REVOLUTIONARY MACHISMO
AND ANIMAL FARM

In this article I am revisiting a problem that has always interested me: How revolutions go wrong; how revolutionaries establish forms of rule and types of authority that they had rejected at a theoretical level—the "animal farm" phenomenon. In my earlier explorations of revolutionary leadership I was impressed by the defense mechanism called "identification with the aggressor" by Anna Freud. Later, I became increasingly interested in the processes leading to the usurpation of power by "hired guns" in a movement initially led by intelligentsia theoreticians. Here I deal with the problem of the hired gun by examining the fine structure of the revolutionary movement. I have formulated the problem in this fashion: Why do revolutionary organizations promote the kinds of people who wreak devastation when the revolutionaries come to power?

It is tempting to take an exclusively structural approach and to say that revolutions tend to run to extremes, to self-destruct. At the gross structural level, one may say that revolutionary processes "select" for certain styles of leadership. Harold Lasswell pioneered the psychoanalytic approach to this problem. Nathan Leites produced one of the first systematic studies of the "hardness" encoded in Bolshevik language and in the intelligentsia subculture. There is nothing mysterious about the emergence of ruthless leaders and their victory in an extended process of political struggle. "Hards" tend to win in revolutionary struggle and they tend to be dictatorial. For a nineteenth-century revolutionary, the European historical record contained sufficient data to suggest the probability of such an outcome. The Russian intelligentsia knew in advance about the perils of revolution. They had carefully studied earlier revolutions and had their own revolutionary experience and insight, acquired during decades of revolutionary struggle. Indeed, the Bakunin-Nechaev


episode was part of their experience—an early warning of what might happen. Yet all of the revolutionary intelligentsia’s experience and foresight did not prevent the revolution from devouring its children in the most monstrous fashion. This strongly suggests that structural factors determine outcomes.

A structural approach does not require the exact repetition of a pattern or strict conformity to laws of revolutionary process. Those who believe in patterns in history identify “substitutions” for elements of a model revolutionary process or find a small number of variations on a theme. One does not even have to believe in a general theory of history in order to accept the notion that revolutions tend to follow a general pattern. Some rough and ready assumptions about the projects undertaken by modern revolutionaries serve quite well. Revolutionary struggle attracts extremists, “true believers,” who in turn create factions or parties; leaders of factions believe they have the only correct policy; they often destroy other factions or parties in order to achieve exclusive control; those most ruthless and clever in the pursuit of power tend to win. But proponents of a strictly structural approach do not care about individual psychology. To them, neither individual nor group “voluntarism” contributes anything important to the realization of this pattern. They aver that it is not important to explore the personal, psychological roots of the ruthlessness of the leaders.

No one has been more creative than Isaac Deutscher in finding structural factors to explain Stalin’s behavior and style of leadership. He made Stalin an extension of Russian political culture as well as of the new bureaucracy; of “Asiatic backwardness or backwardness in general”; of the inevitable processes of revolution in backward peoples. In short, Stalin represented the structural “revenge of history” or the inevitable excesses of revolution and modernization. To be sure, Deutscher did hesitantly explore Stalin’s

4. I believe Trotsky, if not the first to use the notion of substitutism, was the first to popularize it. Among practitioners of this approach Isaac Deutscher stands out. In a sense, it is the Marxian method for “saving the phenomena”—finding a way to make the Marxian theory of historical stages and class revolution work when history fails to unfold according to plan. The Russian Marxists’ fascination with the French Revolution has been well studied. See, for example, J. Bergman, “The Perils of Historical Analogy: Leon Trotsky on the French Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 73-98; Robert V. Daniels, “Trotsky’s Conception of the Revolutionary Process,” in his Trotsky, Stalin, and Socialism (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 11-24.

5. Among practitioners of this approach Theda Skocpol stands out. See her States and Social Revolutions (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), 14-18.

6. Isaac Deutscher, Stalin, a Political Biography (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), especially chs. 8 and 9. In a great many ways Deutscher tries to show that historical actors are instruments of larger forces. In portraying collectivization, for example, Deutscher makes Stalin a sort of puppet, passively obeying the imperatives of the situation. In each major episode of Stalinism, Deutscher finds some historical precedent or analogy that connects Stalin to a