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The Transformation of Russia: The Role of the Political Élite

DAVID LANE

IN THE POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY of the 1970s theorising about political participation and change focused on the long-term effects of modernisation. Economic development was associated with rationalisation, differentiation, urbanisation, widespread education and the growth of the division of labour; these developments led to the decline of the *ancien régime* and to the rise, on the one hand, of market capitalism with its attendant freedom and competition and, on the other, to competitive pluralistic processes associated with modern democracy. This was an optimistic political scenario which, it was anticipated, would involve a shift from autocratically ruled societies to democratic ones. As Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens summarise the research findings, ‘quantitative cross-national comparisons of many countries ... found consistently a positive correlation between development and democracy. They thus come to relatively optimistic conclusions about the chances of democracy, not only in the advanced capitalist nations but also in the developing countries of today’ (Rueschemeyer *et al.*, 1992, p. 3).¹ Failure to follow such a course, it was surmised, would lead to decay and decline. Yet such prognoses were faulted in the 1980s when regimes in South-East Asia and Latin America combined authoritarian rule with economic and social development.

In the communist world, until the late 1980s, the centralisation of power in the party-state also belied the modernisation approach; political stability seemed assured without the legitimisation of a pluralistic competitive party system or representative infrastructure. The political scenario was now pessimistic: autocratic rule was compatible with economic and social development. The transition from communism, which occurred in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, may indeed have had underpinnings in the long-term maturation and growth of social groups, such as the intelligentsia—consequent on rising educational levels and occupational change. But such development cannot explain the breakdown of communism and neither can it predict the type of regime which will ensue. The transition from ‘communism’ may take the form of state capitalism, corporatism, pluralist democracy or even the reversion to some type of state socialism.

Recent theorising has suggested that likely outcomes may be anticipated by examining the role of élites in the process of political change and also by considering their political orientation.² Two kinds of ‘transitions’ are usually defined. ‘Democratic’ ones are characterised by negotiated pacts between actors in the dominant élites leading to the sharing or the conceding of power to ascendant élites (O’Donnell

& Schmitter, 1986). 'Breakdowns', on the other hand, are the consequences of internal élite division and ideological incompatibility. However, the growing literature on élite structure and orientation in transitional societies has little, if any, analysis of the political élite as an agent of transition under state socialism.³ The state socialist societies, particularly the USSR, presented examples of supposedly 'ideologically unified' élites which have moved to collapse (Higley & Burton, 1989, p. 22). The transition literature asserts that political change is a 'consequence—direct or indirect—of important shifts within the authoritarian regime itself' (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, p. 19). This article attempts to link élite activity not only to interests in society⁴ but also to exogenous ones.

On the basis of interviews with members of the political élite, an analysis is made of their conceptions of the interests and forces influencing policy. It explores the political orientations of the political élite in the transition under President El'tsin in Russia between 1991 and 1993 and compares them with developments which occurred under Gorbachev in the 1985 to 1991 period. Finally, distinctions are drawn between the process of transition to capitalism and democracy in Russia and in other countries.

Methods

Defining the 'political élite' is a complex problem in any society, even ones with established political institutions and open processes. In the transitional period in Russia, in which the institutions of Soviet power had been destroyed and the new institutions and élites were being formed, the political leadership has been subject to rapid internal renewal. Three main sectors of the Russian Federation's political élite on a national level were identified: the executive (or government) élite, the rule-making élite and the leaders of parties and factions in parliament. Membership of the political élite was limited to those in post between January 1992 and December 1993.

The executive élite was specified in terms of persons who were ministers, deputy ministers and chairmen of committees of the government of the Russian Federation (also included was one chairman of a Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States). The executive also included members of the President's own apparatus and his political advisers. Of this group, 39 people were interviewed. The second sector of the political élite was composed of two parts: the law makers and the legal adjudicators; the former was made up of leading deputies of the Russian parliament—those who held the position of chairman, deputy chairman or secretary to a parliamentary committee or commission; the second part included seven members of the Constitutional Court—in all 43 interviewees. Third were the leaders of parties or groups who also had been elected to the Russian parliament—a total of 18 respondents. It should be remembered that during the period in question (January 1992 to December 1993) there was movement between the above sectors of the political élite—members of the parliament moving into and out of El'tsin's presidential apparatus. These one hundred members of the political élite were interviewed in Moscow in the spring and summer of 1994.⁵

The research parallels a similar study made of 116 members of the Gorbachev political leadership in post between 1985 and 1991 carried out in the autumn of 1993.

Interviews here were conducted with three sectors of the political élite: (1) 59 members of the Soviet government élite, (2) 24 members of the party élite and (3) 33 'influential' people, including members of the Supreme Soviet—a total of 116.⁶

Influences on decision making: policy issues

The more recent transition literature asserts that élite changes are endogenous to the regime. The 'shift to democracy' is linked to the inability of traditional dictatorships to reconcile the interests of the military, labour, landowners and the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie in particular is an interest which promotes the democratic shell of representative democracy, or polyarchy. What then were the interests involved in the transformation of Russia? On the basis of interviews I sought firstly to construct a 'reputational' analysis of the major forms of influence and political power and secondly to indicate the extent of élite solidarity and division. The responses give insight into the variety of interests influencing the political élite.

To uncover different influences on decision making in crucial periods of political change between 1991 and 1993, questions were asked which covered different areas of policy: the dissolution of the USSR, the privatisation of assets and the move to a market economy, the banning of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; finally, the respondents were asked to indicate the most important influences in the move to a pluralist political and economic system. These questions were analogous to ones asked of the Gorbachev élite and comparisons are made with these earlier responses.⁷ A further question evaluates the cohesion and division of the political élites, the legitimacy of the regime and the type of reform preferred by the respondents. Multiple choice responses were defined on the basis of political forces and interests known to be important on the basis of previous research conducted by the author (for details see Lane, 1995).

The collapse of the USSR was followed by the fragmentation of the units of Soviet power and the formation of 15 independent states from the previous Union republics. The respondents were asked which of the following were instrumental in furthering the independence and sovereignty of the Russian Republic:⁸

- (a) members of the parliament of the RF [Parlt];
- (b) ministers of the RF [Mins];
- (c) interests of the old *nomenklatura* system [OINom];
- (d) the President and his advisory staff [Pres];
- (e) political activists outside parliament in the RF—leaders of parties or other political groups [PolIn];
- (f) foreign organisations (such as the World Bank) or foreign political leaders [WesInPe];
- (g) business interests in the private sector [PvtSec];
- (h) the military leadership [Mil];
- (i) the need of the political leadership to demonstrate to Western leaders that it was seriously interested in economic reform [WesExamp].

The responses to these questions are shown in Figure 1 (the key to the abbreviations is shown in the list above). The presidential apparatus is clearly the most significant,

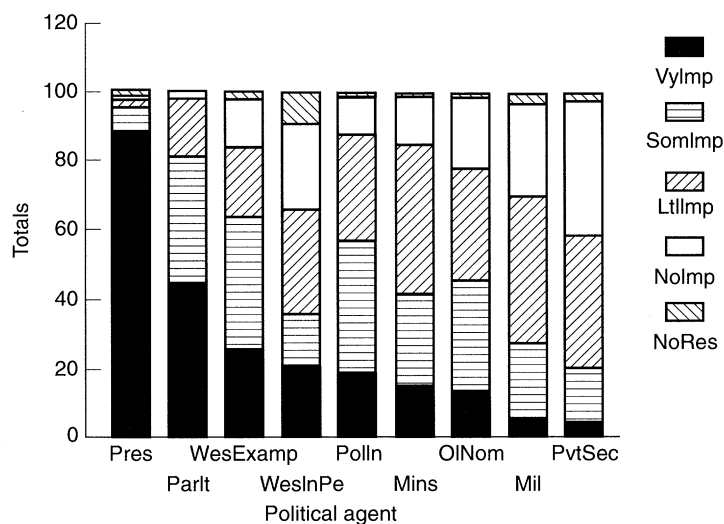


FIGURE 1. FORMATION OF INDEPENDENT STATE: INFLUENCES ON DECISION.

followed by the parliament. The next important set of influences was the West, either indirectly—policy being set to produce outcomes likely to receive approval from the West, or directly as a consequence of pressure from organisations (such as the World Bank) or leading politicians. The role of private business was regarded as relatively insignificant and so was that of the military; clearly the influence of the old *nomenklatura* was now negligible.

Compared with the transition period presided over by Gorbachev, the political context had changed tremendously, hence questions and answers are qualitatively different in the two periods. To indicate the kinds of interests impinging on internal issues we asked about the interests influencing Gorbachev's policy on the regions.⁹ The rank order of the responses on influences on Gorbachev's nationality policy was as follows: regional political leaders, Western political leaders, regional political movements, advisers to Gorbachev, leaders of the political opposition, USSR Supreme Soviet, military leaders, government of the USSR, business and economic interests, trade unions. Clearly a shift had taken place: the leaders and movements in the regions were no longer given much importance (bear in mind that Gorbachev was faced by secessionist movements in the Republics) though the West was still clearly perceived as a major driver of policy; under El'tsin the incumbent political executive and legislature were the major influences.

Figure 1 shows the aggregated views of the El'tsin political élite. Above I defined the political élite in terms of three different constituencies: executive, rule-making, and party leaders. Were there any significant differences in the perceptions of these groups? The data were re-analysed to test the independence of responses of the three groups to the different questions. Only on two sets of responses was there any significant difference in their frequencies. The difference in response of government executive, parliamentary leaders and party groups to the question about the influence

of foreign organisations was significant: Chi-squared = 0.00687. The executive élite (essentially the appointees of the President) were clearly at odds with the rule-making and other political leaders, the former holding that foreign organisations had little influence whereas the latter as a whole believed quite the contrary. Though not statistically significant, the only other influence on which there was any major disagreement was the role of politicians leading parties and factions: the executive élite giving them less weight than the other two groups.

There is an important methodological implication to be drawn here for reputational analysis: élite sectors may differ in their views about 'who makes the decisions' in the light of their own interests and also in the light of declaring their views about interests. The executive's legitimacy is undermined by dependence on foreigners. Clearly the parliamentary and party élites believed this to be the case. In a previous study of the Gorbachev élite's responses (Lane, 1996a) there were no such divisions, as foreign influences were considered more benign.

One of the major policy initiatives of the El'tsin government was the move to the market and to privatisation of state assets. Which were the political forces driving this policy? We asked: 'Under President El'tsin, the Russian government between 1991 and 1993 pursued a policy of movement to a market economy and the extension of privatisation. With regard to the policy of privatisation of state assets, how would you estimate the influence of the following on the adoption of this policy?'

Figure 2 indicates that strategy was perceived as propelled from the top: President El'tsin and his advisers were considered to be the major interests, supported by ministers appointed by him. The West indirectly (item 2) and directly (item 4) were again prominent. Demands from 'society' were relatively unimportant: the private sector was considered to be relatively inconsequential. The respondents considered that the old system of political power had been broken: note the very low rankings

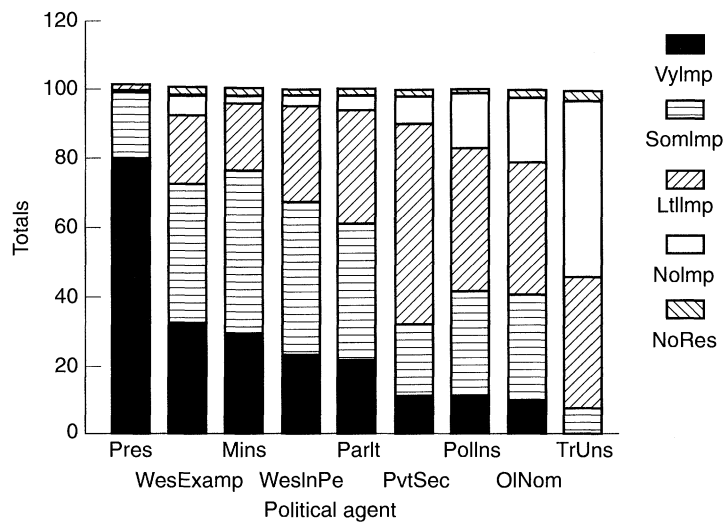


FIGURE 2. PRIVATISATION OF PROPERTY: INFLUENCES ON DECISION.

of the old *nomenklatura*. Study of the variation of responses between the members of the three groups showed that there were no significant differences between the frequency of distribution of the responses. The comparison with the Gorbachev political élite also shows relatively little change: top advisers to the president and foreign influences were seen as most important.

One of the major political moves of the political leadership under El'tsin after the attempted coup of August 1991 was the suppression of the Communist Party of the USSR and later the sequestration of its property. This action epitomises the absence of a pact or compromise with the defenders of the old regime—at least in Russian politics at a national level.

Table 1 shows that the unanimous opinion of the political élite was that El'tsin and his political circle played the major role here. In this the leadership was motivated not only by self-interest but by the need to demonstrate its political legitimacy to foreign interests. Examination of the data shows that these sentiments were shared fairly evenly by parts of the political élite. Only on one issue was there disagreement. The government élite again gave very little salience to the role of foreign organisations or people whereas the rule-making and party groupings gave them much more credence—the leaders of political parties and factions were particularly emphatic about the role of the West.

A final question attempted to tap the attitude of the El'tsin political élite to the

TABLE 1
SUPPRESSION OF THE CPSU

Question: 'In the period following the coup of August 1991, the CPSU was suppressed and later its property was confiscated. We would like to know your opinion on who or what played a decisive role in this policy'.

	Responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
The President and his advisory staff	93	5	0	0	2
The need of the political leadership to demonstrate to Western leaders that it was seriously interested in political reform.	28	42	17	11	2
Political activists outside parliament in the RF—leaders of parties or other groups	17	45	25	1	2
Ministers of the RF	15	38	31	1	5
Members of the parliament of the RF	11	56	21	9	3
Institutions or people outside Russia	10	23	22	39	6
Business interests	2	16	50	30	2
Interests of the old <i>nomenklatura</i> system	8	21	18	50	2
Military	1	11	34	50	4

Key to responses:

(1) Very important; (2) Of some importance; (3) Little importance; (4) Of no importance at all; (5) Don't know, no response.

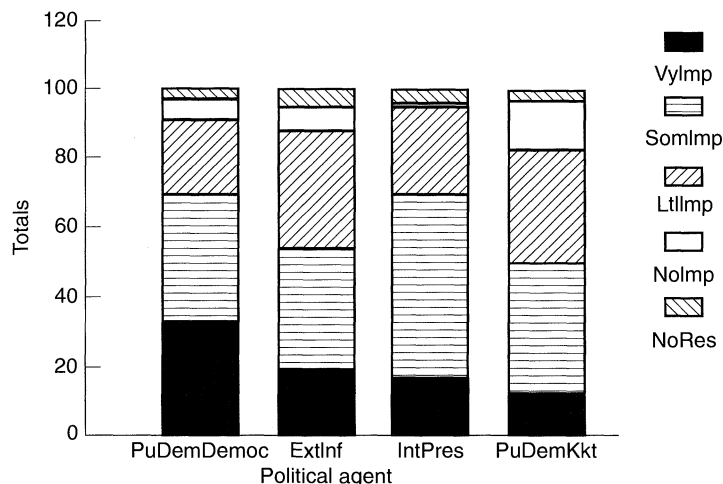


FIGURE 3. FORMATION OF DEMOCRATIC AND MARKET SYSTEM.

transition to a market economy and multiple and competing parties. (As these processes represented a different stage in the transformation period, no comparison could be made with the Gorbachev era.) We asked: 'In the period since the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, the new political leadership under El'tsin has pursued a policy intended to introduce an economic system based on markets and a political system based on parties and contested elections. On these developments, which of the following do you consider to have been: a very important influence, somewhat influential, a little influential, of no influence at all?'

- (1) Public demand for multiple parties and contested elections?
- (2) External (international and foreign) pressure?
- (3) Internal pressure (from leaders of political, economic and regional institutions)?
- (4) Public demand for a market system?

The results are shown in Figure 3.

The political élite as a whole attributed the major impetus for a Western political system (multiple parties and competitive elections) to 'public demand'. At the other end of the scale, there was considerable division about public demand for a 'market system'—only 13% of the respondents giving it 'a very important influence'. Overall, external pressure was less widely rated an important influence. However, these results mask considerable differences between the three parts of the political élite. A Chi-squared test showed that the difference in responses between the three groups on the influence of foreign pressure was statistically significant (Chi-squared = 0.00452). The El'tsin executive strongly denied the influence of Western forces and favoured the authority of the people, whereas the law-making and political party élite, while not denying some support for a movement to a pluralist system, stressed the role of foreign influence here. Similarly, over the pressure of the people for a multi-party and

democratic system, there was again a statistically significant difference in the measure of the perceptions (Chi-squared = 0.00245). The government executive claimed its influence to be crucial whereas the leaders of parties and groups attributed little leverage to it. There is clearly a significant division of opinion here between the executive and legislative parts of the political élite. Before we turn to generalise from these responses, we consider the views of the political élite on the legitimacy of the system.

System legitimacy

The respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the political institutions in place under El'tsin and the kind of change they thought was required. The question offered four alternatives, ranging from the system being 'fundamentally sound' to 'basically flawed'. In Table 2 four sets of data are compared: A: the El'tsin élite; B: the Gorbachev élite; C and D: two studies of West European politicians and executives. The range of responses shown in Table 2 enables one to distinguish between piecemeal reformers and more radical advocates of change.

As might be expected, no member of the El'tsin élite thought that there was little need for change, and 19% believed the system needed to be 'completely replaced' (column A). The large proportion (12%) of non-responses probably indicates negative views which the respondents, out of loyalty to the government, did not want to declare. Column B is a comparative study of the political élite under Gorbachev (referring to the *perestroika* period when an identical question was asked). Study of Table 2 shows the asymmetrical attitudes to the existing political order held by the political élites under El'tsin and Gorbachev (40% believing it to be 'fundamentally

TABLE 2
EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN RUSSIA, USSR AND WESTERN EUROPE

	A	B	C	D
1. Fundamentally sound, with little need for change	0	1	36	60
2. Fundamentally sound, but some reforms are necessary	51	40	54	37
3. Basically unsound and should be completely replaced	19	19	2	0
4. Basically flawed, though significant reforms could be achieved	18	40	8	3
5. No answer, Don't know	12	—	—	—
	100	100	100	100
	<i>n</i> = 100	116	456	420

A = El'tsin élite. Question asked: 'Turning to the economic and political institutions which have been put in place between January 1992 and the present day, do you think that the political system is now ...'.

B = Gorbachev élite. Question asked: 'Looking back at the political and economic situation inherited by Gorbachev when he took over as General Secretary of the CPSU, do you think the political system at that time was ...'.

C = European politicians' élite (Aberbach *et al.*).

D = European bureaucratic élite (Aberbach *et al.*).

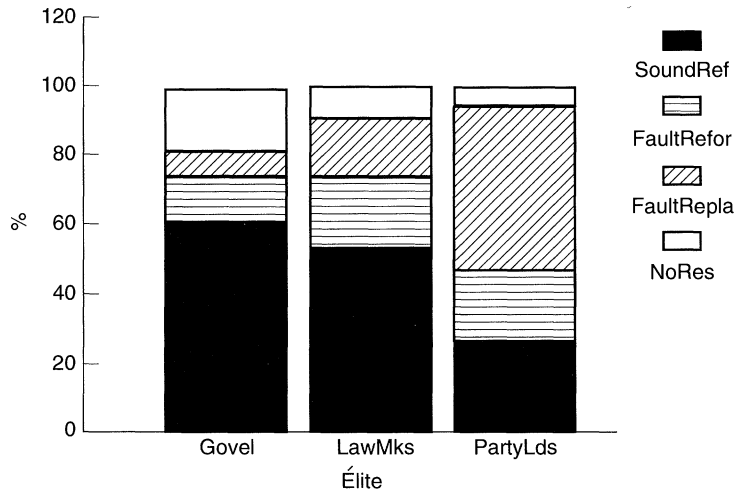


FIGURE 4. EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL SYSTEM: RUSSIAN ÉLITE COMPARED.

sound' and another 40% thinking it 'basically flawed'). The extent of disaffection was similar in scale under both leaders.

Which constituencies of the political élite were the most critical of the system formed under the reform leadership? Again there were significant differences between the three sectors of the élite. The results are shown in Figure 4. As might be expected, El'tsin's government executive expressed confidence in the system—though some 20% of its members believed it to be significantly flawed (and note the high number, 18.4%, in the non-response column). The politicians, on the other hand, were much more critical, with nearly half of the leaders of political groups calling for complete replacement of the system. Clearly, the different sectors of the political élite were agreed that change was necessary but were fundamentally divided about the scale of further reform and the legitimacy of the institutions and processes already in place.

The extent of élite alienation from the institutions of the Russian Republic (as well as the USSR under Gorbachev) is brought out in the comparison with West European politicians and civil servants. Columns C and D of Table 2 (see also Figure 5) show comparative data from a study of politicians and executives in Europe. (The data refer to surveys in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden in the early 1970s. See Aberbach *et al.*, 1981, p. 195.) Unlike the European politicians and civil servants, where only 10% of the former and 3% of the latter thought the political system to be 'basically unsound', a very high proportion (37%) of the El'tsin élite took this position. Whatever the methodological shortcomings of these comparisons, there appear to be qualitative differences between the élite attitudes in Western Europe and the USSR/Russia with serious implications for regime stability in the latter. Stable democracies are characterised by a structure of political élites which accept the basic parameters of the political and economic system: its structures, laws, forms of property, and the legitimacy of its political outputs. The implication here is that

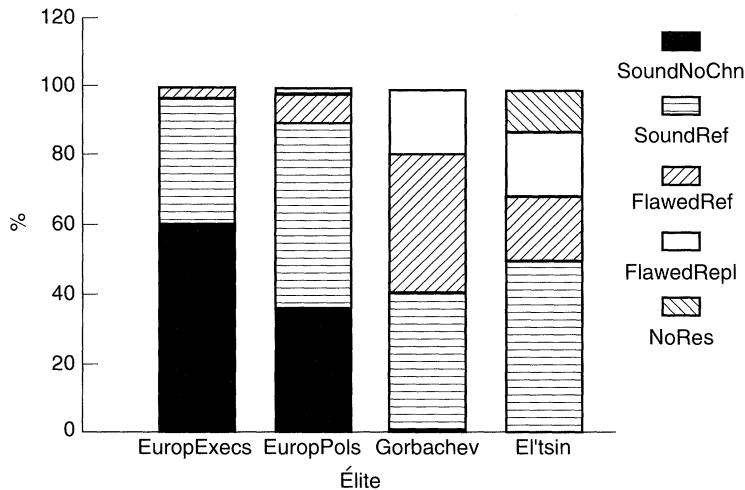


FIGURE 5. EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL SYSTEM: COMPARATIVE DATA.

Russia is likely to experience authoritarian rule of one type or another, with formal 'democratic' interludes. The élites are fundamentally divided about the legitimacy of the system—a characteristic shared also by the political élite which collapsed under Gorbachev.

Discussion

Transitions from autocratic rule in countries with established markets and private property are usually seen to stem from endogenous forces, in which the ascendant bourgeoisie plays an important contributory role. As Moore (1967, p. 418) in his work on the origins of dictatorship and democracy has put it: 'No bourgeois, no democracy'. Moore, of course, is concerned with modern parliamentary-type 'bourgeois democracies'—not all forms of democracy are dependent on the formation of a propertied market class. The reasoning here is that the bourgeoisie has a stake in the institutionalisation of private property, on which legal rational norms are based. Furthermore, a parliamentary type of democracy is dependent on a private entrepreneurial class because its interests are furthered by a limited state and, initially at least, representative parliamentary-type institutions. As Lindblom (1977, p. 162 ff.) has pointed out, 'the history of democracy is largely an account of the pursuit of liberty'. In the West the constitutional movement was the means by which the rising middle class of entrepreneurs and merchants sought to protect wealth, property and economic freedom from arbitrary state action. 'State capitalism'—in which economic assets are owned by the state, on the other hand, has no interest in furthering representative institutions as coordination may be secured by the state apparatuses and representative institutions may challenge the hegemony of the state through demands for individual rights and civil society. In Russia, my study shows that the 'new

bourgeoisie' under both Gorbachev and El'tsin were seen to have played an insignificant role in influencing the reform process. Its members also had little direct representation among the political élites.

Moore also discusses other conditions (the peasantry and feudalism) which influenced the outcome of a democratic or autocratic form of capitalism in its formative stage. To apply Moore's structural analysis to the transition in the former communist countries, where the traditional peasantry, feudal lord and bourgeoisie had no place, one needs to consider the role of the previous pillars of Soviet power—the KGB, the military and the *nomenklatura*. This study would suggest that such institutions had little, if any, influence over the decisions we have examined under Gorbachev and El'tsin. Whether the former members of the KGB, military and *nomenklatura* have benefited from the collapse of state socialism (which seems likely) is a separate question which cannot be addressed here. By the same token, those who 'make revolutions' do not necessarily profit from them. (The public sector 'intelligentsia' have gained the political and intellectual freedom they sought but have lost their relative economic advantage to the new business class, many of whom originate from the middle and lower administrative strata.)

Of greater importance to the process of 'transition' is the fact that the El'tsin executive élite did not attempt to form a pact or compromise with the former dominant political power—the Communist Party élite—but strove to and succeeded in breaking it. This is probably the root cause of the crucial division between different sectors of the political élite about the legitimacy of the regime introduced by El'tsin. There is another important difference in Russia compared with England and the 'democratic path' taken there in the English Civil War (see Tawney, 1954, as cited by Moore, 1967, p. 15, fn. 29). Whereas in England the bourgeois interests (within the landowning classes and the rising bourgeoisie) had an independent economic base and utilised Parliament to legitimate their interests and the country pursued a 'democratic form' of transition from feudalism to capitalism, in Russia the Parliament contained 'regional interests' linked to state socialism opposing private property and the market. Hence, like the move to capitalism in Germany and Japan, Russia under El'tsin has had to pursue a revolution from above. Western political leaders strongly supported the executive of El'tsin because he assured a transition to capitalism, and only a handful of English parliamentarians opposed the storming of the Russian Parliament by El'tsin's armed forces.

Here then we pinpoint a major difference in the transition process to post-communism. Under state socialism, the bourgeois formation was so weak that it may be discounted as a significant factor in the impetus for reform (see Janos, 1991, pp. 81–112; Bova, 1991, pp. 113–139; Pei, 1994). Writers such as Pei (1994, p. 205), following Garton Ash, in seeking causes of reform in China and the Soviet Union, find that '... the principal forces of change, whether economic or political, came from society'. The data we have considered, however, would suggest that political forces from 'society' were minor actors.¹⁰ Changes in the social structure, of course, had latent effects in creating more amorphous demands shaping expectations and a climate of change; my study suggests that the political élite recognised public support for democratic political processes, though there was less backing for the economic market. In the USSR and then the Russian Federation, it is remarkable that the forces

constituting 'civil society', particularly the major internal social actor, labour, are deemed to have played a negligible role in making the transformation.

The testimony of the political élites would lead one to concur with writers such as Higley and O'Donnell that these were transitions led by a faction of the political élite. The composition of the élite under El'tsin, while not differing much in its social position and origin, was institutionally and politically different from the previous Gorbachev one. Élitist theorists, however, have been subject to the criticism that they ignore the interests (classes or groups) to which the (reformist) section of the élite is responding or which the incumbent élite is defending.¹¹ O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986, p. 24), for example, discuss inter-élite conflict in terms of the journalistic categories of 'hard-liners' and 'soft-liners', and alliances and pacts between factions of the élites are at the centre of this analysis. Przeworski (1986, pp. 53–54) discounts an interest-group approach and a 'strategic posture' (hard-liner, soft-liner) because of the volatility of the processes of regime transformation. Such studies, like the earlier ones of Moore, all emphasise *internal* developments; exogenous factors are deemed to play a minor role. Though not denying any role to external influences, O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986, p. 18) regard as 'fruitless' the search for 'some international factor or context' which 'causes regimes to collapse'. This position in general underplays external factors, not only in terms of the role of international corporations, but also the part played by the foreign policy of the metropolitan powers and international agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, which have undoubtedly influenced internal developments in countries, in Latin America and Eastern Europe. MccGwire (1991, pp. 1117–1118) has summarised American policy as involving 'a sustained attempt to achieve military superiority', a general militarization of the international arena and 'a massive "psychological" attack against the socialist community ... '.

A crucial political aspect of the class formation and élite structure of the USSR and Russia following its collapse was (and is) the absence of an ascendant entrepreneurial class which would have had an interest in the evolution of a bourgeois democratic regime and its institutions. The importance of foreigners as shown by this study has to be seen in this light. The executive of both Gorbachev and El'tsin has been pushed into dependence on outsiders to support the move to a capitalist economy; this in turn has intensified élite instability and further weakened integration. Ironically perhaps, dependence was on Western powers which had sought to undermine the previous communist government and its political and economic order. (For instance, in February 1990 Gorbachev reversed policy on Germany and accepted reunification. The policy was hailed by George Bush as a 'triumph for "Western" values' (cited by Garthoff, 1994, p. 407).)

The politically conservative leaders of the leading Western nations advocated a policy of competitive markets in the polity (parties and elections) as well as in the economy (privatised production for exchange). Both these policies clearly had implications for 'transition' in the USSR and Russia: the rise of parties and elections led to the break-up of the USSR; and a marketised form of exchange paved the way for the import of Western products, capital and the exploitation of the indigenous labour force. The linkage with foreign interests provided the ballast in the process of capitalist transition—in the place of an indigenous bourgeois class or, as in early

capitalism, a landed aristocracy with a commercial and bourgeois outlook. It is important here to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the previous dominant institutions (KGB, military, *nomenklatura*) performed a surrogate role for the bourgeoisie. Therefore, if a necessary condition of bourgeois democracy is a bourgeoisie, it is clear why such a democracy has not developed in Russia and why Western interests are given such a prominent place in the views of the political élites.

The process of internal reform saw the reform leadership, first under Gorbachev and then under El'tsin, relying on foreign world actors to further internal policy (see Rose, 1991, p. 462). Consequently, élite dissension was heightened. Under El'tsin, transition involved the suppression of the former communist élite and a physical assault on the legislative one which is invariably the base of a 'democratic' transition. In Russian conditions, however, the parliament (and its élite) represented traditional and regional interests—rather than bourgeois ones. Here the dominant élite which emerged under El'tsin was dependent in its strategy on creating an image of legitimacy to the leading countries of the West.

In an earlier paper (Lane, 1996a), on the Gorbachev leadership, I pointed out that within-system reform could never have succeeded concurrently with political stability because the political élites were divided about the viability of the Soviet system. This study of the political élite under El'tsin comes to the same conclusions. There are fundamental disagreements between the élite actors themselves about the legitimacy of the emerging Russian political and economic system and the objectives of reform. Like under Gorbachev, many among the executive elite regard the emerging institutions as 'fundamentally sound' whereas leading groups among the legislative counter-élite do not recognise the effectiveness and legitimacy of the regime. Rather than putting bourgeois democracy in place, the popular assembly (the parliament) contains significant political forces which seek to maintain elements of the traditional system—particularly over the rights of ownership of property, including land. They also seek to limit presidential power and thereby weaken current policies of privatisation and marketisation. The political space between the components of the political élite is too wide for a 'negotiated settlement' (associated with transition to democracy) and consequently the transformation from state socialism has been one not only of systemic collapse (internal wars, hyperinflation) and slippage to authoritarian rule.

The context of the transition differs considerably from those countries where 'negotiated transitions' have taken place. In the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and in Russia under El'tsin the economy was in decline and, to accommodate a market economy, the state's authority was intentionally weakened by the reformers. Negotiated pacts are also dependent on ideological compromise, and here the legacy of a planned economy and a welfare state (including non-market property rents and prices of necessities) were much more difficult to reconcile with the introduction of a market economy—which was already in place in the capitalist transitions of the 1980s. The reformist leadership has not succeeded in articulating an alternative ideology able to bind the different segments of the élites. El'tsin took administrative measures to destroy the previous ruling élite in the Communist Party and many of his former supporters became a counter-élite in the Russian parliament. This was a consequence of his dependence on foreigners, on the importance of a 'demonstration effect' to the West to secure his legitimacy as a true reformer making a post-communist system

with a bourgeois character. The implication for the transition process is that the political preferences and alliances of incumbent political élites are salient issues in understanding regime change. Moreover, demands on such leaders have to take into account the policy of dominant actors in the international arena who have their own political agenda.¹²

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¹ See also Kornhauser, 1960, p. 231. On the link between human rights and societal development under state socialism see Lane, 1984.

² Higley *et al.*, 1989, p. 17, have argued, for instance, that ‘democratic transitions and breakdown can best be understood by changes in the internal relations of national élites’.

³ Remington, 1990, pp. 160–167, distinguishes between ‘optimists’ (predicting democratisation) and ‘pessimists’ (anticipating internal destruction) but no attempt is made here to show élite divisions or to detail the pressures on the political elite. Higley & Burton, 1989, p. 27, exclude ‘Russia and its European satellites’ from their analysis of élite transformation. Wasilewski, 1990, pp. 743–757, defines and outlines the recruitment of Polish élites and their attitudes to the basis of recruitment. On the evidence of biographical analysis, Lane & Ross, 1994, pp. 19–38 and 1995, pp. 1–22, illustrate systemic differences between the party and government élites.

⁴ Elitist approaches have been criticised for ignoring the dependence of elites on social forces and classes. Domhoff, in particular has linked ‘income, wealth, and institutional leadership’ to the ‘governing class’. See Domhoff, 1967, p. 156.

⁵ The questionnaire was devised by the author, the interviews were organised and carried out under the supervision of Elena Bashkirova and Vera Voinova of ROMIR (Rossiiskoe obshchestvennoe mnenie i issledovanie rynka).

⁶ My sample included eight members of the Politburo, nine Secretaries of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 18 heads of Central Committee departments and heads of commissions; 11 members of the Presidium of the USSR Council of Ministers, 53 ministers and chairmen of state committees of the USSR; the third group included eight people who were party ‘professionals’ (leading academics in the party schools, editors of party journals and papers), 36 people from research and higher educational institutions, 31 from voluntary and trade union positions and six from international associations. (Figures here include overlapping positions.) For further details of this research see Lane, 1996a.

⁷ Questions asked in the Gorbachev survey included the following: On international relations, the respondents were asked about the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe; on an economic issue—the introduction of ‘cooperatives’ (private enterprise) and the market; and on an internal security topic—the relations between the republics and regions in the formation of the Union Agreement (*Soyuznyi dogovor*). For details see Lane, 1996a.

⁸ The wording of the question was:

I would now like to turn to the period 1991 to 1993; this was the period in which El'tsin became the President of the Russian Republic, in which the USSR collapsed and a decisive change of leadership and policy took place in Russia. We are interested in knowing your opinion as to which political interests and forces played a leading role in bringing about such changes in policy.

One of the most significant events was the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the rise of the former republics of the USSR, including the RF, to become independent republics. We would like to identify which social and political forces in your opinion were responsible for this major change.

Which of the following do you think were instrumental in furthering the independence and sovereignty of the Russian republic?

Which had: a considerable influence, some influence, a little significance and no influence at all.

⁹ ‘On the formation of nationalities policy [under Gorbachev] in general, how would you estimate the importance of the following?’ (four-point scale).

¹⁰ Undoubtedly the ‘intelligentsia’ promoted the reform movement. The author has shown that the intelligentsia as an influence on reform was ranked the highest of social groups and forces; his study confirms, however, that they were less frequently mentioned than interests in the *apparat* or nationalist movements. See Lane, 1994, p. 113.

¹¹ The classical theorists (Pareto, Mosca) no less than modern ones (Mills, Domhoff) theorise on the basis of few data. Even empiricists such as Dahl do not probe the political elite on a national level but consider lower-level decisions.

¹² Higley & Burton's 1986 seminal article is concerned with *national élites* and ignores the international dimension. On the role of US foreign policy as a catalyst of collapse in Eastern Europe see Pipes, 1995, who is concerned more with economic and military collapse. The evidence here would point to ideological and elite dissension as well as policy formation. The international aspects are dealt with in more detail in Lane 1996b; see also for a detailed account Garthoff, 1994.

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