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THOMAS REMINGTON

## Institution Building in Bolshevik Russia: The Case of "State *Kontrol*"

One of the dilemmas of revolutionary regimes is the difficulty they experience in creating new structures of rule out of resources inherited from the *ancien regime*.<sup>1</sup> In Russia, the Bolsheviks came to power dedicated to building a socialist society and creating new institutions whose forms were predicated on an unfolding theory of how the transition to socialism would occur. Such a method of shaping institutions was deductive and synoptic, standing in sharp contrast to the evolutionary adaptation of old institutions to new functions.<sup>2</sup> One may wonder how free revolutionary regimes in fact are to construct institutions *a novo*. The early Bolshevik attempt to establish "control" structures, that is, institutions and procedures for the external auditing and monitoring of economic and other public organizations, is a case in point.<sup>3</sup> Of interest are the extent to which the Bolsheviks were successful in creating effective control bodies and the reasons behind their success or failure. In answering these questions I examine two levels of the institution building process. The first involves specification of the powers and duties of control agencies, including the relationship between central and local organizations, and the powers of control bodies vis-à-vis executive authorities. The second issue concerns the practical problem of resolving the incessant internequine disputes among Soviet organizations over jurisdictional rights to control.

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1. Although this theme is familiar in political theory, there is little empirical research bearing on it. Hannah Arendt defines revolution in terms of this experience of being free of the past and able to create new institutions (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [New York: Viking Press, 1965], p. 27).

2. The first approach corresponds to Charles E. Lindblom's construct "Model One" as a guiding vision of social organization in which problems are solved through analysis rather than trial and error (see Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic Systems* [New York: Basic Books, 1977], chap. 19). The evolutionary approach is often associated with Edmund Burke, who warned against replacing institutions "in favor of a geometrical and arithmetical constitution . . . without having models and patterns of approved utility" to follow (Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969], pp. 144, 152).

3. The ambiguities of the concept of control are discussed by William Rosenberg, "Workers and Workers' Control in the Russian Revolution," *History Workshop*, 1978, no. 5, p. 89. Also see Jan S. Adams, *Citizen Inspectors in the Soviet Union: The People's Control Committee* (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 3-4. More abstractly, Gérard Bergeron has identified a range of six possible degrees of control (domination, direction, limitation, surveillance, verification, and consultation) in a useful discussion of the differences between the European and English usages of the term (see Gérard Bergeron, *Fonctionnement de l'État*, 2nd ed. [Paris: Librairie Armond Colin, 1965], pp. 41-52). Although in Bolshevik Russia the exact sense of the term became indistinct, its core meaning expressed monitoring rather than executive authority.

By the end of three and a half years of Soviet rule in the spring of 1921, the government had worked out a compromise among the principal rivals for control powers. But it had not yet satisfied its own demands for a state control body that would be both centralized and democratic. Let us consider the problem of design. In the abstract, the control function under Soviet rule was not intended to be different from its counterpart in imperial Russia. Control in the Soviet system, as in imperial Russia, referred to the auditing and review of accounts by independent examiners to assess the propriety, legality, and expediency of an organization's expenditures and other transactions.<sup>4</sup> Even in the fervid first months of Bolshevik rule, when many workers' groups took over their enterprises in the name of "workers' control," the Bolshevik leaders did not confuse control with management. Workers' control meant that workers had the power to uncover improprieties and hence to act as a check on management in state and private firms.

Defining the rights of workers' control raised sensitive issues. Before October 1917, the Bolshevik position on control benefited from a certain ambiguity. Simplifying the matter somewhat, one can suppose that the Bolsheviks supported the slogan "workers' control" between May and October 1917 in large part to distinguish their platform from Menshevik and anarchist views while building their own base of party support among the radicalized workers who were rapidly forming a strong and nationally integrated network of factory control committees.<sup>5</sup> The Mensheviks called for "state control," that is, the joint participation of proletarian and propertied elements in control, with final powers of oversight, regulation, and administration left to the state.<sup>6</sup> Since under the Provisional Government this formula left the factory workers vulnerable to the legal and political pressure of the property owners, the Bolsheviks won support by denouncing the Menshevik position and demanding workers' control instead.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the Bolshevik leadership was conscious that unqualified advocacy of workers' control would identify the party too closely with the syndicalists and anarchists. These latter groups set great store by workers' control, seeing in it the eventual framework of social self-government: workers

4. V. A. Sakovich, *Gosudarstvennyi kontrol' v Rossii: ego istoriia i sovremennoe ustroistvo v sviazi s izlozheniem smemoi sistemy, kassovogo poriadka i ustroistva gosudarstvennoi otchetnosti*, 2 vols. Vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed. (St. Petersburg, 1898); vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1897).

5. Cf. Paul H. Avrich, "The Russian Revolution and the Factory Committees" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1961); idem, "The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry," *Slavic Review*, 22, no. 1 (March 1963): 47-63; Robert James Devlin, Jr., "Petrograd Workers and Workers' Factory Committees in 1917: An Aspect of the Social History of the Russian Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., SUNY at Binghamton, 1976); A. Pankratova, *Fabzavkomy i profsoiuzy v revoliutsii 1917 g.* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1927); idem, *Fabzavkomy Rossii v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuiu fabriku* (Moscow, 1923); Frederick I. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour, 1917-1920: The Formative Years* (London: Peter Owen, 1969); Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917-1921: The State and Counter-Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1970); and C. Goodey, "Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat (1918)," *Critique*, 1974, no. 3.

6. *Novyi luch*, December 6, 1917. This is a Menshevik newspaper available in the Nikolaevskii collection of Menshevik documents at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

7. Thomas F. Remington, "Democracy and Development in Bolshevik Socialism, 1917-1921" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1978), p. 37.

organized in factory committees would come to manage society directly.<sup>8</sup> Within their own ranks, the Bolsheviks initially tolerated suggestions that self-management was the aim of workers' control. For example, the Petrograd Factory Committee Council — in which Bolsheviks predominated — saw "public control" over the production and distribution of resources as a step toward placing the entire economy "on a social footing."<sup>9</sup> But toward October 1917, party leaders moved away from blanket endorsements of the rights of factory committees over management. Instead, they stressed the priority of political revolution in order that, under a proletarian government, workers' control could eventually be merged with statewide industrial administration. Without power, Lenin said, control was the emptiest of phrases.<sup>10</sup> By this he did not mean that effective control presupposed power, but rather that until state power was wrested from the propertied classes, workers' control was valueless.

Lenin justified the Bolshevik position on workers' control by two sets of arguments. One was practical. Workers' control would serve as an excellent training ground for future administrators, through which workers could gain the experience, skill, and confidence needed for direct executive responsibility. Moreover, workers' control would serve as a wedge with which the proletariat could ultimately overturn the power of capital. Exposing secrets, bringing abuses to light, standing guard over the capitalists, the workers could prepare the ground for full socialization of the enterprises.<sup>11</sup> The other set of arguments drew from Lenin's ideas about capitalism and the transition to socialism. Just before and after the October Revolution, Lenin argued that capitalism had so simplified its own administration, reducing it to rudimentary mechanical operations, that accounting itself was the basis of management.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, by mastering accounting and control, workers would restore the functional order, the flow of information, and the integration of branches in the economy that were prerequisites of socialism. To make this argument, Lenin had to insist that control was simple in itself and that workers possessing relatively little education and experience would be capable of exercising it properly. Although Lenin's misgivings on this score grew rapidly after the first month or two of rule, in January he still encouraged workers to take over production even if they were unready to manage it: "You'll make mistakes but you'll learn," he quoted

8. See the statement by delegate Maksimov at the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in *Pervyi vserossiiskii s'ezd professional'nykh soiuзов, 7-14 ianvaria 1918 g. Stenograficheskiĭ otchet* (Moscow, 1918), pp. 84-85.

9. The phrase in the original is "na sotsial'nykh nachalakh." The full text is reproduced in I. A. Gladkov, ed., *Natsionalizatsiia promyshlennosti v SSSR. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1954), pp. 77-82.

10. *Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vserossiiskaia konferentsiia RSDRP (bol'shevikov): Protokoly, 24-29 apreliia 1917 g.* (Moscow, 1958), pp. 68-69.

11. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 55 vols. (hereafter cited as *PSS*) (Moscow, 1958-65), 35:57, 200; 36:75, 130, 175.

12. Lenin laid out his views on the simplification of the administrative functions in the modern capitalist state and particularly the ease with which workers can assume those functions by means of "accounting and control" in his article, "Uderzhat li bol'sheviki gosudarstvennuu vlast'?" written on October 1, 1917 (see Lenin, *PSS*, 34:287-339). In the article he states: "Statewide bookkeeping, statewide accounting of production and distribution of products is, so to speak, something like the skeleton of socialist society" (*ibid.*, p. 307).

himself as telling them.<sup>13</sup> Even in late June, when Lenin was stressing organizational discipline over spontaneous seizures, he defended the activist conception of factory committees, advising committees to go beyond simple financial and technical matters and to enter management as "cells" of the state.<sup>14</sup> But precisely because factory committees were state organs, their use of control powers for particularistic ends was unacceptable.<sup>15</sup>

This qualified support for the factory committees found expression in the decree legalizing workers' control, adopted not quite three weeks after the October coup d'état. The decree recognized the rights that many workers had already claimed. Politically its effect was to legitimate existing practice.<sup>16</sup> But the institutional hierarchy for workers' control set forth in detail by the decree was largely stillborn. The decree called for factory, territorial, and central councils of workers' control, but it failed to clarify how these organizations were related to existing institutions of control.<sup>17</sup> Important details were proposed by S. A. Lozovskii, the secretary of the All-Russian Trade Union Council.<sup>18</sup> Like other trade union officials, Lozovskii mistrusted the workers' control movement, believing, correctly, that it strengthened the factory committees at the expense of the trade unions. Reproducing the hierarchical structure of the factory committee movement in a new system of councils for which there was no existing support effectively deprived the factory committee movement of its principal function. While a few of the proposed workers' control councils did take form, a full national organization never did. The central council created by the decree convened once or twice, only to dissolve itself into the Supreme Economic Council (*Vysshii soviet narodnogo khoziaistva* or VSNKh) which was formed a few weeks later.<sup>19</sup> In short, the decree on workers' control failed to address, let alone to answer, the major political questions raised by workers' control, particularly that of the relationship of control to management and administration at both local and central levels.

13. *Tretii vserossiiskii s'ezd sovetoov rabochikh, soldatskikh, i krest'ianskikh deputatov* (St. Petersburg, 1918), pp. 29–30.

14. *Protokoly chetvertoi konferentsii fabrichno-zavodskikh komitetov i professional'nykh soiuзов g. Moskvy* (Moscow, 1919), pp. 19–20.

15. Lenin's conception of the relationship of control organs to the government is suggested by the point in his draft nationalization decree of December 1917 that would require workers' control organs to report weekly to the Supreme Economic Council on their success in raising labor productivity and discipline (Lenin, *PSS*, 35:174–76).

16. S. N. Prokopovich, *The Economic Condition of Soviet Russia* (London: P. S. King and Son, Ltd., 1924), p. 5.

17. The decree indicates that organs of control would have oversight power over production, the right to fix output and cost norms, and access to all books, but the specific powers in relation to management were not enumerated. Moreover, as Solomon Schwarz pointed out, the decree states that a ruling on the question of the relationship of workers' control to the organs regulating the economy statewide would be issued, but none ever was (S[olomon] Shvarts, "Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety i profsoiuzy v pervye gody revoliutsii" [manuscript in the possession of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, n.p., n.d., p. 27]).

18. V. V. Zhuravlev, *Dekrety sovetskoii vlasti 1917–1920 gg. kak istoricheskiy istochnik* (Moscow, 1979), p. 43.

19. *Obrazovanie i razvitiie organov sotsialisticheskogo kontroliia v SSSR (1917–1975): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1975); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo: Organ vysshego soveta narodnogo khoziaistva*, 1918, no. 11, pp. 23–25; N. A. Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin — Organizator sotsialisticheskogo kontroliia* (Moscow, 1970), p. 72.

Distinguishing control from managerial or executive power was necessary because both Bolshevik doctrine and Russian conditions were erasing the previous boundary between them. At the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees, which opened on October 17, 1917 (Old Style), Bolshevik party leaders Miliutin and Larin offered the arguments on workers' control that were accepted by the predominantly Bolshevik delegates. Workers' control, according to the resolution adopted, was to be expanded into the total regulation of the economy by gradual means. At the same time it was to become a state system, composed of representatives of the factory committees, trade unions, and soviets, with a guaranteed two-thirds majority for workers.<sup>20</sup> As the reports were debated, Miliutin acknowledged that the proposed resolution failed to clarify the executive functions (*rasporiaditel'nye funktsii*) of the factory committees. He explained that this omission was intentional, since executive functions "are only a necessary evil, which need not at all be brought into a system."<sup>21</sup>

This assertion is doubtful since both before and after the publication of the workers' control decree many factory committees had assumed executive powers. Well into the spring of 1918, the ambiguity of the decree and the effective autonomy of many local and regional workers' organizations allowed workers to expand control into management. A questionnaire distributed to Petrograd enterprises in April 1918 revealed that 47 percent of those responding to the question "who runs your enterprise?" offered answers like: "the owner and the workers' council" or "management and the factory committee" or simply "the factory committee," while the remainder responded "the owner" or "the administration."<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, since the Bolshevik Party itself called for gradual merger of control with administration, Bolshevik workers and leaders made several attempts to combine a statute on workers' control with the creation of an organ for general economic direction. Representatives of the Petrograd Central Council of Factory Committees sought Lenin's approval for an all-worker Supreme Economic Council closely tied to the factory committee movement which would oversee workers' control while regulating production.<sup>23</sup> The first draft of the workers' control decree actually envisioned a supreme economic coordinating body, but supporters of the proposal were unsuccessful in winning Lenin over, and the point was subsequently dropped.<sup>24</sup>

In short, the functions of administration and control had come to overlap as a consequence of the revolutionary intrusion by workers into the privileges of capital, and Bolshevik doctrine on the point blurred the issue of mass participation in the seizure of state power with that of the organization of socialist administration. The task of building a statewide system of industrial administration was facilitated when the factory committees were absorbed into the trade

20. P. N. Amosov et al., comp., *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i fabzavkomy: Materialy po istorii fabrichno-zavodskikh komitetov*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1927), 2:170.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

22. L. E. Ankudinova, *Natsionalizatsiia promyshlennosti v SSSR (1917-1920 gg.)* (Leningrad, 1963), p. 38 and G. A. Trukan, *Rabochii klass v bor'be za pobedu i uprochenie sovetsskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1975), p. 226.

23. *Novyi put'*, 1919, no. 3, p. 26.

24. N. P. Silant'ev, *Rabochii kontrol' i sovmarkhozy* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 98-99; E. N. Gorodetskii, *Rozhdenie sovetsskogo gosudarstva, 1917-1918 gg.* (Moscow, 1965), p. 240.

unions and when the district and city offices of the factory committee movement were taken over by the state's regional economic councils, a process which occurred in the first half of 1918. Workers did enter managerial positions in large numbers. Nationally, they came to make up about half of the membership of management boards; four out of five of the workers serving on management boards had gained experience by working in the factory committees and control commissions.<sup>25</sup> But from the summer of 1918 on, operational authority in the enterprises became increasingly centralized, and management grew independent of the factory committees. Frequently this meant that "bourgeois specialists" gained power within the management boards.<sup>26</sup> Conflicts between committees and management tended to increase and strengthen the sentiment among trade union leaders that control bodies chosen by the workers should remain to serve the workers' material and moral needs. This belief encouraged them to protect the independence of their control organizations against the state's encroachments on their powers.<sup>27</sup>

The failure of the workers' control decree to establish a centralized, mass participatory system of control illustrates the essential contradiction in the Bolshevik effort to construct control institutions. Their attempts to redesign control to meet their ideological criteria were frustrated by the persistent bifurcation of control powers between state and public institutions. By the same token, a compromise that satisfied the main institutional rivals would be unsatisfactory from the standpoint of the regime's needs for control: that it serve as a transitional step to socialism by ensuring the direct participation of the proletariat while guaranteeing the responsiveness of the bureaucracy to centralized rule. In effect, a solution at one level of the institution-building process ruled out a solution at the other level. As the regime turned away from an immediate concern with implementing workers' control to the reform of state control, this dilemma arose repeatedly.

The workers' control decree did not materially affect the existing organization of state control, which was inherited from the tsarist and provisional governments. Although it was disrupted between December 1917 and February 1918 by the clerks' strike, the State Control Office was otherwise untouched by workers' control in industry and trade. Through the first months of Bolshevik

25. V. Z. Drobizhev, "K istorii organov rabocheho upravleniia na promyshlennykh predpriatiiakh v 1917-18 gg.," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1957, no. 3, pp. 45-47. Another study showed that over half the members of governmental administrative boards in industry were former members of factory committees and control commissions (see A. B. Medvedev, "Razrabotka V. I. Leninykh printsipov organizatsii upravleniia promyshlennosti v pervyi period sovetskoi vlasti [oktiabr' 1917-iun' 1918 gg.]" in *O deiatel'nosti V. I. Lenina v 1917-1922 gody: Sbornik statei* [Moscow, 1958], p. 93).

26. Drobizhev, "K istorii," pp. 45-47. A letter written by the presidium of the Textile-Workers' Trade Union to its factory committees and control commissions in mid-summer 1918 cautions the committees against taking over operational power within the factories in the wake of the sweeping nationalization decree of July. It instructed them that while committees were to retain all their former rights, they could not interfere in the decisions of the management board and stipulated that one-third of the management boards must consist of technical specialists (see D. A. Chugaev, ed., *Rabochii klass sovetskoi Rossii v pervyi god diktatury proletariata: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [Moscow, 1964], pp. 120-21).

27. The trade unions in the Urals, where Moscow's influence was weaker, succeeded in demanding that state control organs work through the trade union control organs to oversee factory production as early as October 1918 (Chugaev, *Rabochii klass*, p. 131).

rule, the agency continued to review the accounts of other government bodies, closing out the books on past years.<sup>28</sup> Between December 1917 and April 1918, it was rechristened a commissariat, a collegium, and again a commissariat, but only the name and the structure of the senior staff were changed. Former tsarist employees still made up over 90 percent of the personnel.<sup>29</sup> In fact, probably no other agency of Soviet power underwent so little change in structure, function, and composition during the first months of the Revolution.<sup>30</sup> Some Soviet institutions in this period sought to minimize continuity from their institutional predecessors, as did the Supreme Economic Council. Others reached working compromises with their predecessors, as in the area of science and technology. But the State Control Commissariat was the direct and unregenerate heir of the prerevolutionary State Control Office.

In attempting to give it an institutional mission, the Bolsheviks contended with the claims made by the commissariat itself. In its first ruling under Soviet power, issued in March 1918 shortly after the clerks returned to work, the commissariat declared itself concerned with financial accounting to ensure that the expenditures and actions of state organs were legal, proper, and expedient. Its official house publication expressed gratification that now this role would grow in proportion to the "extraordinarily expanding sphere of the state economy."<sup>31</sup> The journal also argued that the commissariat should report directly to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet rather than to the Council of Commissars, which would in effect have raised its status to that of a supercommissariat.<sup>32</sup>

While the government did not grant all the commissariat's wishes, through the spring of 1918 it broadened the commissariat's responsibilities. The government held that a concentration on financial accounting nurtured the formalistic, petty-minded style of the old clerical staff. Instead, the government demanded that the commissariat improve its actual control over the state bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup> The commissariat was directed to examine the legality and expediency of all state actions, not just financial ones. What was intended to be a change of procedure to prevent the *chinovnichestvo* from obstructive nitpicking became a loose grant of political power. It was not possible to depoliticize this expansion

28. I. D. Martyshevich and V. P. Portnov, *Sotsialisticheskii kontrol' v RSFSR i zakonnost' (1917-1934 gg.)* (Moscow, 1979), p. 53; Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 97.

29. Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 99.

30. This was not lost on the attentive Stalin, who, speaking at a session of the Central Executive Committee on April 9, 1919, observed that the State Control Commissariat was the only Soviet agency not yet subjected to a thorough purge (*chistka i lomka*) (I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. [Moscow, 1947], 4:251).

31. The journal is quoted in G. A. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia v 1920-1923 gg.* (Moscow, 1959), p. 10.

32. Martyshevich and Portnov, *Sotsialisticheskii kontrol'*, pp. 55-57; Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 113; *Biulleten' izvestii gosudarstvennogo kontroliia*, 1918, no. 1, pp. 10-14 and no. 2, p. 11. The editor of this last publication was anonymous as, indeed, was most of the activity of the commissariat. An Old Bolshevik named E. E. Essen was made deputy commissar in November 1917, and another Old Bolshevik, K. I. Lander, became commissar in May 1918. In March 1919 Stalin became commissar, and V. A. Avanesov became his deputy. In contrast to the many Soviet institutions in which power and policy were highly personalistic, the State Control Commissariat seems to have disguised its political ambitions under a faceless proceduralism.

33. A. I. Chugunov, *Organy sotsialisticheskogo kontroliia RSFSR 1923-1934 gg.* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 23-24.



of power so long as the fundamental questions of the relationship of control to management and state to society were left unanswered. Under these circumstances there were no checks on the commissariat's ability to aggrandize power.

The commissariat's leaders intended to restore order to state administration, not only by bringing budgets and accounts into balance and by ferreting out and eliminating bureaucratic abuses, but by wielding "live, real control over all organs of economic construction, with the power to intervene everywhere and direct everything."<sup>34</sup> Yet there was an almost comical discrepancy between the role the leaders of the commissariat thought they must play and their inability to perform any more than sporadic auditing functions. They blamed their difficulties on the organs they were inspecting rather than on their own limitations.<sup>35</sup> They spent much of 1918 drafting a comprehensive statute on state control but did not obtain the government's approval of wider powers until April 1919, when a new statute, only partially corresponding to their wishes, was adopted.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of 1918, public dissatisfaction with the chaos in the field of control reached a high level. At the same time that the State Control Commissariat sought to expand its role, a prominent trade union official, accusing the commissariat of bureaucratic parochialism, called for its replacement by a trade union organization.<sup>37</sup> Several other Soviet agencies, including the Supreme Economic Council, had their own internal control offices. The Supreme Economic Council convened a series of meetings in the autumn of 1918 with other Soviet institutions to discuss the situation (initially overlooking the state control agency). But the meetings produced no resolution of the jurisdictional conflict nor any comprehensive definition of control.<sup>38</sup> The Defense Council, which was the supreme coordinating body over civil and military policy, met on December 1, 1918 and extended the purview of the State Control Commissariat into new and broader areas: uncovering sabotage, raising productivity, and improv-

34. *Biulleten' izvestii gosudarstvennogo kontroliia*, 1918, no. 5, p. 3.

35. *Ibid.*, no. 4, p. 11.

36. Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 114.

37. N. Glebov, "Rabochii kontrol'," *Professional'nyi vestnik*, 1919, no. 1, p. 10. In addition to the enterprise cells for control overseen by the trade unions, there was evidently a new organizational form for trade union-based control in 1918, called "workers' inspectorates." These bodies originated with committees formed in factories under trade union sponsorship during the summer and fall of 1918, principally to look after health and safety conditions. They also developed a system of district offices and inspectors in early December 1918 (see *Vestnik narodnogo komissariata truda*, 1918, no. 5-6, p. 5 and 1919, no. 1-2, pp. 70-74). Other inspectorates were formed by workers who had gained experience during a tour of duty with the State Control Commissariat (Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 141). The Council of People's Commissars and the Central Trade Union Council also formed special inspectorates to safeguard food transports (Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 142 and K. V. Gusev, *Kratkii ocherk istorii organov partiino-gosudarstvennogo kontroliia v SSSR* [Moscow, 1965], p. 11). By and large, these inspectorates seem to have formed part of the trade union rather than the State Control Commissariat bureaucracy.

38. *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn'*, 1919, no. 13, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, December 4, 1918, p. 3; *Izvestiia*, December 6, 1918, p. 4. Although I have not discussed the role of the Supreme Economic Council (VSNKh) in the control field, it too claimed jurisdiction over control as part of its general regulatory mission. The VSNKh hoped to integrate factory-level control bodies into its regional economic councils and to form a control department at the national level. Such a department was formed in June 1918, and the VSNKh became a regular participant in interbureaucratic discussions over the organization of control (*Novyi put'*, 1918, no. 2 [July], pp. 44-45; I. A. Gladkov, ed., *Natsionalizatsiia promyshlennosti*, pp. 124-25; *Biulleten' izvestii gosudarstvennogo kontroliia*, 1918, no. 11, pp. 9-10).

ing overall administrative efficiency throughout the state.<sup>39</sup> But it did not reform the structure of the commissariat itself.

In late December 1918 a special commission formed by the Soviet Executive Committee produced a design intended to reorganize the State Control Commissariat. The commission attempted to reconcile two aims: first, to incorporate into the reformed organization all existing control bodies and particularly those organized by workers themselves; and second, to turn the State Control Commissariat into a repository of expert knowledge about administration to which local governments could turn for guidance. The reorganization plan spelled out both ideas.<sup>40</sup>

The decree of April 9, 1919 incorporating the new design did not improve the quality of the commissariat's work nor did it bring about working cooperation between commissariat officials and working-class control bodies. Although the decree called for the merger of the "workers' inspectorates" into the commissariat, the trade unions apparently balked at surrendering the autonomy of these institutions. When economic problems again began to dominate political debate at the end of 1919, leading party and soviet representatives repeated the call for unification of the inspectorates with the commissariat. Thus despite the reorganization decree of April, Stalin's assumption of the leadership of the commissariat in March, and the demand of the Eighth Communist Party Congress that "the function of control in the Soviet Republic must be radically reorganized so as to create genuine control of a socialist character," the State Control Commissariat and the trade unions continued to exercise separate forms of control.<sup>41</sup>

The reform decrees of 1919 and 1920 were both predicated on the assumption that the defects in the commissariat's efforts and the lack of integration between the state and trade union organizations could be corrected with the same measures. A reintegrated, unified system of control was intended to recruit a base of support reaching into every corner of public life while ensuring the prompt, undeviating, and proper execution of the regime's directives.<sup>42</sup>

The idealized image of control was very far from realization in Bolshevik Russia. To be sure, after the reform of 1919 the commissariat increased the number of inspections it made and grew rapidly in size. Former tsarist controllers, who constituted 70 percent of the personnel as late as March, were so outnumbered by new recruits that they only made up 9 percent of the staff five months later.<sup>43</sup> As with many Soviet bureaucracies, however, the largest number of entrants were members of the former propertied classes rather than peasants

39. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, pp. 13-14.

40. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 4:217, 251; Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, pp. 14-15; S. N. Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost' RKI v 1920-1925 gg.* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 16-17.

41. *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda: Protokoly* (Moscow, 1959), p. 428 and *Obrazovanie*, pp. 70-72. The paucity of statements by Stalin pertaining to the work of the State Control Commissariat in his collected works and the lack of references to any actions taken by him in either Soviet or Western documentary or secondary literature, combined with what is known of his extensive efforts in the military-political and nationalities areas, strongly suggest that he headed this commissariat in name only. Operational power almost certainly belonged instead to his deputy V. A. Avanesov.

42. Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, p. 19.

43. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, p. 19.

or workers. Even at the end of 1920, after intensive efforts to recruit workers, fewer than 13 percent were workers, while peasants made up another 9.2 percent.<sup>44</sup> The commissariat was immense: it employed 34,000 persons on a full-time basis by the spring of 1921, and another 100,000 workers were associated with it on an ad hoc basis.<sup>45</sup> As it expanded its scope of operations, the conflicts and frictions in its relations with other Soviet institutions increased. Often its officials claimed the right to oversee the budgets of local governments, causing considerable ill-feeling on the part of local soviet authorities. It performed poorly even at auditing the records that were submitted. By demanding to review all budget estimates and expenditure reports for all central and local Soviet institutions, the commissariat severely strained its capacity for processing them. Its controllers acted slowly to approve needed expenditures; even so, they could only give cursory attention to the bulk of the submissions.<sup>46</sup> Many officials called for the commissariat's abolition on the grounds that it was "parasitical" and even "anti-Soviet." T. V. Sapronov claimed that for formalism and arbitrariness it was worse than the Cheka.<sup>47</sup> By year's end there were renewed calls for reform.

In December 1919 both the Eighth Communist Party Conference and the Eighth Soviet Congress discussed merger of the State Control Commissariat and the workers' control organizations. Deliberations reached an impasse over the question of whether the workers' groups should merge into the commissariat, or vice versa. Despite Lenin's support for the merger of workers' groups into the commissariat, the issue was resolved only with Deputy Commissar of State Control Avanesov's compromise formula that the new agency be called the "Worker-Peasant Inspectorate" and be required to acquire as much proletarian strength as possible. This proposal was adopted, and on February 7, 1920 the Workers'-Peasants' Inspectorate (*Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia* [RKI or *Rabkrin*]) was created.<sup>48</sup> Lenin called on the new organization to concentrate particularly on recruiting unskilled and female workers.<sup>49</sup>

Like the previous decree, the 1920 reorganization did not eliminate the disorder in the control field.<sup>50</sup> The decree stimulated the rapid spread of a new form called "cells of assistance," intended to link factory-level control with the commissariat, and in the first half of 1921 there were thought to be 12,000 such cells with some 45,000 participants. But again the evidence indicates that the trade unions did not cooperate with the reorganized commissariat.<sup>51</sup> Often trade unions simply refused to deal with the state controllers, or, when called upon to contribute personnel, sent the least competent persons available.<sup>52</sup> Only when

44. Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, p. 72.

45. Ibid. See also Gusev, *Kratkii ocherk*, p. 19.

46. Voskresenskaia, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 128 and Chugunov, *Organy sotsialisticheskogo kontroliia*, p. 26.

47. T. Sapronov, "Kontrol' kak nadstroika nad Sovetami ili organ Sovetov?" *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo*, 1919, no. 6, pp. 3-5.

48. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, pp. 24-30; *Obrazovanie*, pp. 579-80; Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, pp. 21-22.

49. Lenin, PSS, 40:64.

50. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, pp. 31-32.

51. B. Bor'ian, "Rabochii kontrol' (1917-1921)," *Vestnik truda*, 1921, no. 10-11, p. 33.

52. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspeksiia*, p. 75.

the Tenth Communist Party Congress in March 1921 decided that *Rabkrin* was obliged to work through trade union factory committees did relations between the State Control Commissariat and the local factory organs settle into collaboration.<sup>53</sup> When the Fourth Trade Union Congress was held in late May 1921, the delegates resolved that factory inspectors and trade union auditors ought to assume the corresponding positions in *Rabkrin*.<sup>54</sup> In short, it was not until after the first phase of the revolution that the jurisdictional conflict among the state and social bodies claiming the right of control was resolved. The trade unions retained some prerogatives, but the State Control Commissariat had preserved its essential autonomy.

For all its size and the scope of its inspections, *Rabkrin* did not meet the government's expectations. Lenin complained at the end of 1920 that *Rabkrin* existed "more as a wish" than a reality.<sup>55</sup> Looking back in 1925, another leading Bolshevik recalled that in attempting to trace every last kopeck of state expenditures, the inspectorate had lost sight of the large tasks, while being unable to cope with the myriad small ones, and in the end it accomplished nothing.<sup>56</sup> It antagonized other agencies (once, in the course of a great tour of children's homes, the director of one home threw the inspector from the State Control Commissariat out onto the street) and suffered from the loss of its able personnel to other institutions.<sup>57</sup> It was incapable of carrying out the narrower duties of auditing the state's books, and its response, seeking a broader mandate for oversight of all state administration, only increased the gap between its capabilities and its aspirations while exacerbating jurisdictional frictions.

Nonetheless, its leaders' dedication to the mission of rationalizing the cumbersome Soviet bureaucracy yielded some benefits. Because of its autonomy and the government's need for oversight of the state bureaucracy, the commissariat became a channel of supervision and feedback. Lacking a field of executive responsibility itself, it was free to investigate those agencies that did, becoming something of an ombudsman. The many inspection tours of other agencies and local government that its officials conducted convinced them that abuses and improprieties in the exercise of power were widespread and stimulated them to seek formal prosecutorial powers. Although such powers were not officially granted, the commissariat wielded them in fact.<sup>58</sup> Some investigations were prompted by citizens' complaints. After the reform of 1919 a bureau of complaints was formed specifically for the purpose of receiving and examining unsolicited complaints. Since the largest share of these concerned excesses by the Cheka, the bureau formed a special department for investigating complaints against the Cheka, especially those from individuals who claimed wrongful arrest. Between May and October 1919 the department reviewed 1,500 such cases and sided with the petitioner in over half of them.<sup>59</sup> The State Control

53. Bor'ian, "Rabochii kontrol'," pp. 36-37; Chugunov, *Organy sotsialisticheskogo kontroliia*, p. 27.

54. Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, p. 71.

55. Lenin, *PSS*, 42:34.

56. V. V. Kuibyshev, quoted in Gusev, *Kratkii ocherk*, pp. 18-19.

57. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspektitsiia*, p. 75. Of course the shortage of competent personnel was a severe problem among all Soviet organs of this period.

58. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspektitsiia*, p. 59; Martysevich and Portnov, *Sotsialisticheskii kontrol'*, pp. 59-74; Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, pp. 47-54.

59. Martysevich and Portnov, *Sotsialisticheskii kontrol'*, pp. 77-78.

Commissariat's interest in the criminal justice system also extended to the prisons. Its officials periodically inspected prisons, sometimes in the company of private citizens and employees of the Cheka. One such inspection in 1920 succeeded in obtaining the release of 30 percent of those incarcerated.<sup>60</sup>

The commissariat also made broad recommendations about general policy. It attempted to persuade the government to issue decrees prohibiting state agencies from dealing on the black market and directing that industrial production be concentrated in the largest enterprises, although both of these were fruitless and even counterproductive measures.<sup>61</sup> The attempts suggest that the commissariat aspired to a role in setting economic policy that corresponded to its early offer to intervene everywhere and direct everything. Benefiting from the desire among government leaders for an effective, centralized state control body, the commissariat managed to retain its independence and set its own course despite repeated efforts to democratize and rationalize it.

Still, the failure to reconstruct the State Control Commissariat cannot be explained solely by the importance of the ideal of control to the leaders' conception of a centralized economy. We must also take into account the severe discrepancy between the degree of organizational order that a centralized economy requires and the extreme fragmentation of Soviet institutions in this period. A centralized regime expends great effort on specifying and conveying orders to officials at successively lower ranks and on ensuring their compliance with the center's wishes. A hierarchical structure is the answer to this problem. An ideal hierarchy transmits commands down and feedback up the chain, with each level linked to the next. By carrying out fixed procedures, the system breaks down general tasks into more specific ones for lower levels, while aggregating information about observed performance for transmission back up to the top. The process of gathering, screening, and transmitting information is repeated until the top leadership possesses a comprehensive but economical picture of the state of affairs.

Despite its formal harmony, the Bolsheviks rejected the hierarchical model in three respects. Desiring to maximize power at the center so as to mobilize society for socialist construction, the Bolsheviks were reluctant to delegate power to regional and branch authorities out of fear that the procedural autonomy of lower officials reduced their own capacity for free action. Second, bureaucracy implied the lengthy and energy-consuming distractions of red tape, in which the overriding priorities of the day would be lost. Third, bureaucracy spelled the loss of revolutionary élan. As Bukharin's 1918 draft party program put it: "From top to bottom a workers' management of industry is gradually created. . . . If the higher boards will not be supported on the lower ones, then they will hang in the air, or be, as they say, bureaucratic institutions from which any live revolutionary spirit has fled."<sup>62</sup> In short, although mobilization required

60. Dorokhova, *Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspektiia*, p. 68; Martysevich and Portnov, *Sotsialisticheskii kontrol'*, pp. 85-86.

61. These recommendations were futile because of the insuperable addiction of the government to the black market for basic supplies and services and because some of the most productive economic units under the conditions of the time were those of the smallest scale, in which overhead costs were minimal. These points are elaborated in Remington, "Democracy and Development," chap. 6.

62. N. I. Bukharin, *Programma Kommunistov (bol'shevikov)* (Moscow, 1918), p. 35.

centralized rule, and centralization required a hierarchical order, the institutional embodiment of hierarchy — bureaucracy — was the nemesis of mobilization.<sup>63</sup>

The ideal control organization would enable the leaders to exercise centralized rule over the society by overseeing the bureaucracy and preventing “formalism,” “bureaucratism,” and isolation of the state from the workers. When Lenin asserted that socialism meant “building a centralized economy, an economy from the center,” probably neither he nor any other Bolshevik leader was fully aware of the reliance of centralized policy making on bureaucratic order.<sup>64</sup> The weakness of Soviet institutions in the face of overwhelming social crisis made effective centralized rule impossible. In a hierarchically organized system, the control bodies might simply have been local monitors of bureaucratic performance. But in the Soviet regime, they were needed, as were the party, police, media, and numerous special commissars sent out from Moscow, to make up for the center’s inability to maintain direct control over the vast Soviet bureaucracy.<sup>65</sup> The weakness of contact between central and local authorities, however, and the lack of coordination among administrative branches made the job of the State Control Commissariat impossibly broad. By expanding its mandate, the government enabled the commissariat to check some of the abuses of bureaucratic power. But a design deduced from the needs of a mobilization regime could not make the commissariat the omniscient center of real control that it was repeatedly directed to be.

Finally, the commissariat was required to absorb tens of thousands of proletarian recruits. As we noted before, one of the objectives of mass participation was the training of workers for their eventual duty as state administrators. When the first elections to *Rabkrin* were held in September 1920, the slogan of the campaign was: “Enter the RKI and learn to govern the state!”<sup>66</sup> Beyond this lay the longer term, theoretical goal of abolishing the separation of state and society in order to reintegrate man the producer with man the citizen. To this end the government persisted in seeking a merger between the trade union bodies and the commissariat. The efforts to rebuild a control machinery that combined them failed because neither the State Control Commissariat nor the trade unions could be made to surrender rights of control. The compromise that eventually broke this impasse ratified the separation of a general sphere of state control from the localized jurisdictions of elective organizations in the enterprises. In the end, the regime had not so much succeeded in constructing new control institutions as it had acknowledged the claims to control made by strong institutions inherited from the old regime.

63. In more theoretical terms, the process at work is that of the instrumentalization of ends of the movement, expressed behaviorally as a deradicalization or embourgeoisement of its members and institutionally as the bureaucratization of the system (see David E. Apter, *Choice and the Politics of Allocation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971]).

64. Lenin, *PSS*, 37:422.

65. The proliferation of redundant bureaucracies as an outcome of the center’s efforts to enforce compliance is a phenomenon that Anthony Downs calls the “law of control duplication” (see Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* [Boston: Little-Brown & Co., 1966], p. 148).

66. Ikonnikov, *Organizatsiia i deiatel'nost'*, p. 32.