organized interest groups... have shaped public policy"<sup>2</sup>. Still others even agree that certain minor details are presented in Outsiders incorrectly but maintain that the essence of Becker's argument stands unchallenged<sup>3</sup>. It is worth noting that such remarks are made by well-known sociologists, elite authors in the fields of substance use, deviance and social problems. If they do that, what can be expected from the rest? Needless to say, the classic case continues to be repeated in the textbooks: Becker's claim that the Act was manufactured in the course of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics enterprise is cited as though it were an established fact of history and an equally well demonstrated law of making rules in society (the only exception I know of is Orcutt 1983). Among other things, it continues to be stated or implied that the Act constituted a new moral rule for America - another major Becker's claim.

#### The Marijuana Tax Act Case

Becker argues that the Federal Bureau of Narcotics became the entrepreneur which undertook to make the ban on Indian hemp a federal law. The Bureau, according to Becker, sought to enlist support of the other players in a power game and, through the press, to scare the public. Then it used both the supportive influence

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<sup>1</sup> Reinerman and Levine 1997 p.7; see also Reinerman and Levine 1989 p.125.

<sup>2</sup> Akers 1992 p.137.

<sup>3</sup> See Conrad and Schneider 1992 p.22-23.

of other bureaucracies and the fact that the public was alarmed, in order to pass the Act in 1937.

In other words, the organization manufactured a social problem to justify new rules which served its own interests. This is the key point in Howard Becker's explanation of the outlawing of cannabis in the USA. To generalize the case is to state that human initiative (enterprise) and especially the self-serving initiative of powerful groups explain the origin of social problems, their handling and the making of (prohibitive) rules in society. In Becker's own words,

The enterprise of the Bureau had produced a new rule, whose subsequent enforcement would create a new class of outsiders - marijuana users<sup>4</sup>.

Becker's hypothesis: key parameters of rule-making.

Becker sums up his analysis of the process of rule-making as follows:

I have given an extended illustration from the field of Federal legislation. But the basic parameters of this case should be equally applicable not only to legislation in general, but to the development of rules of a more informal kind. Wherever rules are created and applied, we should be alive to the possible presence of an enterprising individual or group. Their activities can properly be called moral enterprise, for what they are enterprising about is the creation of a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of right and wrong.

Wherever rules are created and applied, we should expect to find people attempting to enlist the support of coordinate groups and using the available media of communication to develop a favorable climate of opinion. Where they do not develop such support, we may expect to find their enterprise unsuccessful<sup>5</sup>.

Becker's points on rule-making can be restated as follows: (1) a new law is a new rule ("The enterprise of the Bureau had produced a new rule..."<sup>6</sup>); (2) an enterprising individual or group must be present<sup>7</sup>; (3) the entrepreneur(s) will campaign publicly for public support; (4) they will also campaign for political support; (5) "Where they do not develop such support, we may expect to find their enterprise unsuccessful"<sup>8</sup>; (6) personal interest of the entrepreneur(s) in the new rule must be present<sup>9</sup>; (7) "...rules will not be deduced from values unless a problematic situation prompts someone to make the deduction"<sup>10</sup>; (8) "Social rules are the

<sup>4</sup> Becker 1963 p.145.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. p.145-146.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. p.145.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike in the quote above where only "a possible presence" of such is mentioned, a few pages later Becker is more definite: "Deviance... is always the result of enterprise. Before any act can be viewed as deviant... someone must have made the rule which defines the act as deviant. Rules are not made automatically" (p.162).

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. p.146.

<sup>9</sup> See op. cit. p.138, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. p.132.

creation of specific social groups"<sup>11</sup>; (9) "Differences in the ability to make rules... are essentially power differentials"<sup>12</sup>; (10) all of the above refers to both formal and informal rules<sup>13</sup>.

The ten statements above are briefly examined below.

(1) The Marihuana Tax Act: new law, no new rule.

One important relevant fact which will not be discussed here is that shortly before the Act was passed a uniform state marijuana legislation had been adopted which had made possession of marijuana illegal everywhere in the US<sup>14</sup>. Besides, a number of sources claim that the new law was followed by no significant change in actual policy and enforcement<sup>15</sup>, and the pertinent data shows clearly that the innovation was supported by no increase in funding<sup>16</sup>. It appears that the new federal law in essence did not exactly amount to so much as a considerable change in formal rules. This, as especially Galliher and Walker (1977) stress, plays very much against Becker's major claims. In this respect, there seems to be little or nothing to add. My task will be only to contrast the making of laws, whether federal or otherwise, with the process of producing definitions of wrong-doing.

According to Becker, the MTA was a case of a new rule produced and a new class of outsiders created. Just on the basis of the known history of illicit drugs and common knowledge about the status of marijuana in Christian societies, this looks doubtful. Marijuana smoking had been viewed as deviant long before 1937, in the US as well as other countries with a Christian cultural tradition. This fact is crucial, for it ruins the whole logic of Becker's argument. Yet, sociologists have never addressed the issue, which prompts me to dwell on it below. There is more than enough relevant material scattered in the literature on drugs; all we have to do is place the moral entrepreneur argument in the context of known history of marijuana.

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<sup>11</sup> Op. cit. p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit. p.17.

<sup>13</sup> Another of the more explicit statements on this is the following: "...I will use a legal model. This should not be taken to mean that what I have to say applies only to legislation. The same processes occur in the development and enforcement of less formally constituted rules as well" (p.129).

<sup>14</sup> See Dickson 1968; Galliher and Walker 1977. See also Becker 1963 p.144 citing Anslinger: "...Last month... the last state legislature adopted such legislation".

<sup>15</sup> See Musto 1973; Galliher and Walker 1977.

<sup>16</sup> See Dickson 1968; Walker 1981.

In the outset of his analysis of the passage of the Act Becker gives an impression that prior to the federal ban it was sort of almost okay to light up a reefer. He does not, however, go any further, that is, does not make explicit claims to the effect that no rules and no negative perceptions of marijuana existed in American society until the perceptions and then rules were created by the FBN. In fact, his analysis of how the federal legislation was passed shows that the assumptions which he takes into account are just the opposite - namely, that there were rules and there was a perception that the substance was dangerous (see below). But his claim that the Bureau created both the perception and rules out of nearly nothing logically means that there was no perception of the marijuana menace, no clear rules against smoking it, no (strong) labels and no (clearly defined) outsiders. Following this lead other authors, indeed, have attempted to show just that. Amazingly, these claims seem to have been quietly accepted - despite the absence of any support for them.

Contrary, for example, to Dickson, the negative perception of drugs early in the century was by no means a "weakly held value"<sup>17</sup> but a profound fear, among the very worst fears people had. Particularly, Dickson misinterprets the low intensity media coverage of opiate addiction and, later, marijuana use as an indication of a low intensity of the anti-dope sentiment. The latter, of course, is not measured by the former. The way people feel about marijuana is expressed by how they talk about it rather than by how often. (Similarly, an absence of much talk about murder would not alter the fact that murder is commonly perceived as a terrible crime.) And in 1937 the strong anti-marijuana language was nothing new. Any source which treats of marijuana and its control in the late 19th - early 20th century will provide numerous illustrations of that. Himmelstein (1983) examines or refers to publications most of which had rather telling titles: "The Menace of Marihuana" (The American Mercury, December 1935:487-490); "Marihuana as a Developer of Criminals" (American Journal of Police Science 2, 1931:256); "From Opium to Hash Eesh: Startling Facts Regarding the Narcotics Evil..." (Scientific American, November 1921:14-15). These do not look like a reflection of "a weakly held value".

At other times, horror stories were published under neutral titles (perhaps the word marijuana was

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<sup>17</sup> Dickson 1968 p.149.



supposed to speak for itself, as "murder" does), e.g. the story "Marihuana" published in 1913 in Cosmopolitan (October 1913:645-655) was about a marijuana addict who "ultimately becomes so violent that he must be killed in self-defense"<sup>18</sup>.

The weakly held value hypothesis contradicts everything which is known about the general trend of growing anti-dope sentiments in England, Europe and North America in the 19th century<sup>19</sup>. It also contradicts everything which is known about the particular US situation with marijuana in the decades before the MTA was passed; that country was no exception from the world-wide trend<sup>20</sup>. The following appears to be an accurate summary of the US situation in the pre-MTA time:

Though marijuana had some new features, notably its association with the hoary 'Assassins' legend..., the process of making it illegal was so familiar as to be almost a reflex. Long before Anslinger, newspapers simply plugged marijuana into already-existing crusade themes...<sup>21</sup>.

Indeed, there is no end to scary newspaper headlines in that collage of newsflow of the old, e.g. "New Dope Lure, Marihuana, Has Many Victims" (1932), "Marihuana Makes Fiends of Boys in 30 Days. Hasheesh Goads Users to Blood-Lust" (1923), "Orgies of the Hemp Eaters" (1895)<sup>22</sup>.

Even ostensibly non-moralizing accounts of the hash-induced experience could only make regular god-fearing folks shiver, so far from anything sane and familiar were those "sleeps" and flights away from reality, such as in the essay "A Hashish-House in New York" by someone H.H. Kane, originally published in 1883<sup>23</sup>. Already by that time it was a well-established genre (mysterious substances, other-worldly ecstasies, humans possessed by alien forces) that can be traced back to De Quincy (the 1820s, opium), Gautier and others from Le club des haschischins (the 1840s, cannabis), with a recognizable influence of the old fables of the Orient. Again, this was common to the cultures of European origin and there was little distinctly American about it, but America did have its own classics of the genre, such as Ludlow (Hasheesh Eater, 1857); among

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<sup>18</sup> See Himmelstein 1983 p.51.

<sup>19</sup> See Lewin 1924; Terry and Pellens 1928; Laurie 1967; Behr 1980; Levine 1989 and 1991.

<sup>20</sup> See Terry and Pellens 1928; Morgan 1974; Behr 1980; Walker 1981; Himmelstein 1983; Levine 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Silver and Aldrich 1979 p.255.

<sup>22</sup> See Silver and Aldrich 1979 p.258-287.

<sup>23</sup> Reprinted in Morgan 1974:159-170.

others, Jack London paid a passing tribute to the tradition of referring to the impenetrable mystery of hashish (in John Barleycorn, 1913). This kind of literature probably did not influence law-making in any direct way and probably was not known first-hand to many but it created images exceptionally powerful, pervasive and lingering. The newspapers never produced anything unrelated to this imagery; they only added or greatly magnified the ingredients of beastly violence, unspeakable sexual transgressions and, often, dangerous classes and the temptation for and threat to the youth, in other words, vulgarized it for mass consumption.

One commonly overlooked peculiarity of the marijuana issue early in the century is that in popular perception it was not independent from that of opium. The tendency to lump all mind-altering substances together persists to this day, but before the sixties it was much more obvious. Even the annual narcotics agency reports (from 1926 to the 1960s) were entitled "Traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs"<sup>24</sup>. There were (in 1895) "Reports on opium and hemp"<sup>25</sup>, committees and reports on habit-forming drugs or narcotics (marijuana was officially labeled by the surgeon general a narcotic, i.e. a close relative of opium, in 1929), and everywhere marijuana appeared in the company of disreputable substances as yet another mode of helping oneself into a frenzy. Virtually every attempt to explain the effects of marijuana started with comparisons to opium or its derivatives. The association was "opium, cocaine, marijuana" (meaning mysterious inhuman force, degradation, insanity) and certainly not "bread, milk, marijuana". The public knew very little about opium (except that it was deadly) and far less about marijuana (except that it was in some association with opium), and the only popular understanding could be that both, along with other things like that, belonged to the devil's toolbox. It was by no means unusual even for the authors to display a salient lack of any knowledge about drugs. According to Himmelstein (1983), in the 1920s and 1930s, "even in California" marijuana "received little press coverage, and the few articles that appeared show little familiarity with the drug"<sup>26</sup>. Silver and Aldrich (1979) cite an example from the article published in 1934 about hundreds of students "...'addicted' to

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<sup>24</sup> See Himmelstein 1983 p.159.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Himmelstein 1983 p.168.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. p.42.

marijuana, 'known also as peyote'..."<sup>27</sup>. Little was left to add to the notoriety of marijuana by the middle 1930s in the US; it is quite possible that in the late 1930s and 1940s its evil image was further consolidated - but created it had been much earlier.

Strictly speaking, in this case a detailed review of the relevant material is not even absolutely necessary. It seems to me, it may be enough to read in Outsiders the quotes from the marijuana hearings in 1937, or from the articles of the time, in order to realize that the language and imagery employed there could only correspond to that public perception (of all "narcotics", with no clear distinction between marijuana and heroin) which was not just very negative but extreme of the extremes - and must have emerged earlier. In Outsiders epithets of marijuana used by the Bureau, journalists and congressmen are "killer drug", "assassin of youth", "lethal weed" and the like. References are made to "atrocious stories", especially to the one about "the Florida mass-murderer" - "the youth staggering about in a human slaughterhouse"<sup>28</sup>. And the context in which these words are used is not that of an argument against common misconceptions (such as "marijuana is ok") but that of a reinforcement of the common belief that the use of marijuana is all the way across town from ok. Anslinger could not have created that language by composing several articles and speeches. One does not really have to go into details of the history of drugs to conclude - to suspect at any rate - that a full-blown dope-fiend mythology had been accepted by the moral majority well before the FBN had a chance to invent any of the myths (in fact, before the Bureau came into existence).

An extreme language is never used in earnest to refer to phenomena which are not perceived in extreme ways. In today's America - because the ignorance and related extreme perceptions of the old are largely gone - such imagery is unthinkable in the discussion of marijuana (i.e. after the Sixties: see, for example, Himmelstein 1983), but it is more or less continues to be used in publications on crack<sup>29</sup>. To take a different example, essentially the same old imagery is still used today in the anti-cannabis propaganda in Russia - because there the mythology of the old is still alive and kicking. When first Soviet publications about drugs

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<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. p.255.

<sup>28</sup> See Becker 1963 p.141-142, 144, 140.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Reinerman and Levine 1997.

were brought out in the late 1980s, their authors, when writing about marijuana, would more often than not use the archetypal narcotics vocabulary (i.e. grounded in the medical depiction of opiomania: psychological dependence, physical dependence, tolerance); particularly inventive writers would break readers' hearts by picturing the typical dope den right in the heart of Moscow: dirty syringes filled with hashish and marijuana, the deadly mixture injected into a scrawny child's arm, the child drifting into the world of shadows and prostitution but in the end miraculously escaping death and overcoming the torments of marijuana withdrawal<sup>30</sup>. By the way, there too the mythology was created neither by a police agency nor by official propaganda.

In the US, there had been no federal prohibition of cannabis until the mid-thirties but there had been an old informal cultural rule against it. More to the point, the informal rule had been there before marijuana was banned in the first state. And those who used it had been labeled deviant, law or no law. It is noteworthy - and this is a point of special importance - that all the discussion of the case in Outsiders, and all the quotes on marijuana and its control, only make sense as a discussion of a commonly unacceptable behavior. If this status of marijuana were not implied by Becker himself, most of what he says simply could not have been said. In 1937, there was no need to convince Americans that the substance was dangerous because that was what they believed themselves.

This new law could not create what had been already there (though it could reinforce it). The MTA is a case of a new law with no major change in social definitions or "actual operating rules"<sup>31</sup>. The new law produced no new labels, created no new class of outsiders, and certainly gave no reason to generalize about "a new fragment of the moral constitution of society"<sup>32</sup>. And since a uniform state legislation had been adopted prior to the passage of the Act, the latter can hardly be viewed as an innovation even in formal rules.

Becker assumes that a new law means a new rule, a new social definition, while in the general case it does not; in the MTA case at any rate it did not. The purpose and meaning of the MTA, as of many other

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<sup>30</sup> See Levine 1988, 1990b and 1991; and Levine & Levine 1991.

<sup>31</sup> See Becker 1963 p.2, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Becker 1963 p.145.

legal innovations, was not a creation of something new in society (e.g. a new class of outsiders) but a prevention of change in existing rules, a preservation of the definition of marijuana as evil. That is why it was so easy compared to new laws the purpose of which was to promote new social definitions, as was the case with Prohibition.

The history of opium will show essentially the same, and so will the history of every other major illicit drug. Careers of those substances have been rather similar - and rather different from the Outsiders version.

(2) Was there a moral entrepreneur?

According to Musto (1973), the political pressure went initially from the public, mostly in Southern and Western states, scared by the use of an alien substance by alien elements (from Mexico, in this case). The pressure was intensified by horror stories in newspapers and by demands from local police to give them legal tools for combatting marijuana smokers, and was conveyed by state governors to the Treasury Department<sup>33</sup>. Only then the latter applied pressure to the FBN, which was at the time a subordinate part of the Treasury Department and had to do as it was told by its superiors.

Musto concludes, as though objecting to Becker's analysis: "... the Federal Bureau of Narcotics does not appear to have created the marihuana scare of the early 1930s"<sup>34</sup>. The bad news for those, including myself, who are not in favor of prohibitive legislation is that the bureaucracy, according to Musto and contrary to Becker, appears to have served "the will of the people" rather than its own unsavory interests.

Yet, was there some other entrepreneur? If there was, the researchers who investigated the issue in detail never identified one<sup>35</sup>.

(3) No public campaign for public support of the enterprise.

The 1977 article by Galliher and Walker, which traces down conflicting claims about that Act and examines them, one after another, against data, concludes that

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<sup>33</sup> This analysis is questioned in Galliher & Walker 1977. But not the claim that neither the Bureau nor its commissioner orchestrated the campaign.

<sup>34</sup> Op. cit. p.229.

<sup>35</sup> The publications that uncritically repeat and expand Becker's version, such as Reasons 1974 and 1976, are not discussed here.

...the evidence used by Becker, Lindesmith, Reasons, Dickson and Bonnie and Whitebread does not support their claim of an FBN propaganda effort to secure passage of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937. A total of three articles and one radio speech hardly constitutes a national propaganda effort. It appears that this role of the FBN has become an article of faith for many studying federal marihuana legislation<sup>36</sup>.

(4) Campaign for the support of political insiders?

Becker does not provide an illustration of this<sup>37</sup>, and no publication on the MTA case does. Galliher and Walker (1977 and 1978) argue that an inside-bureaucracy campaign never took place.

(5) Public arousal and inside support are not necessary conditions of success.

Both the congressmen and public were generally supportive of the ban on marijuana, but no signs of any particular agitation have been reported. Galliher and Walker (1977 and 1978) insist that data suggest the absence of any wide-spread crisis or arousal.

(6) Interests behind the enterprise and those against it.

Becker assumes that the Bureau's interest in a cannabis prohibition is easy to figure out even in the absence of hard facts:

While it is, of course, difficult to know what the motives of Bureau officials were, we need assume no more than that they perceived an area of wrongdoing that properly belonged in their jurisdiction and moved to put it there. The personal interest they satisfied in pressing for marijuana legislation was one common to many officials: the interest in successfully accomplishing the task one has been assigned and in acquiring the best tools with which to accomplish it<sup>38</sup>.

One relatively minor problem is that we cannot generally assume even so much as the agency's desire to reinterpret its tasks in a more inclusive fashion or its tendency for expansion. Expansion may be beneficial for a bureau but, on the other hand, it is troublesome and risky. So the agency will have to weigh potential gains against the risk of failure and looking bad, and the answer can go either way. When the agency fears an additional task may be unenforceable, as such or due to lack of resources or to other circumstances, it will most likely object to an expansion of that sort.

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<sup>36</sup> Op. cit. p.374. Dickson, in fact, claims only an effort of the Bureau to secure funds.

<sup>37</sup> Arguments at the hearings do not constitute a campaign.

<sup>38</sup> Op. cit. p.138.

The more general and more significant problem is that the vested interests<sup>39</sup> explanation of making things illegal is in itself insufficient. Becker does not address the obvious counter-consideration. The latter has most to do with what has been called the logic of capitalism<sup>40</sup> as opposed to the logic of bureaucracy. Specifically, the general interest of many groups in developing a trade and particular interests of the state budget are potentially involved here.

Outlawing a product (e.g. cannabis) and trade in it, logically, must be contrasted against the opposite scenario, that is, keeping the trade legal. If the product is legal and in demand, the trade would flourish. That would likely create a resourceful industry, which would create jobs, incomes, profits, and much revenue would be coming to the treasury.

On the other hand, illegal status of a product in demand not only impedes tax collection from the trade but, in the USA, invariably results in considerable spending on enforcement. There is also a social price: illegal supply of the substance, crime, criminal organizations, violence; and illegal behavior of otherwise upright citizens, and putting them in jail, and other things. Just a few years prior to the federal ban on cannabis, Prohibition was demonstrating that attempts to abolish a trade could lead to a political disaster of the century. In 1937, this was likely to be fresh in everybody's memory, especially those in politics and enforcement.

It follows that both the business community and the state (therefore, its bureaucracy) must be greatly interested in keeping marijuana, as well as other potentially popular substances, legal and available to the public. This is the logic of the system based on profit-making: as such, based solely on what the pertinent interests are, it creates powerful forces against restricting business and money-making, therefore, against prohibitions - which are the worst instance of such restrictions.

Assuming some high-ranking bureaucrats were campaigning for the decision, it is hard to see - if one does not consider factors other than vested interests - how their selfish interests could become - and remain for

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<sup>39</sup> Becker applies the term personal interest to a wide range of motives. I will assume, whether correctly or not, that Becker's analysis of the alleged FBN enterprise implies vested interests, since no other interpretation in this instance seems conceivable. In general, he seems to mean by personal interest any agenda of the actor, from strictly self-serving to strictly ethical.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Alford and Friedland 1985.

decades - more powerful than the opposing interest of the government in greater revenue, plus the interests of (potentially very strong) cannabis industry and trade and related infrastructure, plus the interest of the government in cutting budget expenses. Speaking of material interests, it would be quite incredible for any particular agency to be able to make other agencies, including those with more or higher power, believe that they would profit from the ban.

The question without an answer is this: Given all the considerations against and a potential opposition to outlawing a trade, what would make any campaign for any prohibition successful? Only on the condition that marijuana had long had a scary reputation its prohibition becomes a possibility. Otherwise, it is entirely infeasible. The entire discourse, again, only makes sense in the context which Becker clearly assumes but does not mention: namely, marijuana trade was not a normal trade but was seen "by everybody" as dirty business. Only on the condition that the moral majority's view on that was very clear, all the discussion of the passage of the Act is meaningful.

Becker's discourse implies that the ability of a bureaucracy to manipulate the rest of the government and important outsiders has no observable limits. The hypothesis gets disproved by reality on a routine basis. Again, the Federal Prohibition Bureau provides a good example: somehow it was unable to prevent Repeal and its own closure as a consequence.

Vested interests account for only so much. Bureaucratic organizations can and will pursue their interests, they will campaign and exaggerate to create for themselves cases and greener pastures, but it is quite beyond their power to create rules for society at will. The "logic of bureaucracy" which Becker employs can only in some cases, when the circumstances are favorable, overpower the logic of capitalism or that of democracy, or a combination of the two.

(7) Was the process prompted by a problematic situation?

It would be unusual to identify a situation that prompted a "campaign" which did not occur. Still, trying to be thorough, what have the authors on the subject had to say about it?

Becker does not point out such a situation. Another author, Donald Dickson, however, does. Based



on relevant data, he claims that the FBN had endured budget cuts which were aggravated by deductions due to the anti-depression program "from fiscal 1934 to fiscal 1936"<sup>41</sup>, whereupon Anslinger felt a new villain was needed to justify funds for the agency. Dickson's own data, however, show, and he acknowledges it, that the passage of the Act was not accompanied by extra funds. In fact, the budgetary appropriations for the Bureau during the period 1924 through 1944 show little variation and no clear trend, up or down<sup>42</sup>; so in terms of the real dollar value it must have gone down. In itself, this, in my opinion, does not exactly show Dickson wrong, but it also does not support his hypothesis.

(8) Rules created by social groups?

No relation of the MTA to any social group has ever been shown, and it is hard to think of the definition of cannabis as bad as a definition created by a particular group.

An agency usually is not called social group, but if it were, still no relation of the MTA to the FBN or other agency as creators of anti-marijuana rules has been shown.

(9) Power makes rules?

In dimensions other than power and interests of the Bureau (see the section on interests), this has not been shown, either by Becker or by other authors.

(10) Informal rules are not made the way formal ones are.

This, speaking of MTA case, follows immediately from the analysis of (1), i.e. from the fact that there were changes in both federal and states legislation but not in informal definition of the use of cannabis.

One may also take a note of the fact that Becker does not use the old word "norm" but uses substitutions, such as "Italian immigrant standards"<sup>43</sup>. The important fact is that on such occasions he does distinguish between informal "standards" (such as drinking is acceptable) and formal rules (such as Prohibition). The pertinent changes in formal and informal definitions of alcohol use and alcohol abuse, again, show that, contrary to Becker's insistence, the making of formal rules does not inform us very well on how

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<sup>41</sup> Dickson 1968 p.155.

<sup>42</sup> See op. cit. p.154, Table 1. For more data on this, see Walker 1981.

<sup>43</sup> See Becker 1963 p.15.

informal rules (cultural norms) are made.

Claims vs. data in the MTA case: a preliminary conclusion.

10 out of 10 parameters Becker claims or assumes to be part of the rule-making process were either clearly absent from the case he depicted or cannot be shown present. And the evidence against his most important claims looks rather imposing.

I will argue that the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act represents a type of rule-making different from what Becker describes in general terms. His general hypothesis can to a considerable degree be supported by other cases. But it is important to establish that cases which largely support his scheme do not belong to the class with the MTA one.

The 18th Amendment As an Amendment to the Moral Constitution

The difference between the two cases.

Gusfield considers a law which affected the mainstream of American life, while Becker examines something which, in all likelihood, changed about nothing for Americans, including even the then tiny minority of pot smokers, and was a very peripheral, if at all existent, issue for both the public and national political agenda of the time. Naturally, they have to address two different sorts of social processes. Gusfield's is an utterly public (and centuries long) process, with a stage wide open for all of the nation to watch and partake. Becker's subject is not nearly as open, as important and as intelligible for the public - more a bureaucratic chess game behind closed doors than a public affair.

This is the cardinal distinction which Becker ignores (as do to this day those who have adopted his approach to deviance-making). He obviously assumes that his general scheme applies to both alcohol and marijuana prohibitions, and either one is a good illustration of his hypothesis<sup>44</sup>.

Gusfield's case in Becker's framework.

Speaking of Becker's major claims, one finds almost all of them convincingly supported by the case of Prohibition. Specifically, 9 out of the 10 cited above, can be identified in Gusfield's case:

<sup>44</sup> See his many references to the temperance crusade, particularly, in the section "Rule Creators" (op. cit. p.147-152).

(1) in contrast to the MTA, prohibition was a law which was meant to be a new rule (irrespective of whatever could be said about its symbolic dimension); it was meant to promote a new, "progressive" norm, to develop and practically apply an emerging label, it did create a new class of deviants, as well, of course, as a new class of outlaws, such as moonshiners, bootleggers and rumrunners - a significant by-product of the new rule;

(2) an enterprising group - the organizations and people of Temperance - is a fitting illustration of Becker's claim that "we should find" it there - as opposed to the unsolved mystery of the marijuana federal legislation;

(3) there was a public campaign for a ban on alcohol;

(4) there also was much political lobbying for the cause;

(5) the public and inside campaigns resulted in the reform which was their goal;

(6) the interest in material gains was not important there, but Gusfield argues that there was an interest in symbolic gains; what he says about gaining prestige can also be linked to interests in gaining power;

(7) there was, unlike with the MTA case, a problematic situation - the conflict between the movement for sobriety and the reality saturated with alcohol;

(8) the new law-rule was linked to a particular social group;

(9) a powerful group was successful, even if temporarily, in its attempt to impose a rule of its making upon society.

The 10th claim - that informal and formal rules are made in similar ways - is not supported by Gusfield's case because it could not be supported by any case. Informal rules evolve in society in a process which is definitely different from that of law-making. Alcohol use, to take the immediate example, is defined, in Christian cultural tradition, as acceptable, orderly; alcohol abuse is defined as deviant, and so is total abstinence. How did people arrive at these definitions? I do not know the answer; but I know that looking for moral entrepreneurs, their interests, public claims-making and other classic parameters will not help to get closer to an answer.

Becker's case in Gusfield's framework?

What if we were to reverse the question: Do Gusfield's claims apply to Becker's case, and not to his own? The answer is not a categorical yes, but it is yes in some important respects. In particular, Gusfield's claim that Prohibition was not so much instrumental as it was symbolic is hard to support by the history of Prohibition - but it may be true about the MTA. The MTA case could be a better (than Prohibition) illustration for Gusfield's ideas about symbolic politics. The instrumentality of the Act certainly has not been shown; and since marijuana had already been banned by uniform state legislation, it may be questioned that the Act had instrumental qualities. Indeed, Galliher and Walker (1977) argue that it served no purpose other than symbolic: "The bill... was purely symbolic legislation"<sup>45</sup>.

To sum up, substantive analysis by one author provides a better basis for the conceptualization made by the other, and vice versa. The authors of the two famous books could have exchanged either their cases or theories. Ironically, Becker claims a new fragment of moral constitution in a case where any actual effects of the new law have yet to be shown. Gusfield argues that Prohibition was rather symbolic than instrumental, whereas it was an amendment to both the US Constitution and the society's moral constitution - an attempt at drastic change which proved to be instrumental in its consequences<sup>46</sup> and, of course, brought about an impressive host of unforeseen actual effects.

The only explanation of this paradox is that laws or policies on central issues are made in ways different from those on peripheral issues where citizen interest and participation are marginal.

On the other hand, thinking about the enterprising bureaucrat as an explanation of prohibitions, can one imagine a substance control agency, an FBN, lobbying for a dry law in America - and successfully accomplishing the enterprise? This is another way to think about Becker's hypothesis: Prohibition created the Federal Prohibition Bureau, not vice versa. Never could a considerable change like Prohibition be brought about by efforts of a bureaucratic organization.

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<sup>45</sup> Galliher and Walker 1977 p.375-376.

<sup>46</sup> I believe it can be argued that some key features of drinking in America were considerably different in the two eras: before and after Prohibition.

However, what is entirely infeasible in a pluralist society is not too unusual in a closed society. There, rules on any issue, and innovations of any scale, can be created by one individual.

#### The Test of a New Definition/Solution

The tradition in the American sociological literature has been to conclude an analysis of a law/policy innovation at the point where the reform is adopted. In fact, there has been, to my knowledge, only one publication where the post-reform stage of social problems is explicitly addressed - Spector and Kitsuse (1977). But what is addressed in these pages is radically different from their notion of the "second generation" social problem. Focused on the process of making claims, Spector and Kitsuse ignore what is the essence of this stage, i.e. a test of the innovation by the social practice of its application.

The Soviet case, especially when compared to other cases, suggests an explanation of the variation in fates of moral reforms. The new Soviet definition of drinking was short-lived because it was attempted in complete disregard of the cultural norm, which never changed. This, it appears, happened with every alcohol prohibition but - due to the same relationship between cultural and formal definitions - not with cannabis, opiates, and cocaine prohibitions. They all have lasted.

#### Reality-check as part of the natural history of definition-making.

The testing of the adopted definition or solution in the aftermath of the decision on the case has not been viewed as part of the natural history of definitions. There appears to be an assumption that once the legislation or policy which represents the new definition is adopted, we have a new moral order which has to be investigated anew if another change in it occurs; a repeal of the law in question thus comes to be viewed as but one particular instance of such change. It is a point of this study that this assumption is erroneous.

The change in definition, as every alcohol prohibition shows, is not complete until the new formal rule has passed the post-reform test and become accepted culturally. A failure to pass the reality test is a distinct possibility for any new definition. Its test is hardly separable from the preceding stages and cannot be comprehensively examined other than in relation to them. A return to the previously rejected order is a development distinctly separate from other changes in social definitions.

Innovation-testing starts with the putting of the new policy into effect. The relatively new redefinitions of homosexual behavior or gender roles seem today to have passed the test and become adopted, at least, in North America and most of Europe.

The key question is whether the definition supported by the new formal rule is compatible with the existing moral order, the general direction of its evolution and culture of the society. If it is not, there will be numerous signs of all kinds that the basic response of people and social institutions to the new rule is negative. There will be a sense that the situation today is worse than it was yesterday and it would be better for everyone to return to the old state of affairs.

#### Back to the Marijuana Tax Act

Does the analysis above help to explain the MTA case? I think yes, to an extent, although I do not think it will help to solve all the puzzles of the case. To be more specific, I believe this analysis explains the context in which the case developed.

The making of a federal ban on cannabis was just a brief moment of the much broader and much longer process of creation and protection of the cultural definition of marijuana use as unacceptable behavior. What must be primarily examined here is that interaction which produces cultural definitions of behavior (from which the status of a substance follows). This explains the formal rule-making, not vice versa. The Act itself did not produce any cultural definitions. The opposite happened: the perception of marijuana and its users as evil produced the Marijuana Tax Act and other formal rules, federal and local, in America and throughout the world.

This is the first and by far the most important fact: the common perception of marijuana as "killer weed" was there first, and the laws against it were made after. The MTA was one of those formal bans which serve to solidify the informal rules, to protect the existing definition and to prevent erosion of existing rules. The previously passed uniform state legislation already served that purpose, and the MTA as such did not drastically change the picture. However, it made the ban stronger and more difficult to remove, therefore, it was an extra protection against a change in existing definitions. A federal law puts a finishing touch on the

process which has a certain logic and dynamics of its own. This, I believe, is, by and large, the explanation of what happened then and there.

A creation of a new social definition was not at all what the Act accomplished or was designed for. Because of the existence of the negative definition of marijuana prior to any formal rules on it, because of the ignorance-fed mortal fear of drugs, the cannabis prohibition was going to be imposed, with or without Anslinger, as a revenue measure or otherwise.

Secondly, because the new law meant no change and was an anti-change measure in the area where too few of too little importance could offer an alternative perception, the case was not a big item of the political agenda of the time, it did not need a public arousal in order to get through Congress, and it was processed inside bureaucracy by bureaucrats in usual bureaucratic ways. How exactly and by whom personally the case was processed may not be possible to establish now. However, if it were established in every detail, it could not possibly change the meaning of the Act or shed any light on the process of deviance-making in society. It is rather the interpretation of the case in Outsiders and the perception of that interpretation in the literature that needs an explanation. And this may not be an easy one.

The mystery of "the propaganda effort".

As far as the details of the passage are concerned, I think, they have been largely clarified by Dickson, Musto, Bonnie & Whitebread and Galliher & Walker. There are only two particular puzzles that have not been. One is the sharp increase in publications on marijuana, the peak of 17 articles within 2 years - compared to 20 articles during the total of the combined 24 years before and after that jump.

First of all, a disclaimer is in order. With the numbers the greatest of which is 17, how much can the sociologist reasonably claim? The increase from 4 to 17 over a period of two years, after all, means about one extra article every two months. We can only accept as a fact that the media coverage of the marijuana subject was less than intensive all time through. The peak of 17 may or may not be an indication of a propaganda campaign. Naturally, all which is said below has meaning only on the assumption that there was a campaign.

Some support to the assumption is provided by the fact that Anslinger was a co-author of the Florida

murderer article and did try to scare the public on other occasions. One of these took place just before the hearings on marijuana in the House. Speaking in April 1937 to a gathering of American women crusading against the menace of marijuana smoking, Mr. Anslinger reportedly said:

If the hideous monster Frankenstein came face to face with the monster marihuana he would drop dead of fright<sup>47</sup>.

At least, we have some propagandistic effort, however modest, which is documented. It may have the following meaning.

The depiction and the calendar. Solely on the basis of facts cited on pages 141-145 of the original edition of Outsiders, the reader can reconstruct the sequence in which the passage progressed (the reader may also want to pay attention to the page numbers below). It has to be compared with the progression as presented in the book.

The order in which the author presents the events in their definitive stage is this:

1) As the result of "the Bureau's efforts to communicate its sense of urgency of the problem to the public", "The number of articles about marijuana which appeared in popular magazines... reached a record high. Seventeen articles appeared in a two-year period, many more than in any similar period before or after" (p.141);

2) As an aspect of (1), certain atrocity stories got circulated which were "first reported by the Bureau. ...In the American Magazine, the Commissioner of Narcotics himself related the following incident: 'An entire family was murdered by a youthful [marihuana] addict in Florida'..." (p.141-142);

3) "The Federal Bureau of Narcotics, then, provided most of the enterprise which produced public awareness.... Armed with the results of their enterprise, representatives of the Treasury Department went to Congress..."; the hearings in the House were held "for five days during April and May of 1937..." (p.142).

4) The representative of the Treasury Department "introduced the bill... with these words: 'The leading newspapers... have recognized the seriousness of this problem...'" (p.143); "The commissioner...gave examples [of crimes by addicts], including the story of the Florida mass-murderer" (p.144);

<sup>47</sup> Reprinted in Silver and Aldrich 1979 p.276.



and, finally, 5) "Unopposed, the bill passed both the House and Senate the following July. The enterprise of the Bureau had produced a new rule, whose subsequent enforcement would help create a new class of outsiders..." (p.145).

In brief, the book presents this progression: a public awareness campaign by the FBN - horror stories produced by the Bureau - a record high number of articles and horror stories - public arousal - horror stories and public concern used at the hearings - legislation passed.

The table on p.141 and footnotes and quotations on pages 141-145 provide us with corresponding dates, as well as with some facts, for the most part not specified in the text and inexplicably ignored by the author<sup>48</sup>. Placing those dates onto the calendar, the actual progression could only be the following:

1) 1937, March or April: the last state adopts anti-marijuana laws, thus a ban on marijuana becomes uniform state legislation (see p.144: Anslinger quoted by Becker);

2) 1937, April-May: the hearings on Taxation of Marihuana in the House (p.142, 143);

3) 1937, July: Anslinger's article on the Florida murderer published (p.141-142);

4) 1937, July - 1939, June: the record high 17 articles on marihuana (p.141).

The chronological order was this: uniform state legislation - the hearings - the Florida horror story - the 17 articles<sup>49</sup>.

This looks like a media campaign following the reform rather than preparing it by way of arousal of the public. It also looks similar to the Soviet propagandistic back-up.

In a democracy, when peripheral issues are processed, the process can, and I think has the tendency to, follow a quasi-Soviet scenario; and the more peripheral the issue, the more so. Freed from a democratic

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<sup>48</sup> However, Becker provides all relevant dates and facts; none of them have been questioned.

<sup>49</sup> That is, the reconstructed chronology is opposite to the impression the depiction in Outsiders gives. In the literature, despite the several critiques, the Outsiders version has been reproduced and even made "better". For example: "With the waning of narcotics as an issue, ...Anslinger circulated to newspapers across the nation an unsubstantiated tale of a Florida youth who had murdered his entire family.... After the story had been reprinted in many newspapers, Anslinger held up the clippings before Congress as evidence of the need for a new federal law" (Reinarman and Levine 1989 p.125). In other words, in April or May the villain somehow obtained the clippings of reprints of an article which first saw print the following July?

control, American decision-makers do on a small scale what Soviet ones did on a scale of cosmic proportions; in both cases, they go as far as they are allowed to go by their respective circumstances. The FBN propaganda effort appears to follow the seemingly irrational Soviet tradition of backing up the decision already made and policy already in effect, pushing on the public a perception nobody argues against. The FBN efforts look like a modification of that practice.

#### Commissioner Anslinger's contribution.

The other key point of the controversy around the Act appears to be the role of the FBN and its Commissioner. How could its or his activities be explained? What really was his agenda? The answer, I think, is simply this: Why should the sociologist care? Whatever Anslinger did or did not does not explain the case in the least. The case, in turn, does not explain the status of marijuana, nor how society creates deviance. Anslinger's part, therefore, is to the sociologist a matter of infinite indifference. It does not have to be explained.

#### Back to the Essence of the Approach

The argument which Becker advances about deviance-making can be presented as a three-step logical deduction, from the most abstract statement to a quite concrete one. The first principle statement is that deviance is created by society in the sense that the rules about right and wrong are society-made<sup>50</sup>. This has never been questioned, and the posing of the question of how rules are made in society is one of the two reasons why Outsiders made history. However, Becker's answer to the question has been a source of confusion.

The second step is the concretization of the first as "social rules are the creation of specific social groups"<sup>51</sup>. This, as argued earlier, may be true in some cases but untrue in others.

The third statement is even more concrete: deviance is made by moral entrepreneurs, it is "always the result of enterprise"<sup>52</sup>. This is even further from the truth than the one above. Apart from instances of rule-creation by autocrats - *never universal rules and never long-lasting - no informal rules (cultural norms) were*

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<sup>50</sup> See Becker 1963 p.8.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. p.15.

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. p.162.

created ever by an entrepreneur. The way Becker presents the process of rule-making gives an impression that enterprising individuals, with a bit of creativity and a little power, can create just anything they want and can make society live by their rules. On the other hand, all other people, mere mortals, seem to have no perceptions of their own and be unable to know right from wrong: they need a moral entrepreneur to tell them which is which. Becker's world of hyperactive rule-makers is perhaps a good counter weight to the oversocialized individual, but it is no closer to the truth. The only instance of a cultural norm created the way at least remotely resemblant to Becker's scheme might be, according to Koran, the anti-alcohol norm in Islam created by Mohammed.

The most serious argument against Becker's hypothesis, I think, is lack of research that could be taken as supportive of the hypothesis. Unlike the rich and superb studies done along the lines of labelling (application of labels), one cannot find much based on what could be called labels-making. Does this approach explain social definitions of drinking? No. Of marijuana? Heroin? Prostitution? Homosexuality? How many studies have been done which explain at least one social definition?

Still, why does Becker's hypothesis largely apply to Prohibition? Because it was only a formal rule. Non-drinking became an informal, cultural norm prior to that within a certain social group - but how that happened we largely do not know, and there is every reason to doubt that it resulted from an enterprise.

Becker's hypothesis applies to the making of formal rules but not informal ones. It applies to the making of formal rules in a pluralist society but not in autocracies. And in a pluralist society, it applies to rule-making on central issues but not on peripheral ones. These are important limitations that so far have been ignored by the perspective.

## 2. TOWARD DECONSTRUCTION OF CONSTRUCTIONIST CLAIMS ABOUT SOCIAL PROBLEMS

I think it a truism to say that a theory that is not closely tied to a wealth of facts about the subject it proposes to explain is not likely to be very useful. Yet an inspection of the scientific literature on deviant behavior will show that it assays of very high proportion of theory to fact.

Howard S. Becker 1963 p.165

Spector and Kitsuse describe claims-making activities as follows:

Mundanely, claims-making consists of demanding services, filling out forms, lodging complaints, filing lawsuits, calling press-conferences, writing letters of protests, passing resolutions, publishing exposes, placing ads in newspapers, supporting or opposing some governmental practice or policy, setting up picket lines or boycotts; these are integral features of social and political life<sup>1</sup>.

These features of social and political life are integral (and taken for granted) in democracies. But as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, the above, with only minor adjustments, presents a rather precise description of the activities that were, in the post-Stalin era, effectively covered by Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, "The anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda".

As a first-time offense, opposing governmental policies verbally (not speaking here, of course, of any practical sabotage - a far more grievous offense) drew a punishment of up to 7 years of incarceration followed by up to 5 years of exile<sup>2</sup>. Besides, in many cases, such activities could not occur irrespective of the punishment: no court would accept a lawsuit against an official agency, no newspaper would publish anti-official or non-official ads, no publisher would accept an expose. In other cases, when claims-making crimes were not prevented by the very order of things, they were routinely prevented by special enforcement agencies, such as the KGB, which would ensure, for example, that a press-conference did not materialize even at a private apartment, or that letters of protest were not delivered by the post-office. Still other activities, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Spector & Kitsuse 1977 p.78-79.

<sup>2</sup> See Kommentarii k Ugolovnomu kodeksu RSFSR, Moscow, Yuridlit, 1980, p.147. Virtually identical laws were in effect in all 14 other republics of the Soviet Union. The official commentary to this article explains, among other things: "This may be a conversation, a speech, a presentation, etc. For the qualification, it does not matter how many persons are present therein".

setting up picket lines, did not even belong to the realm of thinkable.

Given that claims-making activities are the definition of social problems by Spector and Kitsuse<sup>3</sup>, there were hardly any social problems in the USSR.

This is but one indication of the possibility that the definition of social problems as claims-making activities may not be the best way to approach the subject. Such indications are not as salient in a pluralist environment as in the Soviet setting but by no means are they indiscernible.

#### Awkward Terminology

"Constructionists", assesses Joel Best, "use the term 'social problems' very differently from the way in which we use it in everyday life"<sup>4</sup>. The reader of the constructionist literature, however, must be alert to the fact that the word "problem" is routinely used by constructionists both in their own special sense and in the commonly accepted sense, often within a single sentence. As another source acknowledges: "In the constructionist formulation, the term social problem does double service: It is now a member's then a sociologist's concept"<sup>5</sup>. And sometimes it is not clear where is which.

Terminology is, of course, in part a matter of taste, but it is also part of analytical apparatus and for that reason terminology can be evaluated in terms of better or worse. Actual applications of terminology, including scholarly definitions, have consequences for research and interpretations. The claims-making activities usage of words raises certain questions as to how its differences and conflicts with the common usage - not only in everyday life but also in philosophy and social sciences, including most of sociology - are justified by purposes of sociological work. Let us consider a few examples.

Type 1 examples: Evaluations of the intensity of social problems.

In the article "The surprising resurgence of the smoking problem" Troyer states that the problem of

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<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. p.75, 78.

<sup>4</sup> Best 1989a p.XVIII.

<sup>5</sup> Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993 p.28.

tobacco smoking did not decline, as could be expected, but grew more intense in the 1980s. By this he does not mean an increase in smoking but an increase in public anti-smoking activities<sup>6</sup>. In this quasi-quantitative dimension, statements about the intensity of a problem defined as claims-making activities are likely to be rather different from regular understanding of what makes problems greater or smaller (more acute or less). For Troyer, the more claims, the greater the problem, irrespective of the amount of consumed tobacco and resulting harmful effects - and also irrespective of what the public thinks. This is consistent with the definition of social problems the author subscribes to<sup>7</sup>, and my purpose is not to criticize him for that. Yet, this is something to think about.

Similarly, the numbers of people infected with HIV and those dying from AIDS have been much greater in the 1990s than in the 1980s, and the common perception is that the problem "has got worse", meaning, it has grown bigger. Nevertheless, the intensity of discussion of it has diminished, so in terms of claims-making activities the AIDS problem today is not nearly as serious as it used to be. Much the same can be seen in the use of crack. In the mid- and late 1990s, when crack appears to have become the dominant drug in every large and not so large city of North America, there have been far less claims than during the previous decade; according to authors who have been following this public debate, "By the end of 1992... the crack scare seemed spent"<sup>8</sup>.

This is not unusual. Public discussions have a logic and dynamics of their own, quite unlike the logic and dynamics of what is usually meant by social problems. As the situation gets worse, and is commonly seen as getting worse, people and the media often get tired of talking about it. And what experts in social problems have now to say to people is that the problem is just about over.

Thus, sociologists dismiss common perceptions and offer in their stead their own learned

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<sup>6</sup> See Troyer 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Many authors, of course, do not do that; for example, by "the problem has got worse" or "grown more acute", etc., they mean simply what lay publics mean, while at the same time they may find that the amount of claims-making has decreased.

<sup>8</sup> Reinerman and Levine 1995 p.174.

constructions. For the school of thought which insists that the study of social problems should focus on "members' definitions" and should not favor, or should not even seek, professional sociological assessments this presents, I think, a sign of inconsistency.

Type 2 examples: The use of the claims-making terminology inconsistent with the definition of social problems as claims-making activities.

This is done often and by many authors, as in "claims-making approach to social problems", "social problems policies"<sup>9</sup>, "social problem claims"<sup>10</sup>, "claimsmakers characterize a problem's nature"<sup>11</sup>, "social problems claims-making"<sup>12</sup>, and so on and so forth. I think, these hybrids belie the inward resentment of the authors to the definition suggested by Spector and Kitsuse, all the statements to the contrary notwithstanding. If they saw social problems and claims-making activities as equivalents they would not be using such phrases, because, assuming this equation, the phrases would become nonsensical (which they are not, in my perception). For example, "claims-making approach to social problems", by way of replacing a term by its equivalent, would have to be read as identical to either "claims-making approach to claims-making activities" or "social problems approach to social problems". It gets even better with "social problems claims-making".

Curiously enough, Spector and Kitsuse (1977) are not quite free of this practice. For example, they use on many occasions the phrase "social problems activities"<sup>13</sup>. I wonder if this is different or not from "social problems claims"<sup>14</sup>: the former can be translated as "claims-making activities activities" and the latter as "claims-making activities claims".

Again, it is not difficult for me to see what authors are trying to say (e.g. "claims-making approach

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<sup>9</sup> Miller and Holstein 1989 p.2, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Loseke 1989 p.202.

<sup>11</sup> Best 1995 p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Miller and Holstein 1993 p.8.

<sup>13</sup> For example, see p.71, 73, 75, 78, 128-129, 151-153.

<sup>14</sup> This expression is used by a number of authors. For some examples see Best 1989 and 1995; Miller and Holstein 1989 and 1993; Collins 1989.

to social problems" makes to me perfect sense) - but that must be because for me social problems and claims-making activities are two different phenomena. Authors who assume that social problems are claims-making activities, as they state they do, should recognize their own phrases as tautology.

Some authors may use the terms so that it becomes obvious that they do not see social problems and claims-making activities as the same thing, although they do not argue against that equation: "...social problems as social constructions, that is, as the products of claims-making and constitutive definitional processes"<sup>15</sup>. If social problems are products of claims-making, they cannot be claims-making as such.

The point of the examples above is to show that something makes authors to reserve a distinction, perhaps not quite conscious, between social problems and claims-making activities.

Type 3 examples: Constructionists use the word problem just like anyone else.

Constructionists use the word in the usual sense when they discuss things other than their specific subject matter, just as they use words trouble, concern, difficulty, conflict and other the way everybody else does. Sometimes, it is used in two different senses within a single sentence: "There is a second problem with objectivist definitions of social problems"<sup>16</sup>. This apparently does not mean that "objectivists" make claims about putative inadequacies of their approach; the author must mean that objectivist definitions do not serve well the purposes of theorizing and research.

This is common<sup>17</sup>, but such examples are easy. Far more difficult to untangle are uses of the term problem in discussions of the subject matter proper. For example, do the authors use it both times in the same sense in "...solutions produce problems by providing the framework within which those problems can be stated"<sup>18</sup>? The authors seem to mean that solutions somehow create conditions for claims-making activities to start developing. On the other hand, the notion of problems being stated (with which the sentence concludes),

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<sup>15</sup> Miller and Holstein 1993 p.5.

<sup>16</sup> Best 1989 p.XVII.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.84.



suggests that some sort of problems exist before they are stated, i.e. before claims-making, and, therefore, must exist in some other sense. It does not help that the authors say "those problems" which linguistically, in this context, indicates their intention to talk about the same problems in both cases.

Right in the next sentence, the authors mention "a condition... becoming a social problem". This means quite definitely that conditions can present problems, therefore, problems can be conditions. And next the authors say: "People do not define as problems those conditions they feel are immutable...". This, again, undeniably implies the possibility that other conditions can be defined as problems. This follows the forceful dismissal of the idea that problems could in any way be conceived of as conditions<sup>19</sup>. The usage also implies that what people define as problems is what problems are for sociologists- contrary to the teaching that social problems are claims-making activities. How is the reader supposed to put all those pieces together?

Type 4 examples: Ambiguous and unclarifiable usage of terms.

"Social problems theory: The constructionist view" is the title of an article by Schneider<sup>20</sup>. And what he means by social problems theory is not quite clear: does he recognize or not non-constructionist treatment of social problems (which are not social problems to him) as versions of such? Similarly, when constructionist say "the study of social problems" or "the sociology of social problems"<sup>21</sup> - do they mean only their own distinct project or include any study/sociology/theory?

Usually "the study of ..." includes the multitude of all perspectives, approaches, etc. But in this particular case an inclusion of all perspectives would look funny, since constructionists have been taking pains to prove that what they study is different from what other perspectives study, and not different like two sides of the coin<sup>22</sup> but altogether different. If so, how can they unite entirely different studies under one rubric? If not so, it follows that the claims-making activities problems and traditional problems are essentially the same

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<sup>19</sup> See especially p.74-75.

<sup>20</sup> See Schneider 1985.

<sup>21</sup> This is very common, starting with Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.5: "our reformulation of the sociology of social problems".

<sup>22</sup> Best uses this image: see Best 1989a p.XVII.

subject, does not it? If they refuse non-constructionist studies a place in the sociology of social problems, then how those other studies should be called - if not of social problems, then of what? The sociology of putative conditions? This is not going to be well received, and for good reason.

One consequence of the equation of social problems with claims-making activities is that constructionists do not have a term for what others call social problems. The name has gone to another animal, while the animal their investigation started with now has no name. The phenomena commonly known as social problems cannot be denied to exist, and these phenomena are in some undeniable ways related to what constructionists call social problems - but how shall we call that which is known to the laity as social problems? Shall we say undesirable conditions? Troubles, issues, social syndromes, scourges? In fact, as all concerned know, troubles and issues have been frequently used in the literature as contraband substitutions for problems.

I am not asking these questions for merely rhetorical purposes, I genuinely believe it is impossible to clarify this. The ambiguity does not result from authors' careless or unthinking usage of words, it results from much deeper confusions of the approach.

An aspect of the same contradiction is manifest in the use of such expressions as "definitions and solutions of the problem", or "management of social problems", or "handling of problems and troubles"<sup>23</sup>. What Schneider, a very strict (and very sophisticated, and very careful with terminology) constructionist, may mean by a "definition of the problem"? He cannot mean defining or perception of claims-making activities, for claims-making activities are for him the definitional process. So by problems he means claims-making but by definitions of problems he means definitions of "putative conditions"?

Perhaps, "definitions of problems" might be replaced by a more consistent phrase, but with terms like "solutions", "management" or "handling" of social problems it becomes even more difficult, if at all possible. An internally consistent interpretation of the term "problem's solution" would lead to an idea that claims and claimants - not what claims are about - are solved, managed or handled. Diffusion of claims is often an aspect

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<sup>23</sup> Schneider 1985 p.214-215, 215.

of solutions, of course, but nobody reduces solutions to solely this aspect. Quite clearly, all authors, starting with Spector and Kitsuse, include in "solutions" policies, law-making, institutions-creating and other measures directed at the objects of claims and not just at claimants. "Solution of claims-making activities" is to anybody a phrase without meaning. Problem solution inevitably presupposes an acceptance of the traditional meaning of the term problem. Spector and Kitsuse, in a further complication of this manifold terminology, actually note in passing that solutions too are putative<sup>24</sup> but that does not answer the question: Solution of what are they?

On the one hand, the so-called "objective conditions" are excluded from the concept of problems, on the other hand, policies that change conditions are part of solutions. I do not see what could be a way out of this for the authors who accept the definition of social problems as claims-making activities.

A further small example can be the often used word "problematic". It cannot be understood in terms of claims-making activities. I do not think there is a way to do even a nonsensical translation of it into the claims-making lingo.

The terminology invites and even forces sequences of linguistic novelties on endless levels, and every new trick sends more waves. It cannot be always used in a consistent and unambiguous way.

Type 5 examples: Excessive use of the quotation marks.

Phrases like "in fact", "actually", "really", "in reality", "objectively", "true", "truth" are more often than not ornamented with quotation marks, and not because authors quote or name something but because now and then they have to make a reference to that which, they claim, does not exist or does not matter. Whether this is done in earnest or in an attempt to make fun of an unsophisticated opponent, it shows that, as a result of the desire to be spotlessly subjective, there are not enough words for social problems writing.

Deviance as claims-making: unexplored implications.

What if we tried and applied the claims-making approach to deviance? This is one topic that is somewhat discussed by Spector and Kitsuse but gets lost toward the end of the book. The authors certainly give

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<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. p.85.

the impression that their statements about social problems largely apply to deviance; on a number of occasions, their statements explicitly refer to both. Yet, there are no statements as to how deviance should be redefined in terms of claims-making activities.

In light of Spector and Kitsuse's analysis, only one answer is feasible: deviance comes to be viewed as the claims-making activities about behavior that people find unacceptable. In this view, social reformers, crusaders, law-makers, law enforcers, preachers and the like become deviants. Deviance here is not behavior labeled deviant but the behavior of those, and only those, who do the labeling. On the other hand, conventional deviants, according to this view, not only are not deviants but are excluded from the studies of deviance<sup>25</sup>. And criminals are not those who commit crimes but those who make noise about it.

This is what the claims-making formulation transparently implies with respect to deviance, but the scholars who embrace it never pursued it to its logical conclusion<sup>26</sup>; I wonder why.

Naturally, the view of deviance as claims-making abolishes every link between actual deviance and definition-making, for example, the effects of behavior on the development of its meaning, as well as the effects of labeling on behavior.

From any standpoint, except, perhaps, theoretical puritanism, beneficial effects of reformulation of deviance in terms of claims-making activities, unlike difficulties, are hard to identify.

To sum up, the claims-making terminology is inadequate for social problems analysis and writing, as exemplified especially by the stunning redefinition of deviant behavior. More to the point, it becomes obvious from the way the term "social problems" is used that Spector and Kitsuse (1977), contrary to their proclaimed intentions, have initiated a sociology of something other than social problems.

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<sup>25</sup> They only become deviants (counter-deviants, to be more precise) when, and only when, they complain about the police and others who harass them.

<sup>26</sup> A good example of how constructionists miss or avoid the logical application of constructionism to deviance is Pfuhl and Henry 1993.

### What Do Spector and Kitsuse Mean by Social Problems?

Spector and Kitsuse (1977) start the book with a number of critical remarks and continue in that spirit, but one thing they do not question is the existence of social problems. Their concern is with the lack of theoretical clarity and focus:

There is no adequate definition of social problems within sociology.... It is our aim to provide such a definition and to prepare the ground for the empirical study of social problems<sup>27</sup>.

Spector and Kitsuse invoke three lines of reference to background their vision of social problems. First, they appeal to intuitive perceptions and folk definitions; second, they refer to what they call objectivist treatment of social problems; and, finally, to interactionist writings.

#### Folk and scholarly understanding of the term.

An instance of appealing to the reader's perception is this:

What is it that makes crime a social problem? Is it the absolute number of crimes? Is it the types of crimes committed? Is it the increase in the rate...? Does crime become a social problem when "the streets are no longer safe at night"?<sup>28</sup>

This is exactly how a search for meaning of a thing goes: What is fruit? Is it the taste that makes apples fruit? Is it the hanging from a tree? Is it the near-entrance location in the grocery store? Is it true that fruit is that which is so labeled?

The questions Spector and Kitsuse pose are the kind of questions anybody would ask who wants to figure out: What do we actually mean when we call this or that a social problem? Contemplating crime as a social problem, I would be asking myself precisely the questions they mention. This line of investigation is an instance of non-specialized, atheoretical abstract thinking - the natural and inescapable beginning of any attempt to grasp the meaning of an abstract concept. In addition to its presence in the example above, it provides an implicit background against which the Spector and Kitsuse critique of sociological definitions of social problems can and should be read.

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<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. p.2.

Sociologists, according to the book, have misinterpreted the concept of social problems. So the task is to clarify the meaning - not to invent one. The authors refer to the "sociology of" social problems as non-existent, but do not argue that what others call social problems are not social problems. In other words, they argue for a better definition and for a theoretically consistent exploration of the subject - they do not propose to change the subject. It is a discussion of how to study the same subject in more productive ways.

They start with the concern that a number of phenomena have been studied without asking the question what makes them all social problems. So they effectively agree that there is something which allows to recognize those phenomena as social problems. The authors start exactly where an inquiry like that should start - try to clarify what people and sociologists mean when they mention social problems. It appears that they had no intention of creating a concept of social problems in another sense.

According to Schneider,

The question of just what "social problems" means as a sociological concept... has been at the center of the dilemma surrounding this topic since its emergence in the last century<sup>29</sup>.

This must also indicate that the undertaking of social constructionism is to find a more precise formulation, by no means unrelated to the folk and early sociological perception of the term. Schneider makes another noteworthy remark:

Conventional usage of the term social problems makes it difficult to distinguish what Spector & Kitsuse see as crucial, namely, that it refers to a social process of definition and to the activities that move that process along<sup>30</sup>.

The author, in a sense, complains that the conventional usage is misleading, but apart from that, if one removes a few words - without distorting the meaning - one will come to this: The term, in conventional usage, refers to a process of definition. That is, in Schneider's assertion, Spector and Kitsuse have deciphered what others have failed to, that is all; the claims-making interpretation comes from the meaning hidden in the folk definition.

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<sup>29</sup> Schneider 1985 p.210.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. p.211.

Spector and Kitsuse do not state they will use the term to refer to something different from what others have in mind when referring to social problems. If they did mean something different, what would be the point in arguing with other authors? Disagreements only make sense when parties discuss a common subject. When they choose to talk each about their own issues, that leaves them with nothing to disagree about. Or so, logically, it seems.

The trouble is, Spector and Kitsuse do something like that without stating it or being clear about their usage of the term until Chapter 5. They sort of refer to the reader's sense of what social problems are and at the same time keep in mind something not quite the same. In the beginning, the discussion draws upon some intuitive perception which somehow enables people to get an idea of what is meant by some term or other. In the second half of the book, where they apply their definition, it gradually becomes more or less clear that the definition is not exactly about what is normally understood by social problems.

The book starts with a perfectly natural investigation of what is included in the meaning of the term. The authors' dissatisfaction with existing technical definitions of social problems results from implied contrasting of those definitions against the meaning as it is perceived "by everybody" when the term is used. There is nothing else to draw upon, no way to rationally prove that problems are not problems unless they are so perceived. This conclusion is and can only be based on a mutual agreement that such is our intuitive reading of the term.

Whether we are equipped with technical definitions or not, we are able to understand what others mean by starvation or alcohol abuse or unemployment, and we perceive that these phenomena have something in common - the generalized concept of social problems; and others are able to understand us. It is possible, and may even be advantageous, to discuss phenomena without having a technical definition of the term: the meaning is there.

It is rather obvious that sociological definitions of the kind outlined above are different from definitions sociologists create, or borrow from other disciplines, for purposes of technical analysis. They use the word "dummies" in the sense which hardly has a relation to how it is used in everyday life, and this presents

no problem whatsoever. Whether we call those variables dummies or otherwise is strictly a matter of agreement among ourselves. On the other hand, how we define addiction or social problems is not. These are not technical terms which we can define and use any way we want. These are names of phenomena in the world out there<sup>31</sup>, and they are the phenomena we set out to explain. When we use definitions that are going to be understood as some other phenomena, it defies the purpose of our work.

Sociological definitions of worldly phenomena are supposed to differ from folk definitions in the degree to which either group is informed about the meaning of the term and possible ramifications of its use. But at the same time they are supposed to be about essentially the same thing. It does not make sense to set out to explain crime and to talk about labor relations; by prostitution we better not mean family.

By and large, the sociologist has two options. One is to relate sociological work to the social world and its phenomena as they are understood by people who live in this world and are expressed in human languages. The other is to believe that a theoretical vision of the world, accepted methodology and analytical apparatus have primacy over human senses, intuition, interpretations and vernacular language. The second way to do research could be considered as a bit of an option if sociology were capable of solving its tasks with mathematical precision, where things are postulated without any ambiguity, and analytical tools are so well developed nothing gets lost or distorted in the course of analysis. But since sociology cannot claim such perfection, strong theoretical convictions can only make the researcher insensitive to the world, as far too often they do.

Spector and Kitsuse start with the intuitive perception of social problems and end up with a construct which is very far from the initial meaning it is supposed to represent.

Objectivist definitions: per se, not the problem.

The more sophisticated definitions of social problems by structural functionalists had incorporated the notions of relativity and subjectivity before Spector and Kitsuse formulated their approach. In part, that

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<sup>31</sup> Whether we call them social constructions is entirely irrelevant here.



could have been a response to the works of Becker and other interactionists. However, long before Outsiders, Parsons, for example, had been careful to mention the relativity of social norms and deviance; he always maintained that these had to be related to particular group norms<sup>32</sup>. And long before Parsons, Durkheim, in his two classic works<sup>33</sup>, argued that "crime" is that mode of action which elicits a "collective sentiment" of disapproval. That is why, he says, murder is viewed as crime: not because murder is harmful to society, but because it is collectively disapproved of. As a matter of fact, he goes on, the killing of thousands in war is not viewed as crime, while a case of individual homicide is the most terrible crime, although one cannot reasonably argue that the loss of life of an ordinary individual is likely to affect the life of society. Thus Durkheim, in essence, states that a behavior becomes crime when and only when it is so collectively perceived.

Best (1995) presents an instructive example of the wrong kind of criticism:

Equating social problems with objective conditions fits our common-sense notion of what social problems are. But objectivist definitions have two important limitations: They fail to recognize that the identification of any condition as a social problem is inevitably subjective; and they cannot guide our thinking about social problems because the conditions identified have so little in common<sup>34</sup>.

It is inaccurate to claim that objectivists equate problems with conditions; only the worst and the least influential of them do. The phrase "undesirable conditions" already includes a perception; even the "harmful conditions" does, although in a very insufficient way. Some statements made by objectivists are hardly distinguishable from those made by constructionists. One of the latter states that "no condition is a social problem until someone considers it a social problem"<sup>35</sup>. How is it different from Nisbet: "A social problem cannot be said to exist until it is defined as one.... The subjective element is inescapable"<sup>36</sup> Objectivists, therefore, do not "fail to recognize that the identification of any condition as a social problem is inevitably subjective". Equally untrue is that objectivists are unable to identify that which is common to the conditions

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<sup>32</sup> See Parsons 1951.

<sup>33</sup> See The Division of Labor in Society and The Rules of Sociological Method.

<sup>34</sup> Best 1995 p.5.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. p.5.

<sup>36</sup> Merton and Nisbet 1971 p.2-3.

called social problems: they do point out that these conditions are all undesirable. In this respect, constructionist definitions have no advantage whatsoever.

It is also hard to agree with the assertion that our common-sense notion of social problems does not include the subjective dimension. A good example is the commonly used phrase "the situation/problem got worse"; it has been noted already by Spector and Kitsuse (1977) that the subjective side is not absent from it. Dictionaries that define the common usage of words define the word problem in a number of ways but always include the subjective dimension, e.g. "any question or matter involving doubt, uncertainty, or difficulty"<sup>37</sup>. This does not look at all as an identification of problems with only objective conditions. Philosophical definitions, that is, those which follow the common view but express it in a refined abstract language, describe "problem" as a discrepancy between what is and what ought to be, thus conforming that problems are a matter of perception.

The true limitation of other perspectives is not the lack of constructive definitions of social problems but of consequences of those definitions for research. As Spector and Kitsuse explain,

It is, of course, not true that concern with the subjective side of social problems is completely absent in this literature<sup>38</sup>. Even the traditional and dominant functionalist approach occasionally acknowledges that the existence of objective conditions does not in itself constitute social problems. ...

These statements, however, have not led their authors to explore, describe, and analyze these definitional processes. They are embedded in analyses of the objective conditions of crime and other phenomena, simply presented as prefatory statements that have little consequence for guiding the selection of subject matter, the data, or the analyses they make<sup>39</sup>.

In brief, the functionalist and normative approaches can be said to have failed to investigate the question how some conditions come to be defined as social problems. This, probably, has to do with the traditional tendency to take the normative and cognitive order for granted as well as with the lack of both tradition and analytical means for approaching such a question, as well as the more general one of social change. But the charge that objectivists were never able to compose a reasonable technical definition of social

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<sup>37</sup> The American College Dictionary, NY, Random House, 1965 p.965.

<sup>38</sup> Two decades later this assessment, of course, is only more valid.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit. p.5-6.

problems is unjustified and therefore cannot explain the lack of relevant research.

The second paragraph in the quote has a very special importance to me. It points out precisely where the main problem lies - in research and the way sociological work is done, as opposed to abstract statements about research and how it has to be done. And the charge that deeds are divorced from words applies remarkably well to other perspectives. Spector and Kitsuse point out that it is not enough to make the right statements. Historically, it is not at all unusual for sociologists to introduce one subject matter (or theoretical framework) and to proceed with research on another<sup>40</sup>. In my view, a variation of this applies to the sociology of claims-making activities: it conceives a study of social problems but actually studies something else, namely, public issues in the US setting.

The rationale of the definitional approach.

Spector and Kitsuse state that they aim

to conceptualize the definitional process as the subject matter of a sociology of social problems.... No one has ever attempted to pursue the implications of this position singlemindedly to their logical conclusion<sup>41</sup>.

The authors, then, identify the definitional process as the proper subject matter but claim that the logic of their predecessors have been flawed. The line for them to pursue is the one initiated by the labeling theory of deviance and "the writings of Fuller and Myers [which] are often called 'the labeling theory of social problems'"<sup>42</sup>. These earlier works had encountered in empirical research the fact that social definitions are variable, and this had led them to the question of how those definitions are made. Spector and Kitsuse claim that the predecessors posed the right question but left the perspective with an inadequate framework for approaching it:

We shall examine the failure of the social problems literature to explore the question of how social problems are defined...<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> See Matza 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.6.

<sup>42</sup> Op.cit. p.60.

<sup>43</sup> Op. cit. p.5.

The interactionist project, indeed, directs attention to this question, or so it seems. The question itself requires further interpretation. In the quote above, it is "how social problems are defined" - what does it mean? My purpose now will be to show, first, that Spector and Kitsuse transform the question into another one, which allows, if not invites, ambiguous interpretations; and, second, that their analysis suffers multiple breaches of logic.

It would seem logical that in the spirit of Fuller & Myers and Becker the aforementioned question must be: How do some phenomena come to be defined as social problems? Yet, as the discourse unfolds the Spector and Kitsuse quietly drift away from this. They start with and use most often the phrases "definitional process(es)" and "how social problems are defined". Later, however, they more and more often use slightly different wording and eventually do not stay by the initial question. For example, they reinterpret Lemert's and Becker's formulations as "How do people come to define such acts as deviant?"<sup>44</sup>. It would be more precise to speak in this context about not "people" but social groups and societies. The importance of the difference becomes more perceptible if one inquires about the meaning of phrases like "the process by which members of a society define those conditions as problems"<sup>45</sup>. The latter can be interpreted as a social process (how definitions are made in a group or society) - or as a mental one (how people define). The question "How some behaviors or conditions come to be viewed as deviant or problematic" is unlikely to be understood in terms of the study of mind; it is clearly about society. Spector and Kitsuse either substitute it by the question how individuals construct their definitions or, at least, find another side to the old question. This new dimension may be legitimate and important. But there is no clarity to this day as to what exactly we study here. If there is a new question, or a new aspect of the old question, what is the significance of either for our efforts to explain social problems?

Spector and Kitsuse, as well as the more recent constructionist literature, make conflicting statements

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<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. p.63.

<sup>45</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.59.

and never clarify the issue. One focus - that which eventually leads to the definition of social problems as claims-making activities - is on "the social problems-producing process" and "the deviance producing process". The crucial statement about it, in my view, is this: "It is definitions that are socially processed". In this sense, we can say that definitions have careers...". Specifically, processed in society are "the definitions of reality that groups and organizations assert, sponsor, impose, reject, or subvert"<sup>46</sup>. Here, the focus is not on how definitions are made. It is only on how they are presented and, in Schneider's words, "the activities that move this process along"<sup>47</sup>. The difference may seem subtle but it is important. Definitions-processing implies that some initial definitions have been made and are there before they are processed. Occasionally, Spector and Kitsuse mention "the initial definition of social reality"<sup>48</sup> but never include it in their analysis. It is not even clear whether by this they mean the definitions people have or those publicly presented; and their definition of social problems as claims-making logically precludes an inclusion of "what people think" in the analysis.

Processing is part but not all of producing. And it is illogical to equate definition-processing with "the deviance producing" or "social problems-producing" process. However definitions of substance use may be processed (e.g. the controversy over marijuana), it by itself produces neither substance use nor its perception (and deviance is nothing else but a relationship between the two), though it obviously may affect both. That is, it does not produce deviance.

Other statements, quite to the contrary, invite the reading that constructionists are interested exclusively in what perceptions are or how they are verbally expressed, but are unconcerned about where come from and how they are processed in a society. They insist on dissociation of the pure subjective process of constructing definitions from "objective conditions", indeed, from anything that may occur in society outside of "processes of definition in very pure form"<sup>49</sup>. Here, the focus is on constructing, on "conceptions of social

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<sup>46</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.72.

<sup>47</sup> Schneider 1985 p.211.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. p.72.

<sup>49</sup> Op. cit. p.20.

conditions", "attitudes toward the condition", "how that condition is considered offensive", how "definitions of social problems are constructed", "how individuals or groups construct a definition", "how people define social problems" and, finally, "how values and motives are employed by members in the process of defining social problems"<sup>50</sup>. These look more like questions pertinent to a study of mind.

Do the authors relate these two dimensions? In some brief statements, yes; in the core of their analysis - no. In the beginning, they seem to include both in what they want to address: "...studying the processes through which definitions of social problems are constructed, sustained, changed, or abandoned"<sup>51</sup>. It is quite plausible that by how definitions are constructed these authors mean, at least in some cases, only how they are expressed. However, on the next page - and nowhere else in the book - they offer a few lines that can be interpreted as a reasonable clarification of the relation between the definitions people hold and their outward expression:

One way to begin a study of definitions is to examine the specific vocabularies that are used to describe and classify a condition. Definitions of social problems are expressed in terms that describe the condition, reflect attitudes toward the condition, and give numerous other hints as to how that condition is considered offensive or problematic<sup>52</sup>.

The authors effectively argue that analysis of claims-making is a way to establish what definitions are, since those activities reflect attitudes and help to sense how conditions are problematic. Based on this, claims-making activities must be a tool of analysis, and definitions must be the subject matter. This is logical, grounded in reality, congruent with the rationale of the definitional approach, and, in my view, should have been the chief line of investigation for Spector and Kitsuse and the constructionist perspective. Especially so that it makes natural the analysis of the dynamic interrelationship between definitions and claims-making, thus providing a framework for a study of both the making and processing of social definitions - in the authors' own words, of the "definitions of - and activity about..."<sup>53</sup>. But no. Such words are rare in the book and look almost

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<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. p.8, 21, 45, 75, 96.

<sup>51</sup> Op.cit. p.7.

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. p.8.

<sup>53</sup> Op. cit. p.84.

like a slip of the tongue. The main argument suggests that definitions do not exist other than in the shape of claims-making. And it ends up with this insupportable and incomprehensible extremity:

The dissatisfactions that provide the content and perceived basis for claims are the products of interaction between those who become claimants... and those who provide the vocabularies of discomfort and the possibilities for alternative solutions.... Only the prior existence of these institutional arrangements... make problems possible...<sup>54</sup>.

So in order for problems and their definitions to come into existence, not only there has to be a marketplace where one has to try and sell one's claims but the marketplace also has to have convenient access routes, road signs, parking lots, it has to be roofed and air-conditioned, and has to have all other things without which Americans cannot do and cannot have problems. And the detailed example concerning the use of psychiatry to control political dissidents in the USSR<sup>55</sup> seems to suggest that the Soviets too had to come to that American marketplace (since they did not have their own) - it was the only way for them to have a social problem.

The transition from "how people define" to "how people make claims" is most illogical. The two have been equated for no good reason. How can one assume, for example, that if people do not make claims, they do not define? In any event, the result of the two substitutions is a new agenda, hardly related to the initial one in an obvious way. Recently, Ibarra and Kitsuse have argued for an analysis of claims-making as "a language game"<sup>56</sup>; this completes the disavowal of the question of how social definitions are made in favor of the question about means of expression. This is logical once the claims-making approach is adopted, since claims-making is about how definitions are processed and expressed. But the approach itself is illogical, since claims-making is not exactly about how definitions are made, whether in society or - much less - in one's mind.

The analysis starts with the notion that social problems cannot be said to exist until they have been defined as problems. This the only thing that constitutes the thrust of the interactionist and constructionist

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<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. p.85.

<sup>55</sup> Op. cit., Chapter 6.

<sup>56</sup> See Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993.

approach, the only thing on which the definitionists can find common ground with other sociologists, and the only thing that keeps alive the link of sociological analysis to social problems as a common-sense category. And it is tossed aside. Instead, we effectively have a statement that a problem cannot be said to exist until someone claims a problem. This does not follow from anything and does not serve any purpose. It has, however, the consequence, whether intended or not, of creating a sect with its own obscure game and its own vocabulary, mentality and criteria of right and wrong.

The notion that the interactionist approach has not been pursued by earlier authors single-mindedly to its logical conclusion, that it has been compromised, deflected from its theoretical mission, burdened by conventional etiology, that authors have been unfaithful to it, etc., runs through the book as a red thread. According to Spector and Kitsuse,

The theoretical impasse that Lemert and Becker have created for the labeling theory of deviance underlines the pervasive influence of the conventional concerns in this field of specialization. Sociologists, like ordinary members of the society, seem intent on asking, "What makes people commit deviant acts?" even when their theory poses a prior question, "How do people come to define such acts as deviant?"<sup>57</sup>.

For Lemert, quite obviously, it was a conscientious stance to resist intellectual games and to question theoretical statements that were in conflict with empirical reality and reason. By no means did he contend himself with the question, "What makes people commit deviant acts?" As for Becker, his inattention to the question above has been, probably, the greatest charge against him. He investigated how people made sense of their activities; that he also showed that it was not unrelated to why they got engaged in deviance is hardly an indication of a theoretical impasse.

What do Spector and Kitsuse offer to improve Lemert's or Becker's approach to deviance? A redefinition of deviant behavior as assertions and grievances people make about behavior they find repugnant? This will help to understand why drug abuse, alcoholism or prostitution are considered deviant? If they or other constructionists believe that, they have yet to show it.

It is untrue that Becker's analysis of labeling or learning is internally inconsistent, or inconsistent with

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<sup>57</sup> Op. cit. p.63.



the initial thrust of interactionism. Some of it may be inconsistent with some interpretations of the perspective. If Blumer's formulation is accepted, Becker happens to be in conflict with it, most notably, in his analysis of how the meaning of marijuana emerges for its users. For Becker, the meaning comes from the interaction with fellow humans and - contrary to Blumer's premises but in perfect agreement with Mead - from the interaction with marijuana as well<sup>58</sup>. And that analysis, in my view, is an illustration of the fact that Blumer's premises are insufficient. But even if Becker were impure but right, something must be wrong with the perspective rather than with Becker. Becker goes wrong exactly where he follows the perspective's theoretical postulates blindly, without checking it against careful substantive analysis - in his interpretation of the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act. Spector and Kitsuse indicate that the latter, in their view, is "an excellent model"<sup>59</sup> and - which seems especially dear to them - the only theoretically correct portion of Outsiders. They seem to suggest that he should have never written "Becoming a Marijuana User"<sup>60</sup>. Do they believe that theoretical commitments are more valuable than good research?

The matter of truth.

The debate over the legitimacy of reference to the fact has been raging since the publication of Constructing Social Problems. The argument against facts is manifold. I will only briefly comment on the thesis which appears to be crucial: There is no point in assessing claims in terms of true/false; it is irrelevant to the study of the process.

If the validity of claims in terms of facts is irrelevant, the question is, What is relevant? Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) suggest that one relevant dimension is analysis of the rhetoric of claims-making. Among other things, they discuss the comic style and offer the following example:

...The comic style of caricature might be used to fashion a counterclaim by ad absurdum extension of claims couched in the entitlement idiom. Thus, current efforts by gay educators in California to include recognition of the contribution of gays in high school history textbooks... was countered by such rhetorical questions as

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<sup>58</sup> See Mead 1934.

<sup>59</sup> Op. cit. p.20.

<sup>60</sup> Op.cit. p.62, 98.

"Should we mention the contribution of pedophiles and prostitutes as well?" Implied in this rhetorical gambit are at least two subtexts: first, a moral equivalence between gays and pedophiles..., and second, the notion that history textbook would... soon take on the character of a perverts' gallery...<sup>61</sup>.

The authors clearly do not take the counter-claim at face value. They assess the claim, although not in terms of factual validity. They know it is a claim, they know it is not an innocent question, etc. In other words, they analyze what the one who asks the question intends to claim and how the real meaning of the phrase is different from the literal.

Why is the above more relevant than an analysis in terms of whether claimants lie and manipulate facts and data? The true/false assessment is just another aspect of the same, a special case of investigation of what claimants aim to achieve, what they mean to claim and what means they use. If claimants may be found using the ironic stance, it is equally legitimate to find them using fabrications or using the stance of sincerity. At the same time, if we make all such analyses illegitimate, we have nothing to analyze.

The truth, or other related terms - real, true, in fact - does not refer in this context to whether they are right or wrong in their perception. It refers to what and how they are doing. Ibarra and Kitsuse effectively state that the claimant plays a certain card: says one thing while actually means another. If their reading of the text and context is correct, then it is the truth they are searching for. The truth is about social definitions, not about who is right and who is wrong.

The whole notion that we should not ask the question of how claims and social conditions are related seems to me some sort of misunderstanding. The definitional stance only suggests that we should not question people's definitions of social problems: if they think there is a problem, then so it is - and that is the fact, the reality and the truth.

The thrust and rationale of the definitional approach is simply the focus on social definitions. As such, it does not make the reference to facts and reality illegitimate. On the other hand, references to compromises

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<sup>61</sup> Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993 p.51.

or theoretical impurities do not prove anything. If one believes that being purely subjectivist has advantages for the advance of knowledge, one has to show those advantages. If one finds others in a theoretical impasse, one has, at a minimum, to show it. Being purer is not necessarily being better. Nobody has ever shown that interactionism is incompatible with the rest of sociology. If anything, history of sociology shows that theoretical purity hampers research. This is also logical, given the nature of social sciences.

The logic of the perspective does not require to be uncompromisingly subjective, it does not require to abandon the question of how and why social definitions are made, and least of all it requires an equation of social problems with claims-making activities.

How Spector and Kitsuse arrive to this equation deserves a separate consideration. But first let us take a look at some examples that show that reading the equation either way, it is incorrect.

#### Problems without Claims, and Claims without Problems

In his preface to the 2nd edition of Images of Issues Best writes what I read as an expression of the belief that social problems are equivalent to public debates, or to publicly debated issues:

...The substantive topics addressed in... 1989 edition quickly became dated as societal concerns shifted. Some issues, highly visible in the 1980s, dropped off the front pages in the 1990s, while new social problems attracted public attention<sup>62</sup>.

This must mean that the front pages are a good reflection, if not a definition, of social problems. The author seems to imply that social problems are more or less what the newspapers tell us they are.

The newspapers are not famous for telling the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, the very conditions for making claims that something is wrong may be favorable or unfavorable, or virtually absent. Newspapers may be made keep quiet on social problems, or they may be made manufacture problems out of situations that are not seen as problematic by anybody. Claims-making is not in all settings and for all

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<sup>62</sup> Best 1995 p.IX. One of the problems addressed in the first edition but not in the second is AIDS.

<sup>63</sup> The truth in this context, naturally, must be understood as truth about perceptions and not about their validity. See more on that in the section "The matter of truth".

parties feasible, it can be suppressed. Newspapers may provide us with samples of claims-making, but whether such samples are representative of social problems is another matter.

Not all problems are claims-making activities.

In the concentration camp setting, people do construct reality in a certain way, they are not happy campers, they do suffer, they do not like it, and they feel it is a problem to be reduced to that sort of existence. But as long as the camp functions properly, they do not protest against it in any way, they do not complain even to one another. And nobody makes claims for those people. Does this mean "no problem"? I think to define the situation so would be really unreasonable not only in the usual sense but contrary to the true constructionist spirit as well. We have to divorce what people perceive as problematic from what they claim out loud to be a problem.

An example from Soviet history - nothing unusual, rather a typical situation - can be the famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine. Here is one of the many eye-witness accounts, published decades later:

...A ghost town. Doors and windows were boarded up. And people were dead inside their homes.... No cats or dogs. All had been long since eaten. Sections of bark from trees had been removed for food.... People would just fall dead. They'd be grabbed and thrown in a pile of bodies<sup>64</sup>.

Again, there were no complaints, campaigns or other claims as the situation was unfolding; to be sure, any mention of it was carefully erased from public agenda, even discussion of it in private, in view of the widespread raving, was unwise. And no problem? Yes, that is exactly what the newspapers claimed at the time: the historical victory of collectivization, the 5-year plan fulfilled in 4 years, record harvests, a paradise for working people; things just could not be better. Needless to say, no alternative claims-makers could be heard inside the USSR<sup>65</sup>.

Another interesting feature of the quote above is that it contains no words of direct condemnation of

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<sup>64</sup> The Hamilton Spectator 9 November 1998 p.A6.

<sup>65</sup> Statistical data on mortality for the 1930s were suppressed until the late 1980s. It is often the absence of even state-made claims rather than claims-making which can be interpreted as social problems in the Soviet setting.

the situation or those who created it. A mere mentioning of some details is already a protest against them. The power of the description is such that no words of disapproval are needed. In some circumstances, no words at all may be necessary: the picture speaks for itself as soon as we see it, whether through written accounts or through our own eyes. If that is so, one implication for methodology is that there are situations that are destined to be perceived - by participants and non-participants alike - as social problems irrespective of the possibility for the sociologist to identify claims-making activities. These are situations in which taking the role of the other can serve the researcher much better than analysis of claims-making activities - extremely deceiving in a closed society, and sometimes deceiving in a pluralist society as well. In order to accomplish that, the researcher, of course, would have to pay attention to the so-called "objective conditions" (the latter, of course, must be examined in relation to the order of "subjective perceptions"<sup>66</sup> - not as eternal universal values but images of the wrong and evil here and now).

Some research shows that the identification of social problems with claims-making activities, especially when it is coupled with the anti-reality stance, creates difficulties in studying social problems in the American setting as well. As Collins states,

As a result of this emphasis on process, social problems research begins only after a social problem has been articulated by someone....

Because constructionist approaches generally are launched after social problems claims have been advanced, such approaches provide few clues for assessing the absence of claims-making activities about a problematic social condition. Problems that have not emerged in... a formal claims-making process become difficult to detect. ...

Groups unequal in power have differential access to the claims-making process.... Less powerful groups may define their condition as a social problem, but may choose or be forced to hide their self-definitions from more powerful groups...<sup>67</sup>.

With respect to the particular problem the author addresses she suggests an assessment remarkably resonant to what the Soviet setting shows:

Rather than interpreting the absence of claims about African-American women's poverty as an indication that no social problem exists, the lack of claims might be more accurately viewed as evidence that claims have been

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<sup>66</sup> See below on this sort of terminology.

<sup>67</sup> Collins 1989 p.85-86.

suppressed. ...

Focusing on claims-making activities without using some "objective" criteria to determine which problems merit investigation can easily lead to failing to see a range of important social problems where the activism of legitimate claimants has been effectively suppressed<sup>68</sup>.

Having to deal with a particular instance of problematic situation not expressly articulated through claims made by or on behalf the group in question the author runs into exactly the same difficulty that the Soviet setting shows, namely, the lack of manifestation of social definitions in identifiable claims-making activism:

Although Black women's poverty as a social problem may begin when African-American women define it as such, Black women may be constrained from making their claims known. This suppression, rather than the onset of organized, identifiable activism, marks the origins of a social problem<sup>69</sup>.

"No claims, no problem" is a thesis with strange implications. In both settings, it leads to the finding that those groups whose perceptions, for whatever reason, do not get publicly expressed somehow do not deserve a social problem.

Not all claims-making activities are problems.

Hardly ever claims-making is an undistorted representation of "members' definitions" in any society. Not only can claims be discouraged or suppressed, they may be encouraged or made up. They can also fall on dead ears and elicit zero response.

Again, a closed society provides us with more obvious examples of that. Soviet "enemies of the people", unlike Salem witches, were not products of "members definitions"; they were products of consciously manufactured claims about something which initially did not exist even in perception. The initial claims-makers - the Party-state and its organs - invented enemies and saboteurs they themselves never thought existed. Not "seeing things" or hallucinating but deliberately made up and carefully carried out accusations created the

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<sup>68</sup> Op. cit. p.87. Best (1993) characterizes this critique as an "objectivist response" (p.134). I am not sure that is so, although Collins refers here to "objective" criteria. The focus is on definitions; her point can obviously be made in constructionist terms, and at least partly she does that (see the next quote from Collins 1989).

<sup>69</sup> Op. cit. p.87.

image. Initially, the claims about massive sabotage reflected nobody's perception that there was a problem of massive sabotage.

Had Stalin believed, as he claimed, for example, that Kirov fell victim of an anti-Soviet conspiracy, then the purges of the late 1930s, officially justified by the assassination of Kirov, could have been interpreted as resulting from Stalin's definition of the situation. Some, however, believe that Kirov was probably killed on Stalin's orders. And even if they are mistaken, there is virtually no doubt that the terror served purposes other than eradication of alleged conspiracies. The claims Stalin made are no reflection of how he saw the situation.

By comparison, Lenin's Red Terror was a reflection of Bolsheviks' perception of the situation they faced. The claims they made to justify the policy were a reflection of their definitions of their problems. Stalin's claims were not. They reflected anything but anybody's perception of any problems.

This can be compared to what some agencies or people in law enforcement do to manufacture evidence and fabricate a case. In Moscow or Tallinn, the KGB men would come to certain apartments with a search and find there a pack of US dollars they would bring exactly for the purpose of uncovering it there. The problem the KGB had was defined as anti-Soviet activities; the problem they claimed was illegal possession of foreign currency. An analysis of their claims-making activities would turn up no clues to what they saw as undesirable conditions<sup>70</sup>. Essentially the same autonomy of claims from definitions people hold is found in other settings. In Toronto or Los Angeles, a cop would reach into his own pocket, produce a piece of crack and say: Hey, look what I found in your car! Cases like this must not be confused with honest mistakes or sick imagination. Claims-making does not always faithfully represent perceptions and definitions.

Stalin was successful in creating public perceptions of enemies and sabotage. There were waves upon

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<sup>70</sup> This is, of course, an extremely simplified description. One of the many other twists is that at least some of the KGB people did not themselves take official definitions literally. So what they claimed officially was one thing, what they discussed among themselves was another, what they thought about it was still another, and what they were supposed to think as "knights of the Revolution" was different from any of the above.

waves in his purges. One aspect of this was that the opening state-made claims triggered an avalanche of claims at all levels. People were strongly encouraged to keep an eye and report on other people. Those who worked in the state security had to find and destroy certain minimum numbers of enemies by certain deadlines; otherwise, they quickly became enemies themselves. There are numerous cases when the purpose of exposing others was to get a promotion for vigilance. In other cases, superiors were exposed by those under their command with the conscious purpose of taking over the sacked boss's position. Bosses exposed their workers or other bosses to get rid of competition. Neighbors wrote reports on their neighbors to take over their rooms. Spouses had a reliable way to get rid of each other, and children knew what to do to dispose of unwanted parents.

I will not argue that there was no problem with all of this. This is, in fact, a rare instance when claims-making, along with the actual policy, indeed constituted a social problem - but certainly not in the sense the claims-making formulation implies. The point is, what was claimed was pure fiction and the claimants knew it; their claims were not a reflection of their definitions. On the other hand, the real problem - real in the definitional sense - was never mentioned; the millions of dead and the destruction of everything human in the living were not claimed. In a democratic society too, false accusations are considered a problem even when the newspapers publish nothing about it.

The equation does not hold: claims-making activities are different from social problems, and vice versa. The fact that claims-making activities can and often are affected by circumstances - favorable or unfavorable, prohibitive or compulsive - means that, generally speaking, claims-making cannot serve even as a rough proxy for social problems. In a pluralist society too, although in far less salient ways, some groups are encouraged to make and press claims, some other groups are discouraged; there are taboos and areas of lack of freedom; there are inequalities in access to information and media of communication, in resources, predisposition and skills for making claims.



### Why Claims-Making Activities? (Social Problems as Work)

As Spector and Kitsuse state,

...We wish to elaborate a conception of social problems that follows a social definition approach to its logical conclusion.... Our statement... is an attempt to explain and explore a type of argument, and to describe just what kind of formulation is suggested by the statement that "social problems are what people think they are"<sup>71</sup>.

In light of the above, the notion of claims-making activities must be the logical conclusion (at least, a logical conclusion) which flows from the definitional approach and most particularly from the Fuller and Myers statement. It is not difficult to show that that is not so.

Spector and Kitsuse employ several arguments to make their case. They start with this:

The notion that social problems are a kind of condition must be abandoned in favor of a conception of them as a kind of activity....

Our view is that any definition of social problems that begins "social problems are those conditions..." will lead to a conceptual and methodological impasse that will frustrate attempts to build a specialized area of study<sup>72</sup>.

None of what is stated here can be supported by data or logic, and the very distinction between conditions and activities cannot be sustained. It is not fair to knock Fuller and Myers for saying a social problem is "a condition which is defined...", because the phrase, especially in the context of the article, clearly includes perception, indeed, underscores perceptions in contrast to proper qualities independent from how they are seen. Spector and Kitsuse do no more than reverse the phrase; for them, social problems are definitions of some conditions. Can one detect a difference between "conditions defined as problems" and "definitions of conditions as problems"? Both reflect a relationship between conditions and perceptions, and are essentially interchangeable. One indication of this is that Spector and Kitsuse, on a number of occasions, refer to "conditions defined (or viewed, seen, considered, perceived) as ...".

Even less convincing, to say the least, are their lengthy comments on the "numbers problem", as in

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<sup>71</sup> Op. cit. p.73.

<sup>72</sup> Op. cit. p.73, 74.

"a considerable number of people" required for something to become a social problem<sup>73</sup>. These are, however, only some tips of an iceberg.

What is condition and what is activity? Spector and Kitsuse refer to crime and prostitution as conditions but both these conditions are also activities, and the authors themselves cite prostitution as an instance of socio-economic activity<sup>74</sup>. When they reject definitions of social problems as conditions they do not explain how to deal with the fact that these are at the same time references to activities and vice versa: references to activities are references to conditions.

It is easy to see how claims-making activities can become conditions; in fact, claims are likely to be seen as undesirable conditions by those on whom they are pressed, and counter-claims are likely to constitute undesirable conditions for the initial claimants, and so on. This is typical in every situation of conflict (e.g. over abortion, drinking-driving, gun laws). When some people tell me I should stop drinking or using drugs or being a prostitute because my activities cause problems, their claims-making activities become a problem for me. And just as my and my fellow deviants activities can be called a condition (substance abuse, prostitution, etc.), so can be theirs (criminalization, police brutality, false accusations, etc.). This is de facto acknowledged, for example, by Schneider when he mentions "conditions and conduct [people] find troublesome, including others' definitional activities"<sup>75</sup>.

This counter-distinction between conditions and activities only indicates the shifting of vantage point. Spector and Kitsuse's own definition does not start with "problems are conditions" but is not different in essence, for claims-making activities are an aspect of social conditions. The war on drugs is an ensemble of activities and is a condition - and a problem for many people; the labor movement is a collective behavior (i.e. activities) and constitutes a condition - and is seen by some as a problem. Other phenomena consist of activities

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<sup>73</sup> Op. cit. p.74, 75, 31-34. "A considerable number" quite obviously reflects the concern with the public recognition of a definition of a condition as problematic.

<sup>74</sup> Op. cit. p.75.

<sup>75</sup> Schneider 1985 p.209.

that constitute a condition. So, in a sense, Spector and Kitsuse's definition, although they insist that "problems cannot be conditions", is a disguised definition of social problems as conditions: (1) claims-making activities constitute some conditions; (2) Spector and Kitsuse define social problems as claims-making activities, therefore, (3) Spector and Kitsuse define social problems as conditions.

It might be that activity has an acoustic affinity with interaction, whereas condition sounds somewhat void of energy. If this is the case, let us be clear about it.

The emphasis constructionists put on the distinction between objective and subjective, which by and large corresponds to the distinction between conditions and activities, is equally unsustainable and unproductive. One's definitions are subjective, but when they are shared by some 90% of the public, are embodied in law and enforced - are they still subjective or become "an objective condition"? Or "objectivized subjective phenomena"? Are claims-making activities subjective? Are they objective, or a combination of subjective and objective elements? Why don't we leave all these words to the philosopher. What do we gain from invoking them? Spector and Kitsuse might have asked this question themselves, as they do on other occasions. Whether, they say, we call crime just crime or social disorganization or pathology or a social problem does not change the phenomenon and the way sociologists study it. Exactly. And likewise, by calling things subjective or objective, labeling them as conditions or activities, invoking tautologies like subjective perception or objective fact we gain nothing but confusion<sup>76</sup>.

Schneider argues against Blumer's notion of social problems as products of definitional activities:

For Kitsuse & Spector, definitional activities constitute the social problem..., rather than leading to social problems as a product or outcome<sup>77</sup>.

Here too, the only support for the author's point of view is a general reference to the purity of the

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<sup>76</sup> It is interesting that Spector and Kitsuse make a statement (1977, p.21-22) which shows that they are not unaware of the dubious nature of such distinctions: it is "puzzling that the kinds of materials we have presented should be considered 'subjective'" (p.22). As on a number of other occasions, their own criticism applies here: They make a reasonable statement and go on with an analysis that entirely ignores it.

<sup>77</sup> Schneider 1985 p.211.

subjectivist view. As for the essence of his statement, again, it is anti-dialectical in the extreme. The author proposes the distinction between the process and its products he cannot sustain himself. Blumer did not mean by products anything called by constructionists "objective"; he meant *social definitions*<sup>78</sup>. What people think social problems are can be legitimately called a product, although thinking is also a process. Street protests consist of activities but they also result from something. The river is a flow and at the same time a product of certain processes. It is not unreasonable to think of some objects as more of a process, like work or sex, and of other as more of a product, like commodities or children. But it is never a hundred percent clear distinction. Products of labor are part of the flow of reproduction; work is an outcome of certain circumstances.

Social problems are a category which is particularly hard to conceptualize and describe in terms of either... or.... Like Mead's social act, or Marx' surplus value, or a great many other categories, they are far better presented as neither and at the same time both - a social relationship. Speaking more specifically of the definitional process and the way it has been described, it appears to be infeasible to make a case against thinking in terms of products or outcomes. However we separate definitions from definition-making and definition-processing, we cannot avoid invoking the definitions people hold, i.e. products. If people make definitions, claims, rules, etc., what happens to all those definitions and rules once they have been produced? Do they perish the next moment? If we ignored them, we would be unable to refer to the very essence of our studies - the variance of perceptions by various groups. We are not able to establish that group A's definitions of social problems differ from those of group B on the basis of how they make their claims; the difference is in what they see as problematic, i.e. in products of their perceptions.

The idea that definitional activities constitute social problems disagrees with the point of departure of the perspective, which is looking at things from a certain group's point of view. That is, people who make claims have to see their own claims-making activities as a problem in order for the sociologist to recognize those activities as a social problem. Otherwise, Schneider has to recognize the sociologist as an independent

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<sup>78</sup> See Blumer 1971 p.298-300.

objective observer: he sees a problem where the "participants" do not. This contradiction is insoluble.

And it shows when Schneider mentions, for example, emergence of claims-making activities, or what moves the process along, or "how such activities come about"<sup>79</sup>: if they come about, they are products. The title Constructing Social Problems also does not look perfect in this respect: if social problems are constructed, they are products, and constructing does not by itself constitute a social problem.

Spector and Kitsuse introduce their notion of claims-making activities for the first time as follows:

...If social problems cannot be conditions, what are they? Most succinctly, they are activities of those who assert the existence of conditions and define them as problems<sup>80</sup>.

This is a gigantic jump from the good old "social problems are what people think they are" to the conclusion that social problems are claims-making activities. The claim that "social problems cannot be conditions", apart from the difficulties with its interpretation in a meaningful way, is only supported by itself, but the authors refer to it as if it were an established fact.

Further, the authors state that "social problems... are activities of those who... define [conditions] as problems" (see the quote above). This equation is impossible in more than one sense.

To say "social problems are social problems" would be tautological but, technically speaking, not incorrect. An instance of such is provided by Schneider: "...Social problems are the definitional activities of people around conditions and conduct they find troublesome..."<sup>81</sup>. Finding conditions troublesome is an aspect and at the same time the result of definitional activities around those conditions. The former is more or less a substitution for the former.

In certain contexts, it may make sense to say, for example, that deviant behavior is behavior so defined, or to say that that is a social problem which is so defined. But "problems are the activities of the definers of problems" breaks all the rules of logic. It is not a statement of the type  $A = A$ ; it is a statement that

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<sup>79</sup> See Schneider 1985 p.211.

<sup>80</sup> Op. cit. p.74.

<sup>81</sup> Schneider 1985 p.209.

$A = A * B$ .

More specifically, we have People, Activities (hereafter, CMA - claims-making activities), Conditions and Definitions (that result from People's interaction with Conditions). Definitions are, more or less, Social Problems (SP) by virtue of "social problems are what people think they are" - the point of departure for Spector and Kitsuse. In other words, social problems are already identified:  $P * C = D = SP$ . The question is, Why do we still need CMA? How do they fit in there? As soon as social problems are identified, we do not need any more categories, for they will transform what we have, which is what we need, into something else:  $P * C = D = SP$ , and at the same time  $SP = CMA$ ; therefore,  $CMA = P * C = D$ , which is impossible according to both Spector & Kitsuse and any conceivable meaning of these words. In this equation, social problems definitely are not what people think they are. Here, social problems are what the sociologist tells us they are. CMA is here an unnecessary, illogical and strange addition, an instance of fixing what aint broken.

More to the point, CMA are described as activities directed at other members of society or at institutions, that is, outside of the relationship between People and Conditions. CMA are the activities of claiming to others that these people have encountered a problem. They tell others there is a problem, they have already encountered it<sup>82</sup>. These can be called definition-processing activities but not definition-making<sup>83</sup>. Before definitions can be processed they have to be made. CMA result from people's definitions produced through the interaction between People and Conditions but do not belong to it; they are not part of that interaction - which is in essence the definitional process - and therefore, cannot account for the inception of the initial social problem.

The last and lengthiest Spector and Kitsuse's argument for claims-making activities is an analogy with

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<sup>82</sup> On those rare occasions when Spector and Kitsuse pay attention to this nuance they mention individual who "propose" their definitions, or say that "definitions of social problems are expressed" (op. cit. p.8).

<sup>83</sup> Obviously, processing such a definition, which is processing a problem, may in itself become a problem for others, or create other problems for both parties as well as third parties. This discussion is narrowed to only some initial problem, as defined by people, at the stage of its inception.

the sociology of work. This is also the lengthiest portion. The analogy argument begins as follows:

...The underlying sociological theory that guides our approach to social problems has also guided a major orientation of research on occupations, symbolic interactionism. ...The writings of Hughes (1971) and his followers...may provide us with theoretical analogues for our study of social problems. The study of work and occupations is relevant in another way: social problems are the work of many people.... Many aspects of social problems may be approached through the study of the people who work in various stages of the process of creating social problems<sup>84</sup>.

In what sense "social problems are the work of many people"? How are we to take the statement that people work to create social problems? Work presupposes preconceived purpose, design, organization, coordination and a lot of other things<sup>85</sup> that are common to work and occupations but not to social problems or even claims-making activities. It is only the pro-active theoretical stance that supports such an image; the authors provide no support for it, and it is hard to think of any.

The authors point out that "the study of work... focuses on the activities by which men and women earn their livelihood"<sup>86</sup>. This only reminds us that the sociology of work studies work, as it should, because "the activities by which people earn their livelihood" is what work means<sup>87</sup> and what everybody understands by work. In contrast, Spector and Kitsuse suggest that the sociology of social problems study something quite different from social problems. They say that it "must look at how people define social problems", but claims-making is not how people define social problems but how they present them to the world. Claims-making finds its work-related analogy, I think, in the exchange of goods - the activities of selling products of work to others, as claims-making activities, speaking, of course, very roughly, are attempts to sell to others products of one's perception and definition-making.

Lastly, Spector and Kitsuse believe that the analogy with work helps to solve "the numbers problems" to which they pay so much attention one would think it is a major issue:

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<sup>84</sup> Op. cit. p.75.

<sup>85</sup> As does the word construction, a special case of work.

<sup>86</sup> Op. cit. p.75.

<sup>87</sup> Except that "earn" suggests a monetary or quasi-monetary exchange, thus excluding non-monetary economies and those segments of modern economies wherein neither labor nor its products are sold.

It does not matter whether only a few or a great many people are engaged in that activity. Conceptually, they are considered participants in the category "work". If very few practice the activity, we might... study them all.... Even if only one person earns her livelihood at an activity...<sup>88</sup>.

If very few practiced the activity called work, we would have no economy, therefore, no society, only Robinson.

### Claims-Making vs. Definition-Making

#### A plausible reinterpretation.

The process by which conditions are defined as social problems is about developing meaning. A condition acquires the meaning of a social problem when people perceive it as such - not when they start - if they ever do - making claims. Key points of this development can be presented as follows: There is a perception that something is not how it ought to be (people sense that something is wrong) - The condition is defined as a problem (people believe something should and could be done about it) - Claims are made that something should be done (which in itself is already doing something) - People or institutions mobilize resources to achieve a solution - A new situation results, which includes new perceptions and may cause new activities.

What has been called claims-making activities is but one stage and aspect of the whole in this process. People have to define something as a problem before they can claim it. And before they make a definition, they have to have a general pre-definitional perception of things not being right (some problems are recognized immediately and the pre-definitional stage becomes indistinguishable from the more conscious next one). In view of this, again, the scholarly definition of social problems as claims-making activities seems illogical. It begs the question why the two pre-claims stages are skipped.

A plausible answer is that Spector and Kitsuse (1977), as they indicate on many occasions themselves,

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<sup>88</sup> Op. cit. p.75.



are looking for observable and identifiable phenomena that could be studied empirically<sup>89</sup>. Claims-making activities are to them such phenomena, whereas the observability of unexpressed mental constructions and unnamed perceptions is debatable<sup>90</sup> (although they, of course, have been successfully studied by sociologists). On the other hand, claims-making activities is the closest thing to definitions and perceptions, in contrast, for example, to such other observable phenomena as social movements or policies. Thus, a study of such claims becomes conceived as a study of social problems<sup>91</sup>.

A further question must be asked: Why has an illogical and awkward definition of social problems as claims-making activities been near-unanimously accepted and used by sociologists? Definitions that do not work for researchers usually do not get accepted, which suggests that this one must have some merit. In my view, its advantage is that claims-making activities are the hub of various aspects of the development of social problems in a pluralist society. If construed as a tool of analysis of social problems the notion of claims-making activities makes a lot of sense, especially when complemented by other tools. Much less so as a scholarly definition, but it appears that for the most part researchers use this notion exactly as an analytical tool and pay little attention to whether it was initially called a definition or a tool. And, of course, the tool has been applied mostly to American society where there is, indeed, a tendency for perceptions to quickly escalate to claims.

In a closed society, the tool - as the main or a major one in the studies of social problems and deviance - cannot be applied in a meaningful way. How conditions come to be defined as problematic remains the question but the focus on claims-making activities is not an answer.

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<sup>89</sup> The first such statement is made on p.1, the most straightforward on p.39.

<sup>90</sup> One may also notice that while perceptions have a reputation of being subjective, activities usually are not characterized as subjective. In this sense, Spector and Kitsuse's definition is "objectivist" (just an assessment, not an accusation).

<sup>91</sup> This, of course, is my interpretation of a possible authors' logic but not what they state. In fact, they use a variety of words, often interchangeably, to describe definitional processes: think, act, believe, do, assert, definitions, activities. That is, almost on all occasions they do not distinguish at all between "what people think" and what people claim. On no occasion, they mention the possibility that people can claim problems without thinking so (the hoax scenario and a "fabrication" mentioned on p.76 appear to refer to false assertions of conditions rather than to claims of non-existent perceptions).

Mead on the nature of social interaction and meaning.

All living creatures, according to Mead, have some means of communication. These are some signs that convey meaning; they are introduced in the book as gestures. For instance, a dog expresses the meaning of threat to another dog by the means of snarling; this gesture will be perceived as such (i.e. as a threat message) by the other dog who may respond to the stimulus by snarling back as a gesture of readiness to fight; or it may issue the sounds and bodily movements of surrender - either, in its turn, be adequately taken as such by the first party.

Mead's conception of (social) act is key to his explanation of interaction. The act begins when an organism relates itself to some object, human, non-human or non-organic, external or internal: "The external act that we do observe is a part of the process which has started within; the values... are values through the relationship of the object to the person who has that sort of attitude"<sup>92</sup>. For Mead, act is a broad category that involves more than one actor, more than one phase and more than any single means of communication or order of behavior. What the student of human conduct ought to do "is to take the complete act, the whole process of conduct, as the unit in his account"<sup>93</sup>.

The meaning does not belong entirely to the gesture produced by one party but to the interaction and interrelation between the parties, or, which is the same, to the relation between the earlier and later stages of the act. It takes two to commit an act and produce a meaning which, to become such, must be not simply issued but also perceived. The meaning is signaled through a gesture by one organism and is perceived by the other, and that other displays in response some other gesture(s) to convey another meaning - understood as such by the first organism<sup>94</sup>.

Some kind of adjustive cooperation between the parties emerges and allows the interaction to occur

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<sup>92</sup> Mead 1959/1934 p.5.

<sup>93</sup> Op. cit. p.111.

<sup>94</sup> See p.14, 77, 46 and other through the book. "The social act", according to Mead, "must be taken as a dynamic whole - as something going on - no part of which can be considered or understood by itself...": p.7; see also the footnote on the same page.

and the meaning to develop: "Meaning is implicit - if not always explicit - in the relationship among the various phases of the social act to which it refers, and out of which it develops". In other words, meaning is "a development of something objectively there"<sup>95</sup>. Mead states explicitly that the perception of meaning may be unconscious: "Awareness or consciousness is not necessary to the presence of meaning..."<sup>96</sup>. In other words, meaning emerges much earlier than it is verbally expressed, and even earlier than it is conscious.

Applied to social problems, this reads as the notion that a reality can be perceived as problematic before claims about it are made, and even before it is consciously defined (to oneself) as problematic. The meaning of something as a problem does not have to be articulated in any way whatsoever. To be articulated is to become an item of public agenda, which is different from becoming a social problem.

Mead presents a detailed analysis of the social act and its development from the level of meaning to the level of conscious self-organization. The latter is operated through the system of significant symbols which is represented by the language people speak. Symbolically expressed meaning returns anew to the act and reenters it (not the same particular act, of course) at a higher order of communication.

This is a long way beyond the stage at which a problem is first perceived as such. Social constructionists who subscribe to the claims-making approach start their analyses of this phenomenon at so late a stage of the development of meaning it excludes a whole host of social problems from their attention.

My objections to their equation of social problems with claims-making activities follow the same logic which shapes their objections to the equation of social problems with social movements<sup>97</sup>.

#### A Study of Public Issues?

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the study of claims-making activities around putative

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<sup>95</sup> Op. cit. p.76. It is noteworthy that Mead, a philosopher, characterizes as objective phenomena which today's constructionists unanimously call subjective.

<sup>96</sup> Op. cit. p.77.

<sup>97</sup> See Mauss 1975, Spector & Kitsuse 1977, Schneider 1985, Mauss 1989, Troyer 1989.

undesirable conditions, as designed and partly practiced so far, is different from the study of social problems. Probably, to say that studies in claims-making activities are about how personal troubles become, or are made, public and political issues would be largely correct. Claims-making is the appeal to other parties, and most particularly, to the public and the state. Response to claims and how they are processed is in essence the life of public issues: the nature of the process is public, and "issues" is a much more accurate word than problems.

Indeed, if we talk about issues we do not have to deal with an unmanageable terminology. It is not reasonable to say the AIDS problem has declined but it makes sense to say the issue of AIDS is not as big as it used to be. It is also not unreasonable to say a famine or labor camps do not become public issues in certain circumstances, without assessing them as non-problems. We also are not led to the conclusion that there were no problems in the Soviet Union; we can simply state that they were not allowed to become items of public agenda.

Speaking of being consistent and logical, it appears that such a study does not need to make reference to problems, putative or otherwise. There is, in my view, no reason why claims have to be about social problems. Sociologists can study claims about anything. Claims about desirable conditions, windows of opportunity, "positive ideas" (e.g. to build a highway, create the Internet) may emerge and develop in essentially the same way. With respect to how claims are made it should not make a crucial difference whether they have been made about something threatening or something inspirational.

If the claims-making perspective gets rid of the association with social problems - the subject it does not address as such anyway - it will benefit in other respects as well. It will truly get a set of distinctive phenomena to explain, it will broaden the field and make it more clear. It will not have to screen and exclude bogus claims, such as the politicians' claims about things that do not concern them but are only used as an excuse to press unspoken agendas. Instead, claims of all kinds can be included and analyzed.

On the other hand, claims-making activities (of any kind) can be interpreted as competition for public attention which shapes the current public agenda. This helps to clarify the relationship between claims-making activities and social problems. The former are, in a pluralist society, an important aspect of problems-

processing. They probably are the mechanism of public awareness of social problems, actual (defined by some people as problems) or alleged (claims fabricated about conditions not considered by claimants problematic)<sup>98</sup>. Competition for attention has the tendency to escalate to competition for resources and political decisions. This overlaps considerably with the field of political sociology and with the sociology of social movements. One difference is that the interactionist approach potentially could be but largely has not been employed in political sociology, and has been only to a degree popular among the students of movements.

These nuances seem to me a partial explanation of the paradox why constructionist works on social problems have been popular and brought some fruit. Another factor that has helped the perspective is that much of what the original design demands has been ignored by constructionists in their actual work.

The study of social problems as claims-making activities has been a marriage of inconvenience. Two decades after Constructing Social Problems we can say again that the sociology of social problems still does not exist. Since constructionist have studied claims-making, they have not studied social problems in the regular sense, as the initial intention was before the book and in the first half of the book. How social definitions are made remains the question, and we have a long way to go before we can claim an outline of a project that can assist in the search for answers.

#### Consequences for Research

The most important consequence, as said earlier, is that the study of claims-making activities is not exactly a study of social problems. The postulated equation between the two automatically excludes from research the unclaimed social problems and by the same virtue includes a variety of claimed non-problems. Another distortion is an inclusion of certain private problems in the realm of social ones. Some ramifications of the above are important.

Most noticeable of them are those with respect to data and methods. Spector and Kitsuse suggest an

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<sup>98</sup> In Spector and Kitsuse's terminology, problems must be putative too, for obvious reasons.

interesting question:

What constitutes the activity of defining a condition as a problem is not immediately observable. ... Would this consist of holding an opinion about a given condition or expressing that opinion in a Gallup Poll? Writing an angry letter to a member of Congress or organizing a protest?<sup>99</sup>

From what the authors argue later in the book it is clear that writing letters and organizing protests belong to the realm of definitional activities, while the "activity/behavior" of holding an opinion does not appear to belong. The border-line question is: Are opinion polls part of claims-making activities? If, for example, a respondent, or all respondents, answered "Yes" to a question whether crime presents a problem in the USA, would that constitute a social problem? Following the authors' argument, it should not be:

Usually it is not difficult for the sociologist to recognize and classify activities cited as claims because they are so recognized and interpreted by members as well. That is, claims are a common-sense category.... The participants in an activity must construct its meaning as a claim<sup>100</sup>.

Opinions expressed in a Gallup Poll may reflect the desire to complain about something but this is not the purpose of polling, is not seen by the pollsters as claims-making and is not read as such by third parties. Thus, even if 100% of population think that crime is a problem, and even if that is known through the polls, the sociologist still should not consider it a social problem - unless, of course, distinct complaints or demands (perhaps, with reference to the polls) are made about crime. On the other hand, if one individual complains about crime - while a Gallup Poll may show that 99% of population do not consider it a problem - the sociologist is obliged to recognize a social problem.

This is yet another dismissal of the thesis that social problems are what people think they are. The "set of procedures for identifying and documenting behavior that defines a condition as a social problem"<sup>101</sup> suggested by the authors makes it rather difficult to reconcile the consequences of its application with the initial thrust of the definitional approach, indeed, with the very notion of social definitions. Spector and Kitsuse assert "it is sensible" to say that the American Psychiatric Association, legislative and gay groups have definitions

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<sup>99</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.32.

<sup>100</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.79.

<sup>101</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.32.

of homosexuality<sup>102</sup> - but in what sense does it make sense to state that they have such definitions? In this particular instance, the authors actually discuss the American Psychiatric Association's official definition, in other words, an opinion that this organization held and expressed but, importantly, did not present it as a claim ("A claim is a demand that one party makes upon another"<sup>103</sup>). So in this case in order to qualify for making a definition it is enough to hold an opinion but in the general case it is not?

The general instruction of the claims-making approach is to study social definitions without using the data which describe what those definitions are - only the data on how the definitions are pressed on other parties are allowed. Social statistics, opinion polls, voting behavior, surveys of attitudes, studies of legislation and other usual sources must be left out of the picture. An application of this rule to interviews must mean that the questions about what people think are irrelevant; for example, it must be legitimate to ask "How many times over the last year did you shoot at an abortion doctor?" but not "Do you believe that abortion should be banned in this country?"

Another important feature of the claims-making approach is its isolationism, especially its adamantly anti-causation stance. What causes social problems is an important research question, but the hard reading of constructionism leaves no room for it. In all such instances, the chief consequence for research is that important questions become illegitimate.

#### Whose Problems?

The issue of differentiating between social problems and other problems that members of society or social groups might have is legitimate in the definitional tradition and is crucial to determining the subject matter for a sociology of social problems.

Spector and Kitsuse quote Hughes (1971) to discuss what they indiscriminately characterize as

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<sup>102</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.8.

<sup>103</sup> Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.83.

"experienced dissatisfactions":

Persons and organizations have problems. They want things for them, for their bodies and souls, for their social and financial relations, for their cars, houses, bridges, sewage systems. They want things done to the people they consider their competitors or *their enemies*<sup>104</sup>.

People, indeed, can be said to have problems like that - but this does not suffice for all such problems and dissatisfactions to qualify for social problems. When my car breaks down, the condition is not going to be viewed as a social problem. although for me it is likely to be a problem. When a more competitive colleague is offered a job which I would like to have it is not a social problem either. If the bankers felt unappreciated and underpaid, it probably would be seen as only their own problem. Competition, conflicts, controversies are bound to create problems for people or organizations or social groups but not in all such cases it would be sensible to consider those problems social problems. A problem has to be defined as a problem for society or community<sup>105</sup> in order to be called a social one. This is the distinction between private or particularistic problems and, on the other hand, common or social problems.

In many cases, a clear line between the two cannot be drawn, and private problems are in many ways related to common ones, and vice versa. If, in today's North America, I were denied a job because of my race or gender, this private problem could be widely viewed as a social problem as well - not just my own and not even my ethnic group's problem but that of the whole society. This, however, does not eliminate the essential difference between particularistic and social problems.

There are social arrangements that presuppose problems for the participants but are not commonly viewed as problems for the society. Perhaps, the most obvious example is the adversarial judicial process. It is normal for the prosecution to have problems with the other players, especially the defense; it is normal for both the prosecution and defense to make claims about unfair tactics of the other side, violations of the due process, miscarriages of justice and so on and so forth. Yet, the widely accepted view in today's society is that

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<sup>104</sup> Hughes 1971 p.422, quoted in Spector and Kitsuse 1977 p.85.

<sup>105</sup> Hereafter, I refer only to society.



the arrangement itself is a solution rather than a problem. By contrast, the medieval justice greatly reduces the problems for the prosecution but as a social arrangement is viewed today as a problem. Similarly, the ongoing battles between governments and oppositions are not viewed as social problems but as a working political mechanism. By contrast, the dictatorship eliminates most of these particularistic problems but becomes itself a big social problem. Economic competition too, even though it creates many serious problems for many people and groups, is not as such viewed as a problem for society but as a healthy mechanism which benefits the common good. Soviet economy did not create for people problems of competition but it eventually "did not work" - perhaps, exactly for the reason of lack of competition and related problems for private parties. In all such cases, an abundance of private problems is no indication of social problems; rather, inadequate social arrangements are viewed here as social problems or source of social problems<sup>106</sup>.

The very nature of contemporary society, most notably the interrelatedness of its parts, creates problems with which we have to deal on a daily basis but we often do not see those problems as problems of society; they are only our own private problems, or sometimes those of our group. They are also quite likely to lead to claims about undesirable conditions but this, by itself, still does not make them social problems.

A relationship to the common good has to be established in order for any problem to become a social problem. It may but does not have to be claimed by the interested parties; the only necessary condition is that such a relationship has to be recognized by other parties. In some way, shape or form, the perception of a social condition as harmful to the society's interests or offensive to its values or in other respects irreconcilable with the common good has to be present in public opinion in order for the sociologist to identify a social problem<sup>107</sup>. Blumer, in my view, discusses the same phenomenon when he talks about a social endorsement; and Chauncey calls it legitimation of social problems<sup>108</sup>. The condition has to be viewed more than just somebody's or some

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<sup>106</sup> Poverty or pollution cannot be called social arrangements but they are believed to be produced by inadequate social arrangements.

<sup>107</sup> The sociologist, of course, does not have to think in terms of the common good. The issue is what and how the public thinks.

<sup>108</sup> See Blumer 1971; Chauncey 1980.

group's problem.

Again, these perceptions should not be confused with whatever interested parties might claim. References to common values made by interest groups are often dismissed as disingenuous. The trade unions may claim that if wages are not raised tomorrow the national economy, social peace and human dignity will suffer, but the public and the agencies which act on behalf of the national economy, social peace and human dignity may perceive this as no more than excessive rhetoric used towards selfish ends, and probably a bluff. In other instances, claims may elicit no response at all. The nature of claims is not a good indication of the nature of the situation: the latter may be recognized by other parties as a social problem in some cases, as a private problem in other cases, and as a non-problem in still others.

On the other hand, people may make no claims about their plight or may present their claims in personal rather than common-good terms but the situation can be perceived as a social problem. Child abuse or child labor are today seen by many as social problems, although we do not often hear children complain. A person on welfare may say: "The check is 500, the rent is 400"; this contains no reference to common values or sense of justice but many would interpret it not as a private problem but the social problem of less than human treatment of the unemployed.

The very notion of social problems implies the reference to society and public concerns. Common public matters are the space in which social problems are possible. Things that are "nobody's business" are no prospect for social problems. The latter, to extend Gusfield's ownership terminology, are public, communal property - something in public circulation. The perception that something is wrong must be shared by several parties. Social problems express the idea of common difficulties and common loss; solutions represent common gain. The general historical trend toward ever greater interrelatedness of members of a society is of particular importance here.

The trend has two aspects that are particularly interesting for the analysis of social problems. On the one hand, the contemporary society - represented above all by the state - finds itself increasingly interested in what has traditionally been private; it becomes nowadays difficult to think of anything which clearly is not the

government's business. The institutions that represent society create special social arrangements to ensure that individuals have certain education, skills, motivation, that they are productive members of society and upright citizens and raise their children the same way. On the other hand, the individuals are so dependent on society and public services they expect certain social arrangements to be there for them, and the state accepts a great responsibility for that. To say there is a social problem is to say society is at fault and has an obligation to amend the situation.

Thus, social problems presuppose not only the possibility that undesirable conditions can be ameliorated but also the perceived impossibility of their amelioration as private matters through private efforts. Social problems are matters of mutual concern. (Parties that disagree on what is right often share the perception that something is wrong). Solutions are a matter of social arrangements that address those concerns. This makes the role of the state as a participant in social problems absolutely enormous. Other participants need the state to endorse their concerns and definitions, to adopt policies, laws and practices that support their design of the common good.

The social problem is a relationship between social reality and common-good images of what that reality ought not to be. These are not images of any undesirable conditions, painful experiences, private dissatisfactions or problematic situations; these are images of failure of a society to keep the common house in order.

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