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## THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION IN SOVIET-TYPE SOCIETIES

Summer, 1990

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IRIS Reprint No. 3

Prepared for

Institutional Reform and the Informal Sector Project (IRIS)  
AID Contract No. DHR-0015-A-00-0031-00

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Reprinted from *Journal of Soviet Nationalities*, 1(2), Summer, 1990

Prime Contractor: University of Maryland at College Park

# JOURNAL OF SOVIET NATIONALITIES

*A Quarterly Publication of the Center on  
East-West Trade, Investment, and Communications*

SUMMER 1990  
Volume 1, Number 2

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## The Logic of Collective Action in Soviet-type Societies

*Mancur Olson\**

This essay offers some conceptual tools that should help specialists on the Soviet Union and its neighboring countries with their work. I am not an expert on the Soviet Union nor on any of the nationalities it contains and thus cannot provide a complete and conclusive analysis. I know that a specialized knowledge of the facts of each situation is needed even to know how a theory applies to a situation.

Nevertheless, the whole history of science tells us that fundamental principles—if they are valid principles—apply in all parts of the world. Water flows downhill everywhere, whatever the nationality of the people or the peculiarities of the social system. As a hardened professional economist, I can assure you that demand curves slope downward in all parts of the world too: when the price of a good is lowered, and other things are equal, then a larger quantity is demanded.<sup>1</sup> As this talk will attempt to make clear, the topic that I have been invited to address here, the logic of collective action, applies fully as much to the peoples of the Soviet Union as it does to those in the West.

### I

In the glow of the events of 1989, most people have interpreted the revolution in Eastern Europe in terms of the mass action of unhappy people. It seems to me that this is mislead-

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ing. When there are no free elections and governments are able and willing to use force, political outcomes do not mainly depend on the hearts and minds of the people—on what the various populations or nationalities want. Very often governments can be massively unpopular yet continue in power.

Let us consider some well known examples, starting with Nazi-occupied Europe. Many of the areas that the Nazi armies conquered surely were full of people who did not want to be governed by the Nazis. In Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, and many other areas where the German invasions were clearly unpopular, the Nazis nonetheless managed to maintain tight control over the people. They usually were able to do so fairly easily, even though their armies were very busy indeed at the Russian front and against other allied armies. With only small and often over-aged parts of their army to supplement their police forces, the Nazis were able to control countless millions of different peoples who despised their rule. In spite of the extraordinary heroism of some resistance fighters, the Nazis were for all practical purposes defeated only by the superior allied armies.

There is also no lack of similar examples in Eastern and Central Europe since the defeat of the Nazis. In spite of the lack of good polling data, we can be pretty confident that Stalin's hegemony was, to put it mildly, not always popular in the areas his armies overran, or even among some groups in the Soviet Union. Yet Stalin ruled without question until he died a natural death. Stalin's successors and the political and economic system he created and extended westward were also often unpopular, judging by the uprisings in Hungary, East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and by the extraordinary efforts that individuals often made to leave East Germany and other societies organized on Soviet lines. The widespread expressions of relief and the election results in several countries after the liberalizations of 1989 also suggest that the Soviet-type of social system was unpopular. Yet the

unpopular leaders and systems remained in control until Gorbachev made it clear he was at least relaxing the Soviet grip. Thus Eastern Europe has seen regimes that were despised by large sections of their population remain in power for over forty years. When these regimes were finally replaced, it was only with at least some degree of acquiescence by the leader of the Soviet Union.

The foregoing evidence makes it fairly clear that, in the absence of really free elections, the "hearts and minds" do not necessarily determine even the most basic political outcomes. There is a great deal of similar evidence from all sorts of dictatorships in diverse parts of the world.

Why is this so? Why, when there is all of this power in the population—all of this manpower, muscle, intelligence, social pressure, and moral force—don't the preferences, and even the passions, of the people count for more?

## II

At this point the book that I was asked to talk about—*The Logic of Collective Action*<sup>2</sup>—comes up. As I see it, the reason that unpopular governments—and even despised alien regimes—can stay in power for very long periods is that the logic of collective action keeps the huge number of people who don't like a regime from taking the actions that would overthrow it.

Consider the incentives facing a typical individual—an ordinary citizen who does not expect to be the head of any government that would succeed the existing regime. If such an individual makes a sacrifice to rebel against the regime that he despises, he will bear the full cost and risk of whatever he does to help overthrow the hated regime. Yet any benefits of what he does will automatically go to people throughout the society, whether they made any sacrifices to help overthrow the hated regime or not. Each typical individual who acts to

overthrow a bad government gets only an infinitesimally small share of the benefits from any success. If there are a million people who hate the regime, it follows that the average person will get about one millionth of any benefits of throwing the rascals out, yet this individual bears the full burden of whatever he does to bring about the desired change. So even though the aggregate benefits to the group or population of overthrowing the regime are many times the total costs, each typical individual finds that his costs of working to overthrow an undemocratic regime are normally much greater than the benefits he would receive. The sacrifices involved in opposing an undemocratic government may be very considerable, and even involve risk of life and limb, but the reward for bearing these burdens goes to the society as a whole, including those who made no contribution at all to the replacement of the regime.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the typical person in an autocratic regime does nothing to remove it but instead follows the orders that he is given, even if he dislikes the government. This is true even of the Jews who were herded, by a relatively small number of guards, to concentration camps that they knew would be terrible, and in which most of them were in fact murdered. The evidence of the logic of collective action is sometimes very gruesome indeed.

Since it is explained in the aforementioned book, I don't want to go into the logic of collective action in general, except to say that this logic also explains the cases where collective action can occur. There are some circumstances where collective action occurs, notwithstanding the fact that the benefits of collective action are "public goods" that go to noncontributors as much as to contributors.

If the number in a group is sufficiently small—such as the few large firms in a concentrated industry—voluntary collective action can take place fairly readily. Suppose there are only three firms in an industry and that they are of equal size.

Each of these three firms will get one-third of the benefit of what it does in the interest of the industry, and that third of the benefit might be enough to get that firm to act to some extent in the collective interest of the group, such as by lobbying for legislation that favors that industry or by restricting output to obtain collusive monopoly prices. Each firm also has an incentive to make this action on behalf of the group contingent on what another does, and this further increases the incentive of the others to act collectively. So collective action can happen when there are small numbers, and that is important for many purposes, but not usually for explaining rebellions and revolutions in large populations.

To get collective action for large numbers of people, you have to have the "selective incentives" that are described in *The Logic of Collective Action*. There has to be some punishment of the individuals who don't act in the interest of the group or some reward to those who do. One well-known example of this is coercion in a picket line or the "checkoff" of union dues—often the worker will lose his job if he doesn't agree to let the union dues be automatically subtracted out of each paycheck. My book on collective action identifies many other important (if less conspicuous) negative selective incentives and shows how important they are in explaining the membership of many organizations.

Other selective incentives take the form of positive rewards to those who help bear the costs of collective action. Positive selective incentives often show up, for example, in American farm organizations where the dues are really subtracted from the income or patronage dividends of farm cooperatives that have a symbiotic relationship with the farm organizations.

In groups that are not too large, social interaction, which can take both the negative form of social pressure and the positive form of social praise or honor, is also very important as a selective incentive. The variety, subtlety, and historical importance of selective incentives has been remarkable in the

West, and I hope that students of the Soviet Union will examine the literature on this subject with an eye to its applications to the societies that have had central planning.

### III

The logic of the argument that I have put forth suggests that, in general, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a population to change a totalitarian regime, even if almost all of the population prefer something else. Of course, if individuals were not at all concerned about their own interests or survival, the logic of collective action would not apply; if most human beings would really rather be dead than red, then no society would be red. But in the real world most individuals care much more about their own welfare and survival than about public policy or the ideology of the society, so the logic does apply. Therefore, if a society has no free elections, it will not necessarily change its arrangements just because most of the population would like to see such a change. There is no hidden logic by which the "hearts and minds" of the people necessarily force an autocratic government to act in much the same way a democratic government would have done. This sad truth would apply even if totalitarian governments did not monopolize the media and the educational systems to indoctrinate the population with the beliefs the government wants them to have.

The reason is that a group of people small enough to engage readily in collective action usually won't have enough strength to overthrow any effective government. Any numerous group or any majority in a society will be able to act collectively only if it can find and organize the selective incentives that are required for large group collective action. This would be difficult and time consuming even in the best of circumstances. The existing regime, moreover, will naturally not permit any system of punishment or rewards that would

support an organization that could threaten the regime. So the conservative and pro-establishment tendencies in autocratic societies are often powerful and difficult to overturn.

#### IV

Yet, as we all know, not every autocratic regime has survived. There are some dictatorial and even some totalitarian regimes that have been overthrown. If they are overthrown by foreign armies or forces, that is not relevant to the argument here, but autocratic regimes have also been overthrown by internal opponents or even by revolution. There was a French Revolution, a Bolshevik Revolution, and so on. And, of course, there are the great upheavals in Eastern Europe in 1989. If the logic I have put forth is correct, how could these upheavals happen? The key to this is not so much the hearts and minds of the people as the incentive for collective action on behalf of the government itself by the cadre and leadership of the regime.

Mao was partly right in saying that power grows out of the barrel of a gun. But the power of an autocrat does not depend on his marksmanship: even if he were the best shot in his country, he could not outgun a significant group of opponents. Neither does a totalitarian leader enjoy power because he is legally in charge: the law is enforced only because of the leader's power. Nor need his power rest on the support of his subjects: as we have already seen, Hitler and Stalin successfully controlled conquered populations that despised their rule.

A dictator has power because he has a cadre of officials, police, and military officers who regularly obey his orders. But why do the operatives of a regime carry out the dictator's orders? This takes us right back to the difficulties of collective action—and especially to the need for selective incentives, which for dictatorial regimes do indeed, as Mao sensed, grow

in large part out of the barrel of a gun.

Just as it does not normally pay a typical individual to rebel, so it also does not pay for the typical policeman or soldier or bureaucrat who happens to believe in the regime to go out of his way to help the regime survive simply because he favors the regime. It does not pay the typical official of a regime to carry out the orders of the leadership unless there is some incentive for him to do that *separate from* his belief in the established system. Think of a society where there are huge numbers of people who want a revolution, but also huge numbers who want to preserve the status quo. The logic of collective action applies to one side as much as to the other.

Nonetheless, one's intuition tells one that the situation is different when we are looking at the existing government, and so it is. The existing government, after all, pays salaries to its policemen and soldiers, pays higher salaries to its higher officials, and gives promotions to those who serve it especially well. If the functionaries do not do what the leadership wants, they will lose those salaries. On top of that, the policemen are, of course, paid to arrest and punish people who act in ways that are offensive to the people in charge.

Thus the pay of the soldiers, policemen, and officials—and the punishments the regime can impose—are the positive and negative selective incentives that make the regime work. Regimes can often survive even when they are unpopular because they have the selective incentives arising from their guns, their tax receipts, their monopoly of the printing press, and so on. These selective incentives make the bureaucrats, soldiers, and policemen carry out the orders of the leadership, whether they like the existing regime or not. If the leadership's orders are carried out, the regime stays in power. It cannot be overthrown by a population, however hostile, that does not have the selective incentives needed for collective action.

Accordingly, when there is a successful insurrection against an autocratic regime, I hypothesize that it is normally due to

the problems, divisions, irresolutions, or other weaknesses of the regime, not because of an increase in the animosity of the population.

Although an established autocratic government, with its wide array of other sources of selective incentives, has colossal advantages over a subject population that has no means of overcoming the difficulty of collective action, autocratic governments are nonetheless, as I will argue, inherently fragile entities. However awesome their power may seem to be, they can nonetheless collapse with astonishing rapidity. Though almost everyone had expected that the Soviet-type regimes of Eastern Europe would be around for quite some time, they collapsed, almost without fighting back against their opponents, within a few weeks in 1989. How can autocratic regimes that appear to have such awesome power over their citizens collapse so quickly?

#### V

The fragility of autocracies grows out of the *perceptions* of the government's civil and military officials. If a government's operatives, and especially those in the police and the military, *believe* that they will be punished if they fail to carry out their orders and rewarded if they do, an autocracy is secure. If the cadre perceive that a dictatorship is invincible, it cannot be overthrown by its subjects.

With the perception that it is invincible, a modern dictatorship can not only control a country's government, but even supplant all of the firms, organizations, media, and sizeable institutions in a society: it can create a totalitarian society.

Yet a regime whose power rests on nothing more than a shared perception can lose all of its power once perceptions change. And if the regime is even once observed to be weak, perceptions can change in the blink of an eye. If the cadre observe a moment of vacillation, an incident of impotence, a

division in the leadership, or even the collapse of analogous regimes, all the power of an imposing regime can vanish in the night air. The leader, after all, has no one to guard the guards, unless there are isolated garrisons that have not observed the leadership stumble.

An interlude of democratic indulgence can also undermine the shared fear of autocratic power. It is no accident that autocratic regimes are in the greatest danger when they begin to liberalize (as we have known since de Tocqueville). If dissent and pluralism are permitted, then the regime no longer terrifies either its masses or those who are supposed to implement its orders.

Since even the most awesome despotisms often rest on nothing more than a shared perception of their guards and administrators, they are, paradoxically, close to disorder and even to anarchy. Autocratic dissolution can all too easily bring instability and coups d'état.

So it was with the collapse of *l'ancien régime*. The French Revolution had the same liberal and humane motivation as is inspiring East Europeans today. But that revolution brought disorder and war, not only to Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, but also to all of the Western World.

## VI

Of course, a thousand and one other things were also relevant, but I submit that the suddenness of the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe owes a lot to the logic that I have just described. In 1988 the regimes in the East bloc appeared to have limitless power over their peoples. In no time, Gorbachev's relative liberalism and a number of things that were small in themselves generated the perception in East Germany that the East German regime was not omnipotent, and then suddenly the regime that was previously so powerful came to have no power at all. Its officials finally did not carry

out its instructions. When this happened, the risk of demonstrating against the regime became almost zero. Participating in such a demonstration still cost the participant some time, but that cost was small enough to be comparable to the charitable contributions of the average individual. The unprecedented excitement of participating in these events and the drama of sudden and awesome political change even made participation positively attractive for some. There were probably also a few who were trying to establish their suitability for the different sort of society that was to emerge. So, for a few days, a tiny percentage of the relevant populations—usually, some tens of thousands—participated in the great demonstrations that the world watched on television. This was enough to defeat regimes that, awesomely powerful as they had seemed just a year before, had suddenly found almost no one would take their orders.

As I see it, the sequence that has just been described for the emerging democracies of Eastern and Central Europe is, in its underlying logic, quite similar to the collapse of other autocracies in other times and places. The most important determinant of what happens is not the hearts and minds of populations that have no way of overcoming the difficulty of collective action, but the incentives and perceptions of civil and military officials.

## VII

To complete the intellectual framework that is needed, we also have to analyze the way that economies in stable societies, and in particular centrally planned economies, normally change over time. The output of the economy is important not merely because it affects popular opinion, but even more because it is the source of the selective incentives that give the leadership of an autocratic society their power.

Force is not something that is made of air. Bismarck said

that Germany was made "by blood and iron." Keynes said later, "No, Germany was made by coal and iron." My argument is that it is a productive economy that gives a government the selective incentives and machinery that are the source of power.

Thus to complete our conception, we need, in my opinion, to add the theory of economic performance set out in my book on *The Rise and Decline of Nations*<sup>4</sup> and the application of this argument to Soviet-type societies that Peter Murrell and I present in our forthcoming paper on "The Devolution of Centrally Planned Economies."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, to obtain a full understanding of this theory of economic growth, one must acquire not only a good knowledge of the standard modern economics that is subsumed in it, but also a grasp of the several special features of this theory. It would be out of the question to go over all of this here, but I dearly hope that students of the Soviet Union will want to study the theory, and I know that, whether it fully persuades them or not, they will certainly find that it speaks directly to their professional concerns.

The theory analyzes how over time stable societies acquire a kind of "institutional sclerosis" that makes their economies less dynamic and their political life more divisive. Though this ailment is not inevitable if there is a correct diagnosis and appropriate therapy, no society that has succeeded in maintaining stability over a long period of time has so far escaped its effects, and in some societies (such as the United Kingdom) these effects are very serious.

As "The Devolution of Centrally-Planned Economies" shows, the aging process takes a different and much less conspicuous form in Soviet-type societies than in democracies with market economies, but the negative effects of the aging process are even more serious. When there is a proper allowance for the greater opportunity for economic growth in economies that are far behind the leaders and therefore can

enjoy "catch-up" growth, it is especially clear that the relative economic performance of the Soviet-type societies has deteriorated over time. The world's technological knowledge has advanced over time, and the Soviet-type societies have been able to gain enough from this to increase per capita income over the postwar period. But as time has gone on, the Soviet-type economies' capacities to take advantage of opportunities has diminished dramatically.

Thanks to the "encompassing" interest of the traditional communist party leadership (which more or less "owned" the society and thus had an exceptional stake in its productivity), the centrally planned societies of Europe did about as well in exploiting their catch-up opportunities in the 1950s and early 1960s as did the western democracies. But since the mid-sixties the Soviet-type societies, though still so far behind the leading economies that they continued to have great opportunities for catch-up growth, grew far more slowly than comparable market economies, notwithstanding the sclerosis and deterioration of performance that also characterized the democracies.

The growth performance of the Soviet-type societies has, in other words, deteriorated far faster than that of the democratic societies with market economies. As "The Devolution . . ." explains, over time the small groups of administrators and planners in each industry or sector were able, by inconspicuous and subtle means, to overcome the difficulties of collective action enough to collude in their own interest, even though this reduced economic performance and thereby damaged the interests of the seemingly all-powerful Politburos above them. Over time a new class of subordinate officials came to enjoy spoils and powers that, in an early Stalinist phase, were possessed almost exclusively by the top leadership.

This class of officials tends to lose from the introduction of competitive markets, and is therefore also a conservative

force that has in more recent times resisted reforms. Each of these officials can, if he operates inconspicuously, redirect or delay reforms in the little segment of the economy that he controls. Thus, in the aggregate, these officials, may, without any collective action, sabotage reform. Paradoxically, because the traditional leader of a Soviet-type society has virtually owned the society, he has an interest in reforms that will make the society more productive. Thus the framework offered here suggests that there will be less conservatism at the very top of a traditional Soviet-type society than in the middle and upper-middle levels.

Or so, at least, it seems to me: I dearly hope that experts on the Soviet Union and on other Soviet-type societies will give this argument the benefit of their criticism and expertise.

The ailments of the Soviet-type economies, resulting both from their inherent shortcomings and the collusive devolution of these economies that is described above, are very serious. So serious, I believe, that in the absence of really substantial and well-conceived reforms, the Soviet economy will not be viable in the long run. The economy that produces the selective incentives that persuade officials to carry out the orders of the government—the economy that pays the officials, the army, and the police—cannot continue indefinitely without substantial reform. Sooner or later middle level officials see the shrinking of the very output that is needed to reward them and this is demoralizing. When this occurs, it is no longer so clear that they have an incentive to carry out their orders and to protect the top leadership. In choices about top leadership and overall strategy there is then a conflict between the officials' vested interest in the bureaucratic and monopolistic status quo and the fear that the whole system that sustains them may collapse.

In the 1950s officials in the Soviet Union seem genuinely to have believed that the Soviet Union would gain on the United States over time and maybe overtake it. Given the relative

growth rates of the two societies then, this belief was understandable, and more than a few Americans were also persuaded by it. But by the late 1970s and 1980s the view that the Soviet Union would surpass the United States became unbelievable. I hypothesize that the more thoughtful middle and upper level officials in the Soviet Union ultimately came to understand that the relative deterioration of their economy was no accident, but a result of the inherent contradictions of their economic system. I would not be astonished if this understanding had something to do with the choice of younger and relatively innovative leaders like Gorbachev.

If, by contrast, the Soviet leadership had chosen a resolute and energetic conservative instead of Gorbachev, we would probably still have Eastern Europe under the arrangements that prevailed in 1988. But this could not have worked indefinitely. The economic sclerosis that may have favored the selection of Gorbachev would ultimately have led to a collapse. A thorough economic reform does not insure viability, but without it Soviet-type societies must ultimately collapse.

## VIII

The student of nationalism may say that the intellectual framework that has been set out above is applicable to many situations, but that nationalism is such a powerful force that the foregoing argument will not apply to it—that nationalism is qualitatively different from other political ideas. To some extent it is. We know that if there is one important emotion in the modern world, it is the nationalist emotion. This said, we should also note that people are not nationalistic enough to pay their taxes voluntarily: every country's taxes are compulsory, as the logic of collective action predicts. As the old saying reminds us, taxes are as inevitable as death itself.

Let's also consider one very nationalistic country—a coun-

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try where politics is especially nationalistic, where foreign enterprise is particularly restricted, and where the nationalism takes an anti-American form for the good historical reason that the country has been pushed around a lot by the United States. I am talking about Mexico. All observers agree that Mexicans are nationalistic and especially uneasy about what they see as American imperialism; Mexicans sadly say that their country is "so far from God and so near the United States." But what are they doing? They're moving to the United States in large numbers. Migration has never been stopped by the nationalist feelings of people who were free to migrate. This is further evidence that nationalist passions do not normally overwhelm the individual interests that drive the foregoing analysis.

Nationalism, moreover, is often not a pre-existing primitive belief to which other forces adapt—it is often a consequence rather than a first cause of political outcomes. As often as not, it is governments that create nationalisms rather than nationalisms that create nation-states.

In France, for example, it is nearer the truth to say that the French kings (and later republican governments) created the French people than to argue the reverse. The French kings took a part of Europe that spoke different languages and that had many local loyalties and indoctrinated them to be French. In many other cases, too, we get nationalism and a sense that a given set of human beings are a "people" or a "nation" mainly because the accidents of history have given us governments with a certain domain. The people in this domain are then given a common set of experiences by this government and an indoctrination in a nationalism that is convenient for the government in question. Even a language is, as the saying goes, usually a dialect backed by an army. Widely used languages like French, English, and Russian are undoubtedly widely used languages because of military, political, and economic successes by governments that used these lan-

guages, not because of any linguistic dominance in the primeval forests of Europe.

Time is short, and here as at other points in my argument I have to neglect some qualifications. Admittedly, once a group achieves a sense of national identity in the modern world, that identity can be long lasting. For example, Poland didn't exist as a country for more than a century and there was still a Polish demand for a country. Peoples such as the French in Quebec can obviously remain cohesive for a long time without ever having an independent national government. Nevertheless, I think these cases are exceptions, and even in these cases the influence of a pre-existing institutional structure, the Roman Catholic Church, which had an interest in avoiding the assimilation of the Poles and the French Canadians into other nations, has been an important factor accounting for these nationalisms—they were not created in the Garden of Eden. The process of forming peoples to fit the borders that was found in France certainly seems to be the norm today in Asia and Africa.

In any case the logic of collective action focuses on what does or does not take place after people have defined their interests in a particular way. It suggests that even if people have a perceived interest or a grievance, their individual interest normally does not lead them to take the collective action that would be necessary to change things.

My theoretical framework for dealing with nationalism and the structure of government is set out in two of my articles in the *American Economic Review* on "The Principle of Fiscal Equivalence,"<sup>6</sup> and "Toward a More General Theory of Governmental Structure."<sup>7</sup> I would like to think these articles would persuade readers that nationalism and governmental structures, whether federal or unitary, are not a reality outside the theory of collective goods, but rather are in large part explained by it.

## IX

I regret that my abysmal ignorance of most of the nations of the Soviet Union leaves me unable to say anything directly about the prospects of the separate Soviet republics or about whether they will continue to cohere in the Soviet Union. But perhaps it will be useful to offer a possibly surprising analogy. I would like to suggest that a case that would be interesting for students of the Soviet nationalities to study is the American Civil War. We know that in the United States there was a very large Civil War—one of the largest wars in history to that date—when the southern states seceded from the Union. The war went on for quite a time.

How was the problem of collective action, which I claim is so important, overcome in the case of the southern secessionists? The answer is that the states were organized. That is to say, each of the southern states had a governor, a legislature, and a bit of bureaucracy. In other words, there were already selective incentives—people on the payroll. There were state taxes already being collected, and this meant that the southern states could overcome the problem of collective action and put on a real fight. They were finally defeated, but mainly only because the northern states were more populous and economically stronger.

This analogy suggests students of the Soviet nationalities and the centrifugal or centripetal forces in the Soviet Union should look carefully at just how the republics are organized. Just who reports to whom? Some people may say that's not very important, for even if people are employees of a republic, they are employed in a hierarchy that is controlled by Moscow. But my hypothesis is that this can sometimes determine whether rebellious collective action is possible. If many employees in a republic are on its payroll, the republic's officials can at least briefly get many people in a republic to act in a coherent way. That can make a difference in whether

a secession movement succeeds. As in the American Civil War, a movement might be crushed by greater force, but it would be a substantial and important matter if a republic had enough of the population on its payroll to be able to partially overcome the problem of collective action.

### X

So far in this talk, I have only considered the problem of collective action in contexts where elections do not determine outcomes. I have written about collective action in contexts where elections are decisive elsewhere and saw no point repeating that analysis now. But I had not previously written much about collective action in autocratic societies. So it seemed to me necessary to go into that topic to analyze the history of Soviet-type societies. The analysis of collective action in autocratic environments led inescapably to the conclusion that it is usually better to look at the regime and at the civil and military officials rather than only at the preferences of the people to understand what happens. I did not have the opportunity to offer all of the qualifications to my argument that should have been offered at many points. Public opinion obviously has some importance even in a totalitarian environment—if it did not, regimes would not bother with propaganda and indoctrination. But, even when one notes the importance of all qualifications, public opinion is, unfortunately, not usually decisive.

For the future of the Soviet Union and the other Soviet-type societies, and in many cases even for the present, genuinely free elections may be a basic determinant of what happens. That is what I hope to see. As one who likes to be optimistic, it is also what I would like to expect. In an environment with the fullest range of democratic freedoms, collective action takes different forms than I have analyzed here, such as lobbying and efforts to cartelize markets. But that is a topic I

have dealt with at length elsewhere, so I shall not discuss it here.

Except to say that, in any democratic future for the Soviet-type societies, collective action will surely take much the same form as it has taken in the democracies of the West. Water and demand curves, we must remember, go downwards everywhere.

### NOTES

There is a logical possibility of an upward sloping demand curve, but no case of this has ever been documented. An individual is made better off by a lower price of something he buys, and this normally makes the increase in purchases because of a reduction in price greater than it would otherwise be. If a good is an "inferior good," so that more of it is demanded at lower incomes than high incomes, this effect would counter the main "substitution" effect of a price reduction, and could conceivably exceed it.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

For an application of the logic of collective action to revolutions and Marxian theory, see Allen Buchanan, "Revolutionary Motivation and Rationality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Fall 1979, pp. 57-82.

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